

# Trust and Loyalty

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AC 193 (January)

Seventeen year old Lucrezia Noin, Cadet first class had received the invitation of a lifetime. She clutched her transfer orders greedily. 'I did it.' she thought to herself proudly. After acing all the entrance exams, she was being transferred to the specials Officer's academy at Lake Victoria. There she would receive the highest training possible and graduate an officer in the Oz specials forces. She packed her bags and caught the first Military transfer to her new post.

Zechs Merquise had just finished his mobile suit exercises when his instructor approached. "Son, it's not nice to out-maneuver your teacher." The older man said slapping Zechs on the back firmly. "Sorry Sir." the seventeen year old said in respect to his instructor. "Don't be lad, You're the best damn pilot I ever trained." he said taking up stride next to his pupil. "We've got orders, a transfer is coming in today. The stats, I got show you're going to have a run for your money as top student." He teased and the Silver mask only nodded. "Zechs my boy, I'm worried about you lad. A young man your age shouldn't be so damn, uptight. Loosen up son." Instructor Devonshire said as he walked beside his favorite pupil. "I have much on my mind Sir." was the young man's only response. He wasn't a very popular student, he easily surpassed his peers in combat, and his social graces, though perfect, were cold and unyielding. He was quite unapproachable. He had no friends, he ate alone, studied alone, and fought alone. It didn't help that the lad also wore a harsh silver mask over most of his face. Hiding his eyes and most of his facial features behind cold metal. Instructor Devonshire knew that Zechs' needed a friend to confide in or else the stress was going to eat the youth alive. He knew Zechs was a protégé of Treize Khusrenada, stemming from mysterious origins, Other than that the young man spoke to no one on a personal level. Zechs in short, was lonely.

A figure came walking towards them in a purposeful manner. Instructor Devonshire smiled, 'just the ticket'. He thought to himself as the lovely young cadet came to attention and saluted them. "Cadet Lucrezia Noin, reporting for duty Sir." She said her blue eyes dancing with eagerness. "Ah, Cadet Noin. I was just speaking of you. I am impressed with your record young lady. This is Cadet Zechs Merquise, I'll leave you two to get aquatinted. I have a feeling, the two of you will get along just dandy. Watch out Zechs, she's tough. I'll wager she's going to make your life here as top student not quite so easy to maintain." Instructor Devonshire said grinning as he departed. Noin looked at Zechs and crossed her arms across her chest. "So, you're the one I'll beat next." She said smiling and with humor. "We'll see." was all he said. Noin raised an eyebrow. 'What's with this guy?' She thought to herself as she looked him over. He