

# The Phantom Thief

Von Lluvia

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## Prologue

„Catch him!“, was the only thing heard that night at the mansion of some rich guy apart from “He went that way!”

The people shouting were policemen, who frantically ran around the estate, apparently chasing someone. And that someone was a young man who called himself the ‘Sapphire Phantom’ and was named that in nearly every newspaper, some even entitled him the ‘Prince of Thieves’. Because that’s what he was. A master thief, who stole treasures from rich people, always sending a note beforehand and leaving a blue rose at the place of the stolen thing. His appearance was stunning and definitely memorable. He had short, electric blue hair and wore a mask over his eyes to disguise his upper face. His clothes seemed as if they were taken from some old opera, with ruffles and everything, but also completely in white and blue and it never seemed to bother him when fleeing from the police. He even wore a black hat, with a blue rose on top and some blue feathers pinned to it. These were his typical thief-clothes and he made himself quite a name with it, because he still looked so charming and only ever stole from people who seemed to have dirty business going on.

And today, he had stolen some jewelry, which was worth some hundred thousand dollars, if not even millions.

A crowd of spectators had gathered in front of the main gates of the mansion - the Phantom sent his notes to the owner, the police and most of the time the newspapers too, so almost every of his thefts was in the news - and they all looked for a sign of him as suddenly, he himself landed in front of them. Cameras flashed as he even stopped shortly to look at them and smile mysteriously, before the running footsteps of some policemen were heard and he jumped on the wall next to the gate – however he did that - and disappeared into the night...

## Chapter one

„Yuri? You awake? It's almost noon!" The voice of my older sister, Lily, cut through my sleep.

Tired, I sat up and rubbed my eyes. "Yeah, don't worry, I'm awake... now!" I answered her call and began to get up and doing my 'morning' routine. As I came out of the bathroom, still brushing my short, blonde hair, my other sister came to me.

"Hey, you did an awesome job yesterday, you know that? And you *have* to look at the newspaper!" she said, grinning. "Of course, part of it was my work, but still!" She brushed some of her bright red hair out of her face. "Just come on!"

I rolled my eyes. Lucy - that's the name of our red haired devil here - was always so energetic. But she really was awesome, so I nodded, smiling.

"Okay, give me just a sec." I put the hairbrush away and followed her into the kitchen where the last of us - my twin brother, Alec - sat at the table, reading said newspaper but looking up as I entered the kitchen. Lily was there too, cooking lunch by the looks of it.

"Oh, finally awoke from your beauty sleep?" Alec asked and I stuck out my tongue at him, before he closed the newspaper and gave it to me. "Look at it. I'm not sure if I like it or not, but whatever..."

I wondered what the hell was that interesting, before I saw the big picture on the front page. The headline was a big 'The Sapphire Phantom struck again!' and the picture... well... it was a pretty good shot of me.

Surprised?

Yeah, I'm the so called 'Sapphire Phantom', 'Prince of Thieves' or whatever they come up with. I actually prefer Yuri - my real name, you know? - but it's not as if it's a good idea to tell the newspaper and the police my real name I guess, since I really don't want to be captured. I mean, I'm doing this flashy stuff for a few month already, would be stupid to get caught now. But I'm good enough, as long as I don't do something *really* stupid, there won't be any problems.

Oh, and if someone is wondering why I'm blond while 'Sapphire Phantom' has blue hair... well, ever heard of wigs? And Lily is an *awesome* makeup artist, hairstylist and whatnot. She made my whole thief-outfit, including all the accessories, the wig and of course the mask. And it's a real help, because no one would think it was me stealing all that stuff as I don't have blue hair.

Lucy on the other hand helps me out differently. She's the best hacker I know, so she is the reason why I'm that good informed considering illegal activities of rich guys. And we have many rich guys here, especially the ones with some dark secrets.

And I mostly steal from the ones with the *really* dark secrets. It's their own fault I guess.

Anyway, back to the newspaper. Like I said, the front page was a big shot of me as the Phantom, followed by an article about how I stole that mans jewelry, how awesome I looked, that the police still had no clues and that I was getting more fans.

"Nice!" I commented as I finished reading and grinned. Which caused Alec to roll his eyes.

"You should try not to draw that much attention to you... one day they'll catch you."

I shook my head. "Nah, not with Lucys little toys. And even if they would, I still have you to help me, right?"

He grumbled something and I took it as a yes.

"Great!" I turned to look at Lily. "What's it for lunch?"

"Spaghetti. But we don't have that much stuff anymore, I wrote missing things on the list. Try to get them as soon as possible, kay?"

I nodded. "Sure thing. I'll go looking for it today."

"I added some new tools, too. Could you also look for them, please?" Lucy then added from behind me. "I got another toy for you in exchange."

I laughed and nodded again. "No problem, will do!"

And if you're wondering what 'the list' was: It's simple some kind of to-do list with things we still need. But I don't like stealing money (mostly because rich guys probably have the numbers noted somewhere and I don't wanna steal from other people) so instead I simply grab my stuff from the markets. I mean, not like those teenage pickpockets, I'm a professional! But I'll show you later, as I just promised to go out today.

Now it was time to eat though, as Lily just finished cooking!

And maybe I can get some explaining done while enjoying that tasty meal of my big sister.

First, about my family: It consists of us four, Lily being the oldest with her 26 years, followed by Alec and me being 22 (though I was slightly older) and then Lucy, who was 20. Our parents... well, our father was an asshole and our mother died when Lucy was about four, so let's leave it at that. We live alone now and pretty much like our life, though it might be strange for an outsider to understand why we live this way. I mean, having a master thief as a brother and everything.

But it's actually not that confusing once you know the details. Back in primary school we all had our problems. And I don't mean the simple problems of six or seven years old kids, but *real* problems. Because we are different.

I don't know why or how it was even possible, but it's reality and back then I hated it. All four of us have abilities which are not exactly normal.

Lily is the most normal of us I guess, since her 'special ability' mostly consists of the fact, that she is able to make any wig, outfit or mask look real without problems. And she's doing it *fast*. On good days, she can sew two or three complete outfits. And I mean complex ones. Also, she's our medic as she knows a whole lot about medicine. Especially healing plants, because none of us likes doctors at all. Bad memories, you know?

Then there is me, whose ability is a bit more physical oriented. I'm able to run surprisingly fast and jump *really* high. Like about five meters and more if I'm doing a running jump. I'm also able to move surprisingly quiet, but I think that is something I've gotten through my training, just like most of the martial arts stuff I can do.

The next one is Alec, who is probably the strangest one of us. He's actually able to use telekinesis! At first, I didn't really believe it, but he showed me. He really can move things from far away just with his thoughts, without touching them. Cool thing, but he doesn't like to use it often because it seems to drain his powers pretty fast. Though I'm sure he trains it secretly. Also, he always stays near me when I steal, if one day I'll get caught - something that simply won't happen, just hypothetically - he'll save my ass.

And Lucy has the most helpful ability for my thefts I guess. It's not really an ability, but her IQ is the highest I've ever seen. She understood the theory of relativity with eight. And now, she has learned to hack. She's able to get into any system at all, probably even without leaving any traces so, like I said, she's the one providing me with

information. And that she's a great inventor is awesome too, as she always has new ideas for toys I could use, being able to build nearly everything from scratch. I guess I'll show you some later when I go shopping.

Though I kind of dread *that* and the reason is Lily. Easy to see once I'll want to go, just wait.

But to explain why I'm stealing: After we finally got that we weren't made for society, we somehow started our own not-quite-legal business. We bought a house in a big city, where Lily is paying the monthly bills by selling her self-made stuff online on a website designed by Lucy. It looks really awesome and as the stuff isn't cheap – though the quality is great too so it's okay – it pays enough for the bills. But life is simply better if you're not normal I guess. So instead of doing normal jobs, maybe even with a low pay as we don't have any graduation (Lucy taught us everything we needed to know) instead I steal stuff, Lucy invents interesting new toys and Alec helps me spotting out the locations. Like that, everyday life is an adventure. Nice, huh?

And while I'm talking with myself in my mind, we finished eating in the end. So I guess I have to go shopping now...

And as to why I'm dreading it: Since my stealing method would be pretty obvious if they would always see me before something gets stolen (after some time even the biggest idiot would probably get it) I'm shopping disguised most of the time. I mean, Lily has more than enough stuff.

The bad thing? Every few times I have to go as a girl. Because 'switching' genders helps confusing and shattering any distrust. But it really is stupid.

On the other hand, I'm even kinda familiar to it now, so... I'll just do it and then get over with business.

And just like that, about twenty minutes later I was a perfect young lady with a bag in one hand and a shopping list in the other.

Time to get criminal!

## Chapter two

Oh yes, sometimes I hate the world. Sure, it wasn't stupid to disguise myself, but why did I have such a girlish face? Normally, one wouldn't notice it that much, but with long hair, fake eyelashes and a dress - the worst thing actually - I really looked suspiciously like a girl... Even my voice was high enough to not stand out much if I was careful. Like I said, sometimes I really hate it.

Though it had some advantages. I was really surprised the first time I had to do it, but men could be really friendly when they saw a good looking 'girl'. So they opened doors for me and did funny stuff like that. But oh well, I shouldn't enjoy that stuff, better concentrate on my work.

So I went into the next supermarket in the mall near our house and started looking around for the stuff we needed. I didn't take anything, I just wanted to locate it. Thankfully, there weren't that many people here, which would make stealing easier, as soon as the cameras were taken care of. Because really, trying to take things in a monitored market was just stupid.

But then I felt a light vibration in my pocket (I had short, tight trousers under the dress) and smiled. That thing was Lucys interfering transmitter, which confused every camera near me. Meaning every single camera in the whole supermarket showed grey stuff right now. It was time for me to strike.

No one noticed anything as other people went on buying stuff as usual, but I myself took the needed stuff off the shelves and into my pocket whenever I was sure no one was looking. Soon enough, I was finished and went out of the market, Lucys toy confused even these things they have at the exits to prevent stealing. After that, I reset it and went to the store for mechanical devices, where I pulled the same stunt again. It was harder there, because the store was so much smaller than the supermarket, but it wasn't impossible.

Afterwards I left the store, smiling at the clerk behind the counter - who didn't see a thing - and went away, turning Lucys toy off now. I was just on my way around a corner, when someone suddenly ran into me with quite some force, which made me lose balance. The person was quick though and caught me before I could fall, but as I saw the man - a not very muscular looking guy, maybe slightly younger than me with short, black hair and reddish eyes behind frameless glasses - I wondered, how fast he must've went to bring me off balance.

But he just apologized shortly, before saying something about not having much time and hurrying past me. I frowned and turned to look at his back, as he went into the same store I just came out. But inside was a guy who suspiciously looked around in every direction. He probably tried stealing something, just like me, but he was being so obvious... no wonder that that guy from just now saw him.

But I must say I was surprised as just that guy marched up to the wannabe-thief and pulled out something what suspiciously looked like some kind of police badge. Interesting, I've never seen that guy with the police. And I already saw *many* policeman. Oh well, let's see how good he is with thieves.

He said something to the thief, probably like 'Stop stealing, come with me' and blah, but of course, instead of listening (really, who would listen to a cop in that situation?) the guy pushed him away and ran. Directly in my direction. Oh great. But I normally don't interfere with other people's business, especially if it's not exactly legal. So I

stepped out of that guys way, but no, he seemed to have other plans.

Instead of simply using his legs like I would've done (not that I would let myself get caught while stealing in such a store, really) he suddenly grabbed my arm, pulling me to him and turning back to the police guy, while holding a knife - wherever that thing came from - to my throat. Thank you very much, asshole.

"Don't come near me or that girl is dead!", he growled at that black haired policeman and slowly went backwards, pulling me with him.

But if there's one thing I don't like, I mean, except for people assuming I'm weak - or a girl- it's if thieves start to hurt people. That's not thievery, that's robbery and I'm very proud to say that I'm NO robber as I don't hurt people in the process of stealing. That's a *big* difference. Anyway, that guy didn't seem to care.

"Why the hell are you doing that? I mean, not the stealing, I don't care about that, but that whole hostage thing?", I mumbled, still walking backwards with that guy, probably toward an exit.

"Who cares?" he grumbled. "As long as I get what I want and now shut up or I'll use that knife!" With these words he pressed the knife even closer to my throat.

Did I tell you that I also really don't like being threatened? By someone who clearly isn't worth being called a thief no less? Thanks but no thanks.

And so I stopped following that idiot. Which of course led to a string of curses from the wannabe-thief. And a knife which slightly cut my skin. "What do you think you're doing?" he growled.

I rolled my eyes. "Well, I think I'm tired of being your hostage. I don't like people who confuse thievery with robbery, you know?" "So what?"

I sighed. "So... that." With a quick move I grabbed the arm with the knife and turned it so that he had to let go of his weapon. And that moment of shock was enough for me to get him down. I did mention that I mastered several martial arts, right? So you can imagine that it wasn't that hard.

The guy went down like a rock and I placed one of my feet at him, took the knife from the floor and waited that the policeman approached. It took a while (that guy probably waited a while to not risk the life of innocent people - aka me, though I wasn't sure about that innocent part) but as he finally came around the corner I had to grin at the stunned look at his face as he saw me.

"Hey there. I think you wanted him, right?" Smiling I gave him the knife and took my foot off the guy, who tried to escape but the police guy was already there and cuffed his hands, which was followed by another string of curses. I just smiled. People like him deserve what they get I guess.

"Thanks for your help Miss. You didn't have to do that, it was dangerous!", the black haired guy told me and I shrugged.

"Yeah, but I really don't like being taken as a hostage. And that guy thankfully wasn't that skillful. But thanks for your worry Mister policeman." I smiled at the guy and I could *swear* his cheeks turned pink. Ah, the fun of being a 'woman'. Oh, and if someone wonders why I don't freak out that guys think I'm good looking and even flirt with me sometimes: I'm bi. I don't have a problem with any gender, love is love, right?

But then, the guy saw the cut at my throat and frowned. "Did that guy hurt you?", he asked, narrowing his eyes.

"Well, yes, but it doesn't really hurt, don't worry.", I answered, but he didn't look very convinced.

"At least take that." He gave me a tissue and I took it, hoping he'd leave the matter

alone after that.

"Thanks." I pressed it on the cut and waited, looking at the policeman for a while. Why exactly was he still here? "Don't you have a criminal to take care of?", I asked, looking at the wannabe-thief and he blinked, before nodding.

"Of course, I'm sorry. It must not be nice to see a guy who threatened you still here, right? I'll take care of him. Thank you very much again for your help, though I think it would be better for your health to not do those reckless things again, okay?"

I sighed, but nodded, hoping that that would be enough.

And finally, the officer went away, taking the robber with him and disappearing into the crowd. Gosh, I thought he'd never go.

Sure, he was nice and everything, but my bag was full of stolen stuff and I really didn't want someone to notice it. Even though most people would probably think I bought it.

So just like that, I made my way home again, trying not to think about the events of the mall again but instead hoping that Lily would make a nice dinner.



## Chapter three

As I finally got back home again, the first thing I did was pulling off the shoes and starting to search for my older sister. She always helped me putting on my wigs because somehow she was able to attach the wig to my head good enough that it wouldn't come off, not even when pulled. So I needed her to get it off too, because I myself didn't know how to loosen it.

Not that it was a bad thing, because like that no one ever suspected wigs and I could stay innocent.

So I was pretty glad as Lily finally came down from her room (our house had two floors, the upper floor with our private rooms and the ground floor with the kitchen, the living room and so on) and helped me.

And it really was liberating, finally feeling my normal hair again. The only problem was explaining what happened as Lily saw the scratch, but oh well, I stole our stuff, so she was satisfied enough.

"Hey, Yuri~! Got my stuff?" Lucys voice could be heard through the house as she wanted her tools.

"Yes, don't worry!", I tried to calm her down, because I really wanted to change into more comfortable clothes before giving my sisters what they wanted.

A few minutes later I wore normal clothes again - a simple black T-Shirt and a yellow hoodie - and my siblings got their stuff. So now I had free time, nice!

Though... maybe I should explain 'free time'. For me, it really means free time, playing video games, listening to music and so on, but Lucy is busy with hacking, looking for new victims or inventing new, helpful tools, while Lily is sewing or styling wigs for her Online Shop. I'm not exactly sure what Alec's doing. More often than not he plays with me some nice games, but I think he trains his abilities too.

But whatever, for me, it meant free time, so I'm happy! And if you're wondering why I have free time while my sisters have to work: I'm doing the complicated stuff, like stealing, so we agreed that I can relax the rest of the time so that I don't accidentally make faults. If my sisters do something wrong they can correct it but if I'm caught it would be a problem.

So I can do what I want and relax most of the time. I mean, it's not like I'm not doing *anything* - except for stealing of course - I'm helping Lily sometimes too. And yes, I can sew. Actually, I can sew, cook, clean and whatnot. Lily's a good teacher I guess, just like Lucy. Also I have to work out, awesome abilities - like my speed and so on - don't normally come without training, you know?

But whatever, for now, I had time to play.

The next interesting thing happened about a week later. I just had to steal something for my siblings one other time (of course, I used another mall and another disguise). Then Lucy came to me, looking really happy.

"Hey Yuri, guess what? I found you another job! There is a rich guy again who thinks way too high of himself and started drifting off in the wrong direction. And he has a nice collection of diamonds. I think it's time for new decorations...!"

Oh yeah, if you're wondering what she meant with decorations: She's reusing the stuff I steal as the Sapphire Phantom. Like for example the jewelry I stole the last time. It was just some necklaces with gems in it, but Lucy took them out and made other nice

things out of it. She took the rubies and made herself earrings and I got a nice sapphire ring to wear as the Phantom. Over my gloves of course. Fingerprints are the worst mistake for a thief. Anyway, diamonds sounded really nice, so I nodded. "Alright! Where, when, what about the safety measures and so on?", I asked then and started going through all the details with Lucy. That was one of the most important things and then it was time to let 'him' come out again!

## Chapter four

"Today, we got another note from the 'Sapphire Phantom'! He will strike at midnight. And this time, we *will* get him!"

These words came from Jose Gonzales - the Spanish Inspector who led the case of the 'Phantom Thief' - who held a blue framed card with a rose on it in his hands. And he got new men today, so he was pretty positive that he was able to do it this time. Also, one of his new man seemed to be pretty clever, as he already had captured a wanted criminal on the first day. Though of course, no one told Mister Gonzales that it wasn't exactly Alan - the name of the new guy - who captured the criminal, since he had help from some random girl. Not that it meant that Alan was a bad policeman. Far from it! So just like that, they prepared for the night.

And as the sun slowly went down a whole lot of policeman started to guard the house of the rich man. Only Alan wasn't with them. He got to see the blueprints for the house and decided to go looking at another room. Actually, it was the room with the diamonds in it. Most of the policeman were sure that the Phantom would not be able to enter the mansion unnoticed, but somehow, Alan wasn't so sure about that. So instead, he waited there.

And sure enough, only a few minutes after midnight, he heard a sound and as he looked to the window, he saw the Sapphire Phantom himself standing in the room.

Who actually looked genuinely surprised as he saw the policeman, though the latter didn't know what exactly was that surprising of him being here. But the surprise didn't seem to last very long as suddenly, the thief started smiling.

"Oh. Looks like I'm not alone tonight, huh? Nice, I thought I'd never get any company here before I flee. You seem to be more intelligent than the rest of your people."

Alan frowned. "And you seem awfully confident for someone who just got caught while stealing." He pulled out a pair of handcuffs.

The Phantom laughed. "Do you really think someone like me is caught *that* easily? But it's nice that you're trying. Otherwise it would be boring. Ah how I love challenges!"

With that, he went away from the window - he probably came in through that - and in the direction of the diamonds, but Alan stepped into his way.

"What do you think you're doing? You are arrested now!" He pulled out a gun. He didn't actually intend to use it, but he could if he had to. Though it didn't seem to impress the master thief very much. With a swift motion, he grabbed Alans wrist - the one that was holding the gun, of course - and held it firmly.

"Sorry but I don't really like prisons very much, you know? I like gems much more.", he smiled, watching as the policeman struggled against his grip, but it was useless. At the same time though, the thief wasn't able to take the diamonds as he would need two hands to not set the alarm system off and send every single guard a signal. And as much as he liked publicity, thirty guards and more could be a little bit too many, even for him.

So instead, he had to confuse the guy in front of him and he had a pretty good idea how to do that.

"You know... you're not only a pretty intelligent officer - I mean, it's not exactly an easy guess for a first timer that I don't really try to take the front door. Or any door by that means - you also have pretty good looks if I dare say. So... forgive me my next action and continue trying to catch me, kay? Otherwise it might get boring."

Confused, Alan looked at the thief, determined to not let him pass. But he simply wasn't prepared for what happened next. Because the Phantom didn't try to get past him (at least not visibly) but instead... he kissed the poor policeman.

Being completely and one hundred percent straight, it was more than enough to shock Alan, especially as the thief deepened the kiss.

And then, it was over. And the Phantom wasn't in front of him anymore.

Trying to get his senses back together Alan turned around and saw the thief working at the security glass of the diamonds. He just opened it as the policeman got his language back.

"What the hell?!"

"Sorry, like I said, you caught my interest. Also, I needed to get past you, you know? But don't worry, I'll try to hold myself back the next time. Though I have to say, you taste pretty good. See ya!"

With these words, the blue haired man threw a blue colored rose at him and jumped out of the still opened window into the night, leaving Alan to stare into space for a short time before narrowing his eyes. No one kissed him without his permission, especially no thief like the Sapphire Phantom! He *would* get him into prison for that one day!

But for now he had to admit his defeat. He wasn't fast enough to catch the guy if he ran out of the house now and he couldn't simply jump out of the window.

So he went down to the others, clenching his fist around the rose, grumbling about how that stupid guy *dared* to do these things and how he'd get him for that one day.

## Chapter five

The next few times when I stole something as the Sapphire Phantom, about the same thing happened over and over again. Well, minus the kissing. But really, that guy somehow managed to always know where I would strike, but thankfully, he didn't seem to tell anyone, at least he was alone when we met.

And it started to get funny, because he made it really complicated to get past him. Which was good, because I nearly started to bore myself before the guy had appeared. And now it got interesting again! Also, I found myself thinking about him increasingly often.

So you could say that I looked forward to my next theft, wondering if he would see through me again and find where I'd break in.

But as the time finally came and Lucy had another mission for me, I was alone. Well, not exactly alone, since I had sent my notes as usual the normal policemen stood guard at the entrances (by now, they also guarded windows and so on, seeing that I still seemed to be able to get in without anyone - except one - noticing) but my favorite guy wasn't there.

Did he really didn't get where I would come in today?

I had no idea, but it looked like it. So I took the treasure - this time it was just some strange, golden statue Lucy would melt into something better and more beautiful - and was just on my way out as I heard a noise from the toilets of the house. I wondered if the police was allowed to use it and if the guy just drank too much, maybe he was here?

But as I watched from behind the corner, a different policeman left the toilet. Aw, I had hoped I had company today... though that lonely guy there could help me anyway, he didn't look like the strictest man, more like... young and not that experienced.

So I waited until he went further away from the toilet, probably heading back outside, but just as he passed through an empty room I caught him from behind, turned him around and placed a hand over his mouth (Just as a precaution, you know? I don't want him screaming or something and alarming more policemen).

"Hey there, just a question. That pretty new policeman, short, black hair, reddish eyes, glasses ... where is he today?"

The guy looked unsure at me. Oh right, I still had my hand over his mouth. Dammit. I slowly took it away, but looked at him warningly. He shouldn't dare crying for help now. I just wanted some answers...

And I seemed to actually get them, as the confused policeman didn't just start screaming for help but instead actually talked.

"Um... you mean Alan? He didn't show up to work today... I guess he's ill...?"

Did I say talked? It sounded more like mumbling... was I *that* scary? Creepy... Or maybe he just didn't know how to act in front of the guy he should arrest even if he seemingly was weaker than me. But I got my answer at least... though it wasn't a satisfying one. But I knew what to do now.

"Thanks for the answer. Hope you won't get in trouble for talking with me... just pretend you haven't seen me or something like that. Goodbye!"

With that I went past him, breaking into a run before he could answer or think about doing something else. Today it was surprisingly easy to sneak past the guards, I even got out of the mansion of my victim without getting noticed. Nice one. But it still

bugged me somehow that Alan - hey, at least I had his name now! - didn't show up. How boring. So naturally, instead of simply returning home for the day, I called up Lucy.

"Yes? What's wrong?"

"Uh... hey sis, nothing's wrong actually, I finished my job without problems, but-"

"Then why are you calling? You know that this is risky, don't you?"

"Hey, I'm using your 'special phone'" - which meant a phone, that send interfering signals to prevent being located, for example - "and I'm completely alone, okay? Anyway, I have to ask you for a favor... could you please check the database of the police station for a guy named Alan? He has transferred here recently, has black hair, reddish eyes and glasses. And he's in the team which has to capture me. I need to know where he lives...!"

I could nearly see Lucys raised eyebrows...

"For what? Is he troubling you?" "Uh... not exactly, but anyway, could you? *Please?*" I heard her sighing. "Fine. But I really hope you have a good reason for that." Yeah, I kinda hoped that too... "Wait a sec.", she told me and I could hear her moving into another room. Probably into her study. Then I heard the sound of furious typing before, just a few minutes later, my sister let out a quiet "Got it!". A few more clicks and she started talking to me again.

"Okay, thankfully I found him even though your information wasn't really helpful. His name was, though. Because there is just one 'Alan' in the data bases of the police office in this town." She told me his address and I smiled.

"Great, thanks for going through all that trouble for me Lu, love you!"

I hang up and began walking to Alans home. I guess I'd see for myself if he really was ill.

Just a few minutes later I stood in front of his door. He actually lived pretty near to myself. Interesting coincidence. But anyway, I was still the Sapphire Phantom, so I needed to be a little bit careful around other people, you know? So... I rang the doorbell. Don't ask me why I did that, but it seemed to be the easiest option to get him to the door.

Well, at least I thought it was, but no one answered. So instead, I chose option number two. Since the corridor was deserted I pulled out one of Lucys toys and started to open the door my way. Lock picking wasn't that hard with that little tool and a few moments later a soft click was heard and the door quietly swung open. Smiling, I entered the small apartment and looked around curiously.

I wondered if Alan was home and how he lived in general, so I took a peak into every room. Not that there were many, just a bathroom, a kitchen, a bedroom and a living room, but it seemed enough for one person. (And I assumed he lived alone as there was just a single bed in the bedroom)

But the thing that worried me a bit was that he wasn't home. Because really, he didn't seem like someone who would fake being ill if he hadn't a very good reason. Especially as today was a day where I'd steal something. After the first time we met each other - as thief and policeman - he somehow... started to get real serious about catching me. He probably didn't like that kiss back then as much as I did. I mean, I'm not actually the kind of person who ran around kissing random guys, but in that situation back then it was really helpful. And as I already told him, I really thought he tasted good. Though I guessed he would not appreciate if I did it again. At least not now.

But I had other problems anyway, so I called Lucy again.

"What is it now?"

She didn't really sound annoyed, but she also definitely wasn't that pleased that I called her two times in a row for something personal. But I knew that she was the only one I could ask, so whatever.

"Lu, listen, could you *please* do me another favor? I know I'm asking a lot of things right now, but I'll get you some new things if you want or help you otherwise later, okay?"

Again, a sigh.

"Fine... what do you want?"

"I just want to know something... was there any contact information as you looked into Alans profile?"

"Yes, a telephone number. Or in his case, I guess it was his cell phone number. Why?"

"Could you try to locate his cell? He's not home and I have the feeling that he's not just out buying some stuff in the middle of the night. His apartment looks like he wasn't even there today."

"Okay... I just won't ask why you need it... but be careful, okay? Alec isn't there to save your ass if something goes wrong..."

I nodded, though she couldn't see me. "Alright." I said, meaning it. Because I really had to be careful, as Alec just helped me with the police while I stole, not afterwards. But still, I waited patiently as she worked to locate Alans cell. And while I was pacing through his kitchen I saw how most of the flowers on the table looked as good as dead... the poor things.

I knew it wasn't my place to do something about it - hell, it wasn't even my apartment for god's sake! - but I didn't really care, I needed an occupation. So I threw the brown ones away - actually... every single flower was brown, what the hell did he do with these poor things? (And yes, I like gardening. Who do you think grows the blue flowers I always leave when I steal something?) - and replaced them with blue roses. I always had some of them with me, so it wasn't a problem. Also, I changed the water and put a bit of sugar into it, so that the flowers would stay like that a little longer.

And finally, I heard Lucys voice on the other end of the line again (yes, I still had the phone in my hand) as she told me the location where Alans cell had to be. I thanked her again, promised not to take any unnecessary risks and hang up once more.

After that, I put my cell phone back into my pocket and left the Apartment, heading to the address Lucy told me. Oh yes, I'd definitely find that guy and if there wasn't a good reason he had suddenly vanished I'd think about something to... get even.

## Chapter six

The moment I arrived, I knew something was wrong. One might think it was my intuition, but actually, I just guessed, because why the hell was Alans cell phone in a run-down factory building? It didn't look like a place you would go for... good things, you know? But why should a goody two shoes guy like Alan do something 'not good'? Deciding I needed to find out, I made my way around the building, looking for security cameras, windows and maybe some hidden entrances, but the only thing I found was a window which wasn't closed properly so I could easily open it. But first, I looked around, fearing that the room was already occupied. But it didn't look like it, it seemed more like a little storage room or something like that.

So I quietly climbed in and went to the door, which I opened a tad bit to peek into the next room. And I really had to control myself to not let out a gasp as I saw what was happening there.

Well... I found Alan, at least. But it certainly was a... surprising position. And not exactly a positive one for the policeman, because as far as I could see, he was tied to a chair. But I couldn't really come out and help him, because just as I saw him, two other guys came into the room, grinning meanly at the man, stopping in front of him.

"Ah, looks like our little policeman has awoken from his sleep, huh?", one of them said, grinning at Alan, who just glared at him - something he could do very well by the way, I got to see that glare often enough myself.

"What do you want? If you got enough information about me to kidnap me, you should know that I don't have money or anything like that."

I narrowed my eyes. So he really got kidnapped? Darn, these guys had nerves. Even I wasn't stupid enough to steal from a police officer and they kidnapped one?

Not that I had much time to think about it, as one of the other guys started to answer.

"Well, what do you think that we want? Of course we know that your finances are low, you're here for something else. Do you remember Mike Cornwall? That's one of the guys you arrested a while ago. And he's one of our buddies. So, the deal's simple: They have to trade you for Mike, then everything is alright.", the smaller of the two guys explained, while the taller just watched Alan for a while, before speaking up. He didn't talk to Alan though, but to his fellow.

"Hey... you know, while we have him... why don't we have some... fun? I mean, look at him, I'm sure it wouldn't hurt anyone." He looked at the policeman. "Well, nearly no one, but whatever."

The other guy thought about it. "Huh... nice idea. That should teach him a lesson, shouldn't it?" With that, he started smiling, but it was a cruel and even slightly perverted smile. Creepy...

At least Alan seemed to still be able to fight somehow, because as one of the guys tried to touch his clothes he started kicking and even biting. Nice, but against two people at once it wasn't very helpful. And finally, it seemed to be too much for the guys so one of them took some cloth from somewhere, pressing it on the mouth and nose of the black haired man, until he stopped struggling.

Chloroform, I guessed. But as they undid the bonds and laid him on the ground, I decided it was enough. I wasn't sure if I could take both guys down, but I had to, because I sure as hell would not stay here any longer and watch these guys doing... certain things to Alan. I might've been a thief, but I actually had a conscience. And



letting innocent people suffer definitely wasn't my style.

So before they could begin taking off any clothes - or doing anything inappropriate at all - I opened the door fully, drawing the gaze of both guys to me.

"Good evening you two. I can assume you know who I am? I'm sorry that I did not send a note beforehand, but I think you have something I want. And I *always* get what I want. So... is there any chance that you give up and let me take him" - I pointed at Alan - "with me?"

But of course, it wasn't that easy.

"Are you crazy? That guy is our friends ticket to freedom, we so aren't just letting him go. Why should we?"

I shrugged. "Why not? Better letting him go than getting arrested for kidnapping, right?" I pulled out a voice recorder and turned it on, trying to let it stay unnoticed. And it actually worked.

"Do you really think we let him go just because you want us to? We've kidnapped him and we're keeping him here until they let Mike go. We're professionals, idiot!"

I smiled, turning the thing off again. "Yes, very professional, letting confessions like that getting recorded." I showed the thing to the guys and their eyes went wide as they understood.

"Give that to us!" One of them held out his hand but the other one - seemingly the one who was more brawns than brains - simply walked to me, probably to get the thing straight from me.

"I don't think so." I walked backwards to avoid the guy reaching me while putting the recorder back into my pocket, but I knew I didn't have much time to think what I should do now, because I was backing off into a corner. Also, the guy took one of the loose iron rods lying on the floor. Not good... I probably wouldn't get close enough to take him down barehanded without receiving a blow first.

So I did the only other thing I could think about: Taking an iron rod too. Thankfully I had also some training in kendo, so I was able to fend him off for a while.

But already after the first few attacks I knew it wouldn't last long because I definitely was weaker than my opponent, at least physically. So with his next blow I ducked to dodge, before striking the guy in the chest. I might've been not as strong as he was, but it seemed to have been enough to make him lose balance, fortunately.

The thing that followed really was unexpected though. Because he didn't just lose his balance, somehow he managed to hit his head on one of the boxes which stood randomly around as he fell and didn't stand up again.

Uh-Oh... I really hoped that it wasn't what it looked like, but then I saw his chest moving up and down slightly, so he was just unconscious... phew. I was a thief, not a murderer, and I really didn't want to become one...

So I stepped away from the unconscious guy, back to the one who still was with Alan. The good thing was, that now, it was one vs. one, which was definitely easier than me against two people (though I had no idea why the still conscious guy didn't help his friend). The bad thing? This man had a gun. And no, he didn't point it at me, but at Alan. "Throw that rod away and give me that frickin voice recorder or this guy is dead!" Fuck...

Grudgingly, I dropped the iron rod, kicking it away with my foot and pulled out the recorder to throw it to him.

"Happy now?", I grumbled and he just grinned as he caught the thing, before taking his gun from Alan, instead pointing towards me. Finally! I could handle being threatened by guns, since I was fast, but Alan was still unconscious (how strong had

that stuff been...?) so he probably would have died.

So I waited until the attention of the other guy was on the voice recorder, trying to get how to delete whatever was saved on there, before I stroke.

I ran to him and he looked up and pulled his gun, probably wanting to shoot me, and if I would've been any slower or tried to get a weapon, he'd have done it, but like that, I got to him first. A well placed hit at his neck and he collapsed, also unconscious.

I let out a relieved breath, before I took the recorder from him and dialed 911. Fortunately, no one at the police knew my voice (well, except for Alan and that guy I asked about him today, but Alan was here and the other one shouldn't answer the call, as he had nothing to do with that, right?) so there couldn't be a problem.

As I heard a voice, I explained the situation (meaning I told them I'd seen how two men kidnapped someone and brought him here) and they said they'd send someone and that I should stay where I was.

But I really didn't plan on waiting until they arrived. I knew that the police station wasn't very far away, so I just pulled the two kidnappers together and put the recorder on top of them. Like that, it should be enough evidence for the police.

I didn't want to risk the men waking up too early though, maybe even take Alan and flee, so instead I did exactly what I previously said I would do. I took what I wanted. Meaning I picked the policeman up bridal style and made my way out of the hall, already knowing where I had to go next.

## Chapter seven

As Alan opened his eyes the next time, at first he was afraid of what he would see. The last thing he remembered was struggling against one of his kidnappers before losing his consciousness as he had inhaled too much chloroform.

But then he was just surprised. Because he didn't see one of the kidnappers. He saw the Sapphire Phantom. And not only that, said Phantom actually had the nerve to smile as they made eye contact.

"You all right?", he asked, even sounding slightly concerned. But Alan ignored the question as he finally took in his surroundings. He was at home in his bed, while the master thief he was out to catch calmly sat next to him and asked him if he was alright?!

"What the hell is going on? Where did you come from and how do you know where I live?"

The Phantom didn't stop smiling, even though Alan could catch something else in his eyes... another emotion, but he didn't know the guy good enough to tell what it was. At least he got his answer. "Well, if you want to hear the story from the beginning: I wondered where you were tonight, as I missed your interesting sixth sense, asked one of your colleagues about it, found out your address and went looking for you after I saw that you weren't home. And as I found you they were about to... you know..." He shrugged, looking slightly helpless - not that it was easy to tell with that mask on - before going on. "Anyway, so I saved you and brought you home. And the only thing I get is a 'What do you want'? No 'thank you' or something?"

They were silent for a moment. Sadly, the Phantom was right. It looked like he *did* save him, so Alan probably owed him one now... "Thanks...", he grumbled quietly, but it was loud enough for the other man to hear. And it made him grin, which in turn annoyed the policeman, but they both knew that right now, their meeting was under some kind of truce.

"So... why are you still here? You know that I can arrest you right now, don't you?", he then asked as he sat up in his bed.

"Well... not really as you don't have any evidence that I did anything, right? I think you need a proof to arrest me, meaning you'd have to catch me red-handed. Also, it wouldn't be very nice of you to imprison the one who just saved your virginity, would it?"

The blue haired man smiled and Alan blushed slightly. "What makes you think I'm still a virgin?!" "Easy. You just blushed and you didn't deny it."

That shut him up, even if he did it only grudgingly. But the Phantom wasn't finished yet. "Anyway, as to why I'm still here: I thought it would be nice for you to have some company. It doesn't look like that's happening often, you know?"

"How would *you* know?" Alan narrowed his eyes and his opponent sighed. "Oh come on. You're the typical loner, right? You're clever and have a nice job and everything, but not many social contacts except for your colleagues. Aren't I right?" Silence. The Thief was dead on. "See? So shut up and be happy for once, okay? You can try catching me again when I send my next note.", he continued but the policeman still stayed silent.

"Oh whatever... I have to go now anyway, it's getting late. But you should tell other policemen that you were kidnapped. Don't worry, they've already caught the two guys

and there is evidence against them so it shouldn't be a problem. And don't think you can continue being a loner afterwards, I'll visit. Though you can be relieved, I won't be doing anything illegal before I'm coming over, okay?"

"What the-? No!"

"Oh, got your voice back? Nice. But why shouldn't I? It's not as if there is someone else who lives here. But maybe I'll watch out for visitors. Goodbye!"

The Phantom ruffled Alans hair and before the latter could say something - or react at all - he turned around and left the bedroom and probably the apartment too.

"What the hell...?" Alan shook his head, unsure if he should believe what he had just experienced. But whatever, at least that blue haired guy had been right with one thing: it really was late now, just a few hours left until morning. So he did the only thing that seemed more or less logical now: He went to sleep, hoping that when he awoke everything would be back to normal again, that everything had been just some wicked dream.

## Chapter eight

You don't want to know about how I got reprimanded from Lucy as I finally got home again...

I got told off for about twenty minutes, about how everyone had worried about me and why the hell I had returned only now. I tried explaining everything to her but it wasn't that easy as she didn't really want her rant interrupted.

But finally, I made her listen and afterwards she seemed to be appeased, at least somehow. Because at least I had saved an innocent guy from being raped or maybe even killed, but I could tell that my behavior still peeved her.

"Come on, I told you that I'm sorry...! It was an emergency.", I said, once again, and finally, she sighed in defeat.

"Fine. But don't do it again! Dammit, we already feared that they got you!"

"Yes, yes, I won't! And thanks for the trust, I won't get caught *that* easily, really...!"

She shook her head and went away, probably into her study, trying to cool her temper. Oh great, that went well... it's just too fun letting yourself get scolded by your younger sister, you know? (Yes, that was irony.)

Whatever, I didn't regret what I did and Lucy would calm down again. So I just went to Lily so that she could take my wig off - at least she didn't reproach me - and changed my clothes, before placing that golden statue I had stolen in front of Lucys room (as I really didn't want to disturb her again today) and finally going to bed. But since I had slept long today to be fit for the theft I wasn't that tired and had time to think a bit. I wondered if my plan to visit Alan really was a good idea, but somehow I also didn't want to leave him just like that. I simply needed to watch out that he wouldn't get a chance to capture me while I was with him, then it would probably be okay.

Oh well, I wasn't the type who thought too much about that stuff, so whatever. I was positive that it would be alright. So just like that, I turned around and tried to sleep. Everything else had to wait.

The next day was pretty uneventful again, but at least I got to tell Lily my idea of visiting Alan regularly. She wasn't that pleased with it, but in the end she agreed to do it, partly because I practically begged her to do it, but also because she probably felt a bit sorry for the policeman. I mean, I told her that he didn't seem to have much social contact and I knew that she felt something like pity, because she just was like that. So now I was able to visit him every few days to check if he was alright and accompany him for a while, even though I knew he himself wasn't nearly as pleased for that as I was. Not that this changed anything.

So two more days after that decision I decided that it was time to turn my plans into reality. In the evening Lily helped me with the wig for the Sapphire Phantom and after she and Lucy - who finally talked to me again - had warned me one more time to be careful (Alec thankfully wasn't that overprotective) I finally was able to leave the house.

And then I made my way to Alans house, which by the way had been much easier in the middle of the night, because right now there were way too many people outside. Fortunately I hadn't put on the frilly blue clothes I normally wore when I stole, but a simple white coat with blue hems and grey trousers. It still wasn't the most

inconspicuous outfit, but it was okay and it fit the blue hair. I didn't even put on the mask as the hair made me look different enough that no one who didn't actually know that it was a wig would recognize me as the Phantom. (I still wore the gloves though, leaving fingerprints wasn't good)

But because I still had to be pretty careful it took about twice the time any normal person would have needed until I finally stood in front of Alan's door. Not that I cared, I was here and that was the only thing that mattered. I didn't bother ringing the doorbell - maybe because I thought that he might not even open the door if he knew I was there - but instead opened the door my way, just like last time, after I made sure no one was looking.

I went in and closed the door silently behind me, before stopping shortly to listen if Alan had a visitor (apart from me). But the apartment was silent, except for a quiet clicking sound from the living room. If I remembered right there was a computer in it, so it wasn't that hard to find out what he was probably doing. As silent as possible, I went to the living room - just stopping shortly at the kitchen as I saw that my blue roses still were intact. Nice! - to take a look inside. And I had been right, he really sat in front of the computer, typing something. I snuck up to him and looked over his shoulder.

Wow... he was writing? I mean, not just chatting or stuff like that, but it looked like some kind of story.

"You are a hobby novelist?", I asked, surprised, completely forgetting that until now he hadn't known I was here. His reaction was just like that. He jumped so high he nearly fell out of his chair before turning to me. And I really had to bite my tongue to not start laughing at the face he made, but I didn't want to make myself even more unpopular with him than I already was.

"Sorry, I'll knock the next time.", I said, smiling apologetically, but at the same time I had the feeling that that wasn't the only problem he had right now.

"What the hell? You really came? I thought that was a joke, no, I *hoped* it was a joke. What do you want?", he asked, still looking pretty shocked.

I just shook my head. "Now we're at the beginning again. I told you I'll visit you and here I am, doing just that. I don't want anything in particular from you, so just lay back and relax, okay?"

Alan didn't answer (again) - sometimes I got the feeling that I was the only one talking when we met, except for him asking me something or telling me that he'd catch me of course - so I just went on, trying to get him to talk. "Anyway, did you go to the police about the kidnapping?" He slowly nodded. Okay, that was *some* form of communication at least. "Good... I take they'll go to jail for a while?"

"Well... the court case will be soon, but they are in pre-trial custody with good chances for jail, yes. The police found a voice recorder with a plea of guilty from them on it, so it was easy. I don't suppose you have something to do with it?"

Aah, so he *could* talk about something else. Even though he ended with a question again.

"Well, of course I have, I told you they have evidence. But whatever, I'm glad that these guys don't run around anymore but I didn't want to talk about them. Let's do something else!"

My opponent looked at me blankly. "Tell me one reason I should do anything with you except throwing you to jail where you belong just as these kidnappers."

I furrowed my eyebrows as I answered. "Well, first I would appreciate if you don't lump me together with them and second, I saved you from them. Can't you just give it

a try? I mean, it won't hurt you to try and have fun for once, will it? And I already told you, you can try to catch me all you want when I try to steal something again, okay?"

I could practically *see* him thinking about it, balancing the different reasons. But I knew what the conclusion was he would come to, even if he himself might still be thinking. Because I wouldn't give up annoying him until he'd finally give in. So at least he let out an irritated breath.

"Fine. Okay. Visit me or whatever. But I don't see how you could help me having fun, because I *do* have my ways for having fun without needing anyone like you, so don't bother."

I smiled, actually happy that he gave in, even though I knew that it would need quite a bit of work to get him to not despise me as much as he probably did now. But I had a pretty good idea how to do that. Or at least, how to start.

"Hungry?", I asked, as it was about time to eat dinner. He shook his head, but his stomach rumbled right afterwards. Very authentic. "Alright, let's make dinner!", I said and before Alan could protest or anything I grabbed his hand and pulled him up from the chair. Without letting go, I dragged him into his kitchen, ignoring the following grumbling about what I thought I was doing.

Instead, I opened the fridge to see what he had. And I was pretty flabbergasted as I found it nearly empty.

"Hey, what do you normally eat in the evening?", I asked the policeman, confused.

He just shrugged. "Nothing much. A slice of bread, a bit cheese or something like that. I neither have the time nor the desire to prepare big meals."

I stared at him. "So you never eat warm meals for dinner? I *have* to change that! And hey, you have eggs, so I already have an idea..." I started to look through various cupboards, searching for flour, milk, butter and whatever he had apart from that, once again tuning out his protests.

After I had found everything I started measuring and mixing all that stuff together, watching Alans increasingly confused expression out of the corner of my eye.

"You can cook?", he asked, sounding surprised and a bit suspicious. I grinned. "Yep. And pretty good if I dare say, so don't worry, it definitely won't kill you."

He still didn't look convinced, but I didn't care, concentrating on my preparations instead.

It didn't take long before I was finished, spontaneously having made pancakes, because I myself simply *loved* them and there weren't many opportunities where you couldn't eat them. Alan still looked distrustful though. But oh well he was hungry and I had food, he'd eat sooner or later. I set the small table in his kitchen and gave him and me each some of the pancakes before I took a seat and motioned him to do the same. "Enjoy your meal!"

Reluctantly, he sat down, but even though I started eating he didn't even touch his food. I rolled my eyes. "We both know that you're hungry, so ignore your pride for once and eat."

I cut a bit from my pancakes and waited for his protest, to push the stuff in his mouth just as he opened it. Which seemed to take him completely off guard, as he just blinked surprised, before chewing and swallowing the food, like a reflex.

"So? It's not that bad, right?", I said, smiling. Not that I expected an answer.

And really, he stayed silent, but at least he began eating so I was content. I mean, it's always said that even the biggest things start with small steps, right? And it looked like my plan to make Alan like me at least a bit was a pretty big thing. But I was

stubborn, I'd get what I wanted in the end for sure.



## Chapter nine

The next time I visited Alan, he was in a better mood. I had no idea why, maybe he had captured a criminal? But I was glad, because like that he wasn't as quiet and grumpy as before. Quite the contrary, he even agreed as I suggested a game of twenty questions. I mean, it wasn't easy to get him to talk, so something like that, where we could ask each other something in turns, one question at a time, was really a success. And of course, I inwardly hoped that it would help my goal of him starting to like me if he got to know me first.

So we sat in his living room, facing each other, in silence.

Great.

I motioned Alan to start, because I had no idea what to ask as I didn't want him to snap at me again or something like that.

But of course, Alan didn't care about small details like that as he chose his question.

"Why do you steal?"

I bit my lip as I thought how to answer. I had to be honest, as I had suggested the game and that was one of its rules, but the question itself wasn't easy.

"Let's say... it's the fault of the society. Isn't it always, though?"

Alan frowned. "Society? Why is that?"

I shook my head. "My question first. You write, right? So... what exactly do you write?" At least I had found an innocuous topic. I hoped. And I really was interested in it after I had seen him typing something the last time I visited him. It didn't look like it was the most comfortable topic for him, but he still answered. "Mystery, mostly. Or detective stories. Experience certainly helps too, you know? And now tell me why you think it's the fault of the society that you steal."

"Fine, fine...", I mumbled. Now, how to explain...? "Well, I'm sure you know how it is if you're not exactly... liked by the people, don't you? But the problem is... I'm not only *disliked* by society, believe me. No one would be able to tell you, since it has been a while that anyone saw me as myself, but I'm... different. And you know how humans react if there is something they don't understand. So I guess, that's the main reason for... how do you call it? 'Drifting into criminality'? Or simply 'stealing'."

I suppressed a sigh. I really didn't like talking about my reasons and so on, but I had to try and make him understand at least somehow, right?

"Whatever, it's my turn again now. Do you have finished stories? Anything published?"

The policeman still looked in thought before he shook his head. "No. Well, I do have finished stories, but nothing published. I'm the only one who reads my stories anyway." I furrowed my brows. Why was that? I was sure the stories couldn't be that bad...

"But, what do you mean with 'different'? You say people dislike things they don't understand, but it can't be that bad, can it?", he continued and I laughed dryly.

"It can. I can't really explain how I am different, it's nothing you normally see when you meet me. It's not my appearance or even my personality. It's nothing I can change, it's just who I am. But you know, the 'Sapphire Phantom' is pretty popular with everyone, even though he steals. And if you research a bit, he only steals from rich people with dark secrets. You should keep that in mind.", I explained, smiling slightly. It seemed to get Alan to think, which wasn't bad. But I still wanted to ask my next question.

"Hey, can I read your stories?" But the answer came immediately.

"No!"

"Why not? I do know a little bit about literature and if no one else reads it anyway, what bad could it do?"

He looked to the side. "It's... nothing for other people."

"How would you know if no one else ever read it? Also, if you write, it's stupid if you never let anyone read it. Come on...!"

A sigh. "You won't give up, will you?" "Nope...!" "... Fine. Read it, but don't say I haven't warned you!" "Okay!"

After that little 'quarrel' our little game went on, with him trying to get more information about me, mostly about why I was stealing, what I was doing with the stuff and how I chose my targets. Of course, I didn't give him all the details, but I tried to tell him most of the stuff. At least the one that I knew wouldn't harm my chances of continuing to steal successfully. I myself on the other hand mostly asked about simple stuff, like favorites, hobbies and so on.

And everything went pretty well, with him warming up a little after a while, giving longer answers and so on. Maybe it was connected with the fact, that he and I surprisingly were quite similar in ways we both didn't thought we ever could have been. (For example, we both loved music and even if his favorite was classical music while I adored rock, we could find certain positive facts each other's style of music.)

But then, of course, he asked the one question we both knew I could not answer honestly without getting problems.

"Who are you really?"

I sighed. "Come on, did you *have* to ask that? You know that I can't answer that without putting myself in danger, right?"

He stayed silent, waiting for an answer.

"Let's put it like that: I'm just a more or less normal boy with a slightly dysfunctional family and a small criminal twist. And that's about as detailed as I can get without having to watch out what I'm saying to not give you any information about my identity. Sorry about that, but you *are* a policeman and I quite like my freedom."

He nodded slowly, though I wasn't sure if that was an understanding nod or more something like 'I'll get you anyway'.

"So... can I ask you one last question?" I mean, I would've done it right away, but first I didn't really give an appropriate answer to his question and second it was getting late and unlike me Alan had to get up pretty early.

"You just did, but go on anyway."

I nodded before looking him straight in the eye, leaning a bit in his direction. It was my last question and probably the most important one. At least, it was for me.

"Say... do you still hate me?"

That seemed to surprise him, but he looked like he was honestly thinking about it so I stayed quiet until I got an answer.

"Um... I didn't actually *hate* you to begin with. Dislike, yes, maybe even strong dislike, but not hate. And now... well, I guess you *can* be okay if you try to. But don't think that this will hinder me while trying to catch you! You are still a thief and you will pay for your crimes!"

I smiled happily, relieved at the given answer and nodded. "Alright, I can live with that! And you know, I like you too!"

"Hey, I never said I particularly *like* you either!"

"I know, but that doesn't mean that I'm wrong, right?"

I grinned, suddenly in a very good mood. I wasn't sure if he really liked me, but as he didn't answer, I guess he felt at least something like that. And hey, one day I'd get him to admit it!

But for now it was really getting late, so I just ruffled his hair one more time - having come to like it even though he always got annoyed by it -before saying my goodbyes and leaving for home. Ah, I really could repeat stuff like that more often...!

## Chapter ten

Like that, the rest of the summer went by, followed by fall and finally, the weather got even colder as the winter slowly approached. And it was really awesome, because I had so much fun, more than in quite a long time.

I visited Alan again a few times and we got to talk about some things. I still didn't get what he really thought about me after our game of twenty questions the second time I met him at his home, but I guess it was okay, otherwise he probably wouldn't speak to me. I even got to read his story. And really, I know he thought it was bad or whatever, but I liked it. It was interesting to read about the thoughts of detectives and policemen in his stories. Also, there probably were his own experiences in it, a reason to like it even more.

But I did my thefts anyway, so it wasn't easy to gather Brownie points with him. Yet he met me alone every time, trying his best to stop me from stealing the stuff. And he was the only one who at least achieved *something*, because he tried changing his tactics, while the other policemen somehow still thought I wanted to march in through the front door... Idiots.

The same thing happened in the last days of November, but still, something was different. Because as I entered the room I found Alan looking not exactly good. He had a scarf wrapped tightly around his neck even though it was pretty warm in the building and sniffled every few minutes. At least he was alone, as always.

"Hey, you alright?", I asked, slightly concerned and he jumped a bit.

"Of course I am.", he mumbled, but even his voice sounded slightly raspy. It had already been a while since I last visited him as I had been very busy preparing the theft, but I was sure he had been pretty healthy back then. And now, he certainly was not.

I even had no problem in reaching the painting I should steal. It wasn't that useful to us - except for the frame, maybe - but the owner only collected expensive paintings and he really had skeletons in his closet - metaphorically speaking - so the opportunity was too good.

Anyway, Alan didn't even try to stop me, instead, he stood in front of the window where I came in. It was unguarded, of course, as it was on the second floor, but I had my ways, as always. So the idea itself wasn't that bad.

"Be nice and give up, okay? Your escape route is blocked and the doors are guarded by my colleagues.", the policeman said, but he actually didn't look as if he *could* stop me. Instead he seemed to lean against the window for balance, his mind seemingly set on not letting me pass.

I sighed. "You should go home and sleep. You're ill, right? So behave like an ill person and rest!"

"Not before you're arrested...!" He shook his head and glared at me. (Really, he could *always* glare, he'd probably even do it when he was at the brink of death if something - or someone, like me - annoyed him)

But then, he seemed to have some kind of problem, because he grabbed his head, before suddenly, he blacked out. Fortunately, I wasn't that far away and fast enough to catch him before he hit the ground. As I held him I wondered why he was that red in the face, so I took off one of my gloves to feel his forehead. He was burning up. What the hell?! He really should've stayed in bed...

I laid him down on a couch that stood around in the room, before taking the paper from the picture, ripping it to shreds. (Of course I had put on my glove again, to not leave any treacherous fingerprints) If I couldn't steal it I would make it vanish anyway. I threw the shreds out of the window, before placing one of my roses in front of the empty frame and turning back to the unconscious policeman.

Actually it was pretty strange that I saw him without consciousness that often, but oh well... time to play the savior again!

By the time I had arrived at Alans apartment - carrying him bridal style like the last time since it was the easiest way - he had fallen asleep, slightly snuggling into me. Though he just did the latter because the weather really was cold and I was the nearest warm place... But hey, I guess that made me pretty comfy, right?

I laid him into his bed, taking his scarf and jacket off him and placing his blanket over him.

After I made sure he seemed comfortable I went into his kitchen, searching the ingredients for some kind of soup, which would probably be the best for him right now. Hey, Lily once taught me her special recipe against almost everything. And Alan seemed to have nearly everything... at least a fever and a cold, he'd probably start coughing soon too. So I was glad that he actually had enough stuff for me to work with and I could start cooking once more in his kitchen.

But this time, I could not stay for long. I knew that I'd visit him the next day, but for now I needed to confess my 'failure' to Lucy. So after I finished cooking I replaced the flowers in his kitchen once again - after a while I had made it a habit to bring blue roses for him if his old ones started to wither - wrote a little 'Get well soon!' card to go with it and put the soup in his fridge, also writing on the card that he'd find it there. I only left one plate for him in his bedroom, with another rose next to it. He'd know it was mine, as I was the only one crazy enough to break into his house, cook and leave blue roses before going my way I guess.

As I went home in the end, I just hoped that he'd appreciate my effort at least a little bit. And, of course, that he'd get better.

## Chapter eleven

I hadn't been wrong about Lucys reaction after all. As I confessed her that I once again didn't do what I should've done, not even stealing the painting, she stared at me as if I had gotten mad.

"Could you *please* tell me why - exactly - you destroyed that painting instead of stealing it?"

I shrugged. "Look, Alan passed out directly in front of me because he's ill. I couldn't carry him *and* the painting, because that thing was just too big. And really, what did you want with that thing? We don't need stuff like that!"

She let out an annoyed breath. "I know we don't need it, but you should've stolen it anyway! The frame was pure silver, do you know what I could've done with *that*?"

"Yes, I know, but come on...! I was worried about Alan...", I defended myself.

"Why do you favor him over your work anyway? He's just a policeman!"

I sighed. "He's not 'just a policeman'. Do you think I'd risk my job as a thief for the next best police officer? I mean, I like him."

"Maybe, but I still think it's too dangerous to do all that stuff just because you like someone."

I looked at her and raised an eyebrow, waiting for her to understand what I meant as I had said 'like'. She returned my look as if she waited for an answer, before her eyes widened slightly. "Oh... you mean you *like* him? As in... *like like*?" I nodded slowly and she slapped her forehead. "God, I'm so stupid! Sorry! That doesn't make it easier though, does it? And... does *he* know?"

I wondered why she took everything so calmly - the police was our 'enemy' after all - but I shook my head anyway. "I mean, he's not stupid, he knows that I like him somehow, but he probably has no idea how much."

She thought about it. "You know that you eventually have to tell him, right?"

"Yes... I even have an idea when I might do it, but I don't know what he'll think about me afterwards..." I sighed once more, letting myself drop on the couch. She sat next to me, patting my head. Looks like she finally got why I was acting the way I did.

"It'll work out. Lily and I will find a way to help you, okay? Don't worry, we've experience."

I frowned. Not only was my younger sister comforting me - which was already pretty strange - but... "What do you mean, experience? With what?"

She blinked. "You don't know?" I raised my eyebrows, shaking my head. "Well... Alects boyfriend is a policeman, just like Alan. Though he's mostly doing desk work as far as I know. And Lily and I also helped him back then, so... we'll help you too."

Wait, what?! I mean, I knew that Alec had a boyfriend, I was his twin brother after all, I even knew the guy, but nobody had told me that that guy went to the police afterwards (since he hadn't worked yet as they got together). But oh well, as far as I knew him he was okay, so... why not?

In the end, Lucy and I talked for a while, with her asking me a whole lot of questions - especially the ones I didn't want to answer, naturally - and finally clearing up the misunderstandings between us. She even encouraged me in the matter of Alan. Well... at least she knew now, what meant that Lily and Alec would know soon too, but it was okay, we supported each other so it would work out in the end...

The next morning - I got up pretty early - Lily made my wig ready and I went to visit Alan.

The streets were surprisingly empty - well, maybe not that surprisingly, it was a cold Sunday morning and it looked like rain so most people probably were either asleep or inside their houses - so it wasn't a problem to get to him and I was pretty fast.

I opened his door (something I grew accustomed to instead of ringing the doorbell) and went inside. I waited a second before walking to the kitchen, having heard the clattering of dishes. It seemed as if Alan just ate breakfast.

And really, when I entered the room he was just washing his dishes. In his pajamas. How cute. He hadn't seen me yet because his back was turned to the door so I walked up to him unnoticed.

"What are you doing, washing your dishes? Aren't you ill? Just stay in bed, doing stuff like that later when you're feeling well again.", I said after I was directly behind him, making him jump and nearly dropping the plate he held.

He spun around before backing away to the sink, wide-eyed. "Could you stop doing that every time?!"

"Doing what?", I asked innocently.

"You know what I mean! Every time you visit you sneak up to me from behind! Can't you just ring the doorbell like every normal person?"

"Nope! You know you like it! And otherwise it would be boring."

He shook his head. "Whatever... to your question: I might be ill, but I can still work at home. Better than having to do all the work the first day I'm healthy again."

I thought about it. "Well... I never thought about it that way, maybe you've got a point?" Shrugging I tousled his hair.

"Of course I have. It's not the first time that I'm ill, I know what I can do and what would be a bad idea."

"Okay, okay...! But whatever, did you like my soup?"

Now it was his time to shrug. "It was... okay, I guess."

I grinned, knowing that that probably meant a 'Yes, it was awesome.' in the Alan-language. He just couldn't give - or take, for that matters - compliments very well, so it was alright.

"Great! But go back to bed now, kay? You should rest. Then you'll be fit again in no time!"

I shooed him into his bedroom, pushing him with slight force into his bed and covering him with his blanket. He wanted to protest but I put a finger on his lips. "Just relax! Work can wait, don't worry..."

Of course, he glared at me, but he stayed put, so I just smiled and sat on the edge of his bed.

"So... do you need anything else?"

The next few days I visited Alan every day, helping him a bit, watching out that he rested instead of working. Though I got the feeling that he got frustrated with staying in bed the whole day. But his fever only went down slowly, so I insisted that he didn't work.

"Oh *come on*! I'm not a kid anymore! Let me do my work dammit! Where is your problem?", he grumbled as I pushed him back into his bed the hundredth time this day.

"Easy: You should rest now. I told you already. Just stay in bed, then you'll get better

in no time!”

“But I *am* well! I mean, my fever isn’t really high anymore and my cold got better too, so what do you want?”, he protested and I shrugged.

“I want that you get healthy fast. Who says that you won’t get worse again when you work? Stress is bad. And not only for ill people.”

Just like that, we discussed quite a lot as time went on, until it finally became really uncomfortable. Sure, I understood his motives but I had hoped that he understood mine too. Because really, was it that hard to just lay down and relax a few days until it got better?

So in the end - his fever had disappeared mostly anyway - he snapped.

“Let me do my work! I don’t care if I get worse again after that, but it has to be done. It’s not your business and I’m tired of you always trying to not letting me out of my bed! So go away and stop bothering me!”

That was the moment, when I had enough too. My patience was wearing thin and I really didn’t want to snap too.

“Okay. Fine. I was just worried about you but it doesn’t look like you even want someone that worries about you. I don’t get why you don’t understand that sometimes it’s simply easier to rest a while before doing a great job than doing the same thing in a bad condition, maybe even with a bad outcome, but whatever. Do what you like if you think it’s so much better. But think of my words if it goes wrong in the end.”

With these words I left, earlier than planned. I’d give him some time to calm down I guess. Maybe he’d get better until then, especially since he actually wasn’t that ill anymore anyway, when I’d return he should be completely healthy again. At least I hoped so, because I’d really feel guilty if he wouldn’t be. I’d probably see.



## Chapter twelve

Soon after the last visit of the thief, Alan got better again, but while his health improved he started to feel pretty guilty about what he had told him. Sure, he had been really annoyed by the fact, that he wasn't able to do anything but sleeping, reading or talking with the Phantom, but now, after he had cooled down and thought about the whole thing again, he knew that there would've been nicer ways to say that. So maybe he even thought about apologizing the next time the blue haired guy visited. The only problem: He didn't.

In the first week after that incident, Alan didn't worry too much about it. He had his work to do and normally, the other guy visited only once or twice the week anyway. The second week was still okay. That was the time when he got to the conclusion that he probably had to apologize, so he thought that maybe the Phantom stayed away for exactly that reason, to get him to understand he hadn't been very nice.

But as the third week began, Alan got increasingly nervous. He began thinking about the thief pretty often, wondering why he still hadn't visited. Some part of him even worried, maybe something bad had happened? Because he himself had no choice but to wait, as he hadn't any contact information about the Sapphire Phantom. (Not that it was strange, because he probably would've found out his identity with any given information)

Still, by the end of the week he started to get distracted during his work, beginning to make careless mistakes. Even his boss asked him one day if everything was alright because he seemed slightly distant. Of course, he told him that everything was alright but it still wasn't that easy to concentrate anymore.

The whole thing went on - on some parts even getting worse - until a few days before Christmas.

Alan sat in his living room, trying to write a report without getting distracted by every single noise he heard, somehow hoping that his usually frequent visitor would be there when he looked at the door. But as always, every time he did, he was just as alone as before.

Suddenly though, he heard the slight sound of knocking and spun around. And this time, it hadn't been his imagination. In the doorframe of his living room stood the master thief himself.

Before he could open his mouth though, the policeman had already jumped from his chair, striding through his room and stopping right in front of the guy.

"Where have you been?!" One could clearly hear the anger in his voice, but there also was some kind of relief. Relief that the thief was okay. Not that he'd ever admit it.

The Phantom himself seemed mostly surprised though, it looked as if he'd expected a different reaction, but he answered anyway.

"Well... originally, I just wanted to wait until you calmed down a bit, but then I got ill myself and had to stay home. I'm sorry."

Alan shook his head. "Don't be." It seemed wrong to let the other one apologize as he didn't even do anything wrong. "It's me who should be blamed. I shouldn't have snapped at you, it wasn't your fault anyway..."

The last few words came out pretty quiet, but the other one still seemed to have understood them as he smiled.

"Let's forgive and forget, okay?" A nod. "Great! So..." He paused for a second,

probably searching for a safer topic. "Will you go to the annual masked ball?"

Yes, that definitely was a safer topic.

The annual masked ball was a tradition of the town they both lived in, every year on Christmas eve everyone came together in the town hall. There was great music, everyone danced and generally had fun. And of course, as it was a masked ball, everyone had to wear a costume and a mask, which made the whole thing interesting, as it wasn't always easy to guess who the person behind the mask was.

Alan nodded again. "I have to. Most of the police will be there, some of them for fun, some to supervise the whole thing a bit and watch out for crimes." Of course, crimes were easy to do too, as no one showed their real face, so it was a good idea for the police to have men there.

"Let me guess: You're one of the people to supervise the whole thing?" The Phantom smiled amused as he asked the pretty obvious question. Alan simply didn't seem like a person who liked to go to events like that. Also he had said 'I have to'. The policeman answered anyway.

"Yes. And what about you?"

"Of course I'm going! It'll be so much fun! And I love to dance! So watch out, maybe you'll recognize me?"

As he told him that, he looked as if he knew something very funny about that, grinning the whole time.

"We will see.", was the only answer he got though.

After that, both guys talked a bit, mostly about some harmless things. But after a while Alan made clear that he still had important work to do - though he did it nicer than the last few times - and as the Phantom himself had supposedly some 'preparations' to do he left shortly after that.

And surprisingly, the policeman got his work done the same evening, without being distracted or making a single mistake.

## Chapter thirteen

The last days until the masked ball went by surprisingly fast. Most of the time I helped Lily, as she sold costumes on her site and there were so many orders that even she had some problems. But I liked helping her anyway, especially as she had done something really awesome: She had made an announcement - months ago - that she'd sell 'Sapphire Phantom' costumes. Meaning, everyone could run around dressed as the famous master thief. And you have no idea how many people seem to like that.

The reason it was that awesome? Well, if she sold wigs and costumes that looked like mine, I could show up personally in that outfit and no one would suspect me being the real thief.

Which of course helped me greatly in getting closer to Alan without having to reveal my real identity.

So just like that, Christmas arrived. My siblings and I didn't really celebrate it, actually we just made some kind of wish list and I stole that stuff to hand it out at the 25th. But the masked ball still was an event we loved to go to, because we could simply be ourselves without really having to pretend being something we weren't.

Which meant that we all made ourselves ready that evening, putting on our costumes. Lily wore an extravagant white dress with a lot of beautiful details and a mask over her eyes that looked like butterfly wings, also in white of course. Lucy was the complete opposite, with her short, black dress, which looked pretty tight but fit her nicely, just like the pretty simple, black mask in her face. Today probably was the only day in the whole year that she ever wore a dress, so it was kinda special.

Alec and me 'only' wore our thief clothes. Meaning the blue and white clothes - including the hat and the mask - for me and a black and white cloak with white fur on the shoulders and a black, metallic-looking mask for my brother.

And dressed like that, we left the house and went to the town hall, where the masked ball would be located. We got a few looks, but none of them said something like 'how weird' or 'what are they wearing?'. Of course not, most of the town was dressed in a similar way, if we got looks it was more something like admiration. Well, in your face, looks like Lily (and me, somehow) did an awesome job with our costumes! She made new ones every year, so we normally never wore the same things twice. Well... at least the girls didn't.

So at the entrance of the hall, we showed our tickets and went in, looking around a bit at the decorations. They did a nice job, getting the town hall ready for the big event. There were garlands at the ceiling, fake snow was lying around everywhere and I even saw mistletoes in some corners.

The people in charge of the decorations obviously had been woman, but hey, it looked fine.

After I observed the environment, I started looking at the people and I was surprised. I mean, I knew that Lily had gotten quite a few orders to make a Sapphire Phantom costume, but there were more people around with these clothes than I had originally thought. Oh well, easier for me to stay unnoticed I guess.

Also, I had to find Alan. But before I could go looking for it, someone suddenly started talking to me.

"Nice clothes mister."

I turned and saw a pretty old man - maybe about seventy years old? - looking at me smiling.

"Thanks, my girlfriend sewed them for me!", I answered, grinning and placing my arms around Lilys shoulder. Of course that was a lie, but we had agreed on playing two couples, because that was not as rare as four siblings who were only seen at Christmas each year.

The old man nodded. "How nice. But why are there so many people here dressed just like you?"

Looks like he didn't follow the news...

"It's the thief they're talking about in the media. He's pretty popular and there is an online shop selling clothes just like he wears.", I explained smiling and he nodded, chatting a bit with me until he finally left.

I shook my head inwardly - I wasn't such a big fan of people like that, but Lily had taught me to always play nice - before I finally parted from my siblings and started to look for Alan.

Most of the people were here now, because the music had started shortly after I began searching, but even though it was really crowded, at least I pretty much knew that Alan would not be a big dancer, meaning he probably stood around somewhere away from the dance floor.

I searched about fifteen minutes, then I was back at the place I had started searching. Oh great. But it's pretty hard to find someone if you have no idea what they would be wearing. I had to ask more than one person if it was him, but no such luck. Not that I was the only one that was confused, it happened every year a lot of times. It still was pretty annoying, though.

Finally I had found another 'candidate'.

"Alan...?", I asked as I stood near the guy and he looked at me.

"Phantom.", he answered curtly. Right, he didn't even know my name... must be awkward to call me 'Phantom' or 'you', huh?

"Thank god I finally found you.", I sighed, relieved that he actually was the one I searched. "It's not easy to find you with all these people here. But you look nice in that outfit."

"Thanks.", he answered, not looking at me. Confused, I tilted my head sideways.

"Is everything alright?"

"Sure. Of course everything is alright. I'm just wondering what exactly you are doing here with me if you could spend time with your precious girlfriend."

I blinked. What was he talking about? And even his tone was strange.

Seeing my confusion, he rolled his eyes.

"Oh come on, you know what I'm talking about! Back then, when that old man was talking to you. So your girlfriend is in on that thief stuff too, having sewed your outfit?", he grumbled, looking angry, but I got the feeling that the anger wasn't completely directed at me. Still, I had to clear up the misunderstanding.

"Look, I'm not sure why it bothers you that much-" though I certainly didn't dislike it "-but that girl isn't my girlfriend or anything. She's my sister. I lied to that guy, because of some reasons you're better off not knowing, but still. Believe me, I don't have a girlfriend."

He still looked suspicious, but nodded. And somehow he even looked calmer than before, though it looked as if he tried to hide that fact.

As he still looked to the side I remembered something. After searching in one of the

many hidden pockets my outfit had I pulled out a little wrapped box, holding it out to the policeman. Now it was his turn to look confused.

"It's a Christmas present.", I explained. "You can open it tomorrow if you want."

"Okay...? Thanks, I guess.", he answered and I smiled. I just hoped that he'd like it, though I wasn't sure he'd open it at all if I really went through with what I had planned.

But for now, I ignored that voice, looking at the dance floor.

"Let's dance!"

Alan stared at me in horror. "No way!"

"Why not?"

"I... just don't want to."

"Don't worry if you can't dance, I'll lead you!"

Blushing slightly, the man shook his head. "Forget it. Also, I never said that I couldn't dance! But it will be awkward... we're two guys!"

I raised an eyebrow. "So what? No one recognizes us anyway and from far away you can be mistaken for a girl. Don't worry!"

That might not have been the most intelligent thing to say, but as Alan sputtered I just took his wrist and dragged him onto the dance floor.

And he had no time to protest because as soon as we arrived there we had to get into position and begin dancing, because otherwise it would've caused a big commotion. Since it was a Christmas party the only music that was played was classical music, but I could dance to that sort of music pretty well and helped Alan a bit as I took the lead. After a while he stopped trying to fight it but instead somehow relaxed to the music, trying to get the dance steps right. Fortunately he caught on fast and my feet weren't actually stomped on all that much.

In the end, he even opened himself a bit more to everything, having a content look on his face. And it really was enthralling somehow...

Like that, we continued dancing quite a long time, not even feeling the growing exhaustion (because dancing isn't *just* nice, you know? It can be pretty tiring too), until we finally stopped in the middle of the dance floor, a spot, where the pairs danced around but never crossed, because some dancers rested here shortly, meaning they wanted to continue right afterwards.

Slightly out of breath we looked at each other, ignoring everyone else around us.

"See? Dancing isn't that bad, right?", I told him, smiling.

"...maybe."

I could swear that he was slightly red - and not because of the exhaustion - but before I could ask about it, one of the dancers who weren't really good (probably dancing for the first time?) suddenly stumbled and fell, pushing Alan right into my arms in the process.

Now I was probably blushing too, but not as bad as Alan. After he freed himself from the surprise-embrace he looked down, definitely embarrassed.

And then I did something that was probably - no, definitely - not the best thing to do. But he was looking so cute right not that I couldn't help myself.

I kissed him.

In front of nearly every person in town.

I could just hope they weren't interested in two kissing people somewhere or at least didn't get that Alan was a guy.

Not that that was something on my mind in that moment.

Actually my mind went blank the moment our lips touched and I just let my feelings take over my brain. And this time I could swear that my opponent reacted. Not negatively, like screaming, punching my lights out or whatever you might think of, no, I was sure that he was kissing me back!

But I couldn't shake of my fear that that was a spur of the moment thing and I actually didn't want to take advantage of him, so I ended the kiss, looking at him.

He still looked somehow dazed, probably not exactly sure what just happened, but it was far too late for me to stop what I would have to do eventually anyway.

I looked directly into his eyes, where confusion gradually began to form.

"Look... I know it probably isn't the best way - or the best time - to say it, but I think I'd never do anything if I don't say it now, so..."

I took a deep breath.

"I love you. I know it might be awkward for you, being loved by a guy and everything, but... I hope it doesn't freak you out completely...?"

Finally it was said. Unsure I waited for his reaction, but trying to make sure he got that I was totally serious with what I said, even if I might not have used the best words for it.

And though it needed a while for my words to sink in, the reaction finally came. First, his eyes changed from confusion to realization as he got what I told him, but he stayed silent.

I would've done anything to get him to say something, do something, anything, but I didn't know what so instead I just waited.

And in the end, he started to shake his head. "That's a joke, right....? A pretty stupid one, but a joke..." , he began, sounding a little bit desperate.

It might have been a chance for me to lie, to tell him that yes, it was a joke and laugh it off, but I couldn't. It was better if he knew, even if that meant that I'd lose him. So I shook my head.

"Sorry, but I was completely serious. And I still am." I sighed. "You know, as a thief, I only steal things I care about... but right now, I just can't bring myself to care. You're the only thing in my mind. I only... want to steal your heart."

God, that was mushy. But it was the truth. I just wondered how Alan would react. I wasn't sure if I was imagining things, if my love struck mind was playing tricks on me but it looked like he was blushing slightly. Though his words said otherwise.

"But I... you... I mean... that's stupid!"

I furrowed my brows, waiting for him to continue.

"We're both guys! Also, I don't even know your name or *anything* important about you! You just want to confuse me, right? Trying to keep me from catching you one day! Stop it, I won't fall for that anymore, count me out of this!"

I wanted to respond, telling him that he presumed the wrong things - because I definitely *didn't* do that stuff just to confuse him or anything - but he turned around and ran, vanishing too fast between the dancers making it impossible to follow him...

## Chapter fourteen

And just like that I found myself at the police station, a few weeks after that disastrous masked ball. My siblings knew about everything and finally, after moping for a while, I made this decision. It was no use in trying to steal anything in my condition and there was only one thing that would cure it, so I took the last - and probably riskiest - step to try that. Arriving as myself, without any disguise.

I walked up to the woman who sat behind the desk and greeted her friendly.

"Good Morning. Could you please tell me whom I have to contact if I might know something about a certain case?"

She frowned. "Well... which 'case' do you refer to?"

"The one about the Phantom Thief."

Her eyes went wide. "Well... if you know something about that, you might as well tell me. I can pass the information on."

"Well... actually, I wanted to talk to a specific policeman..."

"Why?"

"Personal matters. But I am certain, that the information might help you catch the thief and I won't tell it anyone else.", I answered stubbornly. I wasn't stupid, I knew that it wouldn't help my plans in the slightest if I just went and told any other police officer except Alan what I wanted to say.

She tried to argue but I wouldn't change my request so in the end, she gave up.

"Fine... but I honestly hope that your information is worth the trouble. You know, police officers have work too, even if they are here. Paperwork doesn't finish itself. So, with whom do you want to talk?"

I nodded and told her Alans name. She searched shortly at her computer - probably figuring out where he worked exactly - before she stood up and motioned to me to follow her. I did just that as she walked through the building, until we finally reached a room, where a lot of people seemed to have their desks to work.

"Alan?", she asked, loud enough to be heard over the chaos and just as I found him sitting behind his desk he looked up.

It actually was kind of funny that his eyes didn't instantly showed suspiciousness and caution, but instead confusion, as he looked at me. Like I said, Lilys costumes were *good*...

Anyway, he walked up to us to ask what was wrong.

"That guy here wants to tell you something, he said he won't tell it anyone else but it would be important. You know him?", the woman explained and he looked at me again, frowning.

"No, I don't think so..."

"Anyway, I hope whatever it is helps you."

She rolled her eyes at me again before leaving the room, probably to go back to the front desk.

Alan looked at me with raised eyebrows. "So... you only want to tell *me* whatever it is?"

I nodded, not trusting my voice because he'd probably recognize it right away, which would be bad. At least, in front of so many people.

"Fine... then follow me."

He led me to some kind of interrogation room, which currently was empty and

seemingly unsupervised.

After he closed the door behind me, he turned around to look at me.

"So... what do you want?"

I sighed inwardly. It was probably now or never, huh? So I returned his look, trying to look as serious as possible.

"I want to turn myself in."

His eyes went wide as he recognized my voice and he took a surprised step backwards.

"Phantom?!"

"Actually, it's Yuri."

"What?"

I took a deep breath.

"My name. It's Yuri. I'm currently twenty-two, living in a pretty big flat near the city centre with my three siblings - though I won't tell you their names, because that's not my place to do that - and my hobbies are playing video games, working out and sometimes sewing. Don't look at me like that, yes, men can like sewing too, it's relaxing and surprisingly fun. My blood type is AB negative, my favorite colours are blue - who would've guessed? - and black, I like rock music, spaghetti and if I'm right and I hate it if I can't get what I want, lose in any of my video games or if I'm proven wrong. Why I'm stealing and everything I have already told you a while back, so... Is there anything else you want to know?"

After that speech I watched as his face turned from completely surprised to a frown before he started to look confused.

"Why are you telling me all this...?"

"Well... I already told you, I want to turn myself in. Oh, and you said you don't know anything about me. Now you do, and you can ask me whatever you want, I'll answer truthfully, I promise."

His frown came back. "But why? Why do you suddenly want to turn yourself in?!"

I raised my eyebrow and smiled sadly. "You still don't know? I already told you, I don't care about stealing anymore. Not if there's something I want so much more." I looked him directly into the eyes. "I still love you, you know? And that won't change anytime soon. So I thought, why bothering with stealing if I can't get what I want the most anyway? Your rejection was pretty clear to me..."

It stung, having to say that aloud again, but I actually had no time to think it over again, as Alan suddenly grasped my shoulders, slammed me against the nearest wall and glared at me.

"You idiot!"

I blinked. "What are you-" But he cut me off.

"Do you have any idea how incredibly stupid that was?! Coming here undisguised, wanting to turn yourself in...! You can't do that, just because of me!"

Frowning, I looked at him. "Well, what should I've done in your opinion? Just sitting around at home, boring myself to death?"

"No, but... something! There has to be something else you can do except for stealing!"

"Well sure, but nothing could distract me enough to not think about you. So I figured this was the easiest way to talk to you without you being able to run away again. I just wanted to tell you that I absolutely meant what I said back then and... yeah, I thought that you'd like it if at least you were the one who could arrest me..." I shrugged.

"Though I can go out and announce to everyone else who I am if you want."

"No!"



I frowned again. "Then what *do* you want me to do?" He opened his mouth to answer but I wasn't finished yet. "And please don't tell me to just 'not steal' and search for something else to--"

Before I could finish that sentence, I was interrupted. In a very... interesting way.

Yes, he kissed me.

It was only a little one, but it shut me up pretty effectively as I simply stared at him, waiting for an explanation.

"Well... sorry about that, I needed you to be quiet for a second.", he mumbled, red rising to his cheeks as he looked at my flabbergasted expression. "Actually, I wanted to tell you that for the past two weeks already, but you never showed up, so I wasn't able to do so. When you kissed me at the ball I... just kind of freaked out and ran. I know how it must've looked to you, though back then, I couldn't care less... so I went to visit my older sister for a while, you know, to prevent you from visiting me. But in the end, I kept thinking about you anyway and... well, my sister helped a good deal, but in the end, I got it... I might actually like you too... I just didn't know if you were serious, so I hoped that, after I went home, you'd show up again at my doorstep, so that I could ask you, but... see what you've gotten yourself into..."

I blinked, unsure if I had heard correctly or if I had just imagined that.

"You mean, you... changed your mind?" Hope started to well up inside of me.

"You could say that, yes... though I think that I only needed time to accept it and never really... well... disliked you. Except for the start, *that* kiss was unnecessary!"

But I hadn't really heard the last part, as a grin spread over my face and I pulled him closer.

"I love you!" I told him, still grinning like a madman, before I closed the gap between us once more and kissed him for all it was worth. And this time I was sure I didn't imagine it, as he kissed back enthusiastically.

Though he soon stopped it again.

"Look, we're still at the police station! And we can't stay in here forever, I'm sure the others want to have whatever information you've given me about the thief and *no*, you're not allowed to turn yourself in anymore."

I nodded, *that* plan had been discarded the moment I had heard that my feelings actually weren't rejected.

"Just tell them I told you that the thief doesn't work alone or something like that... it sounds not all too stupid but won't actually help, as my siblings are way too intelligent to get caught by *them*."

"Fine... it's your fault anyway if it's not helpful, you were being the annoying one here.", he answered, smiling slightly.

"Exactly! But..." I hesitated shortly. "What should I do now? I mean I could continue stealing, but..."

Alan thought about it.

"You know what? Just continue stealing like before." I looked at him, confused, before he added: "But if I catch you - and I mean really catch you, not because you want me to or some kind of stupid mistake - you'll stop stealing altogether, okay?"

Surprised, I thought it over. It actually didn't sound very bad and the chances of him catching me weren't too big, still it would be a challenge and if he *would* catch me, he'd probably not turn me in, so I could still think about something else to do if that happened. So I nodded.

"Fine. I promise."

He smiled. "Great. And now, off with you, I still have a lot of work to do and I have to

do a report to write down the information you just told me.”

I nodded. “Okay. See you later, I’ll visit you!” But before I went away I thought about something. “If you’re nice, maybe I’ll even give you my phone number!” Grinning, I winked at him, before I put the same expression on that I had, when I arrived (My acting skills thankfully weren’t that bad when I needed them) and left the station without anyone - except Alan of course - noticing, that their famous thief had just been amongst them.

I loved my life.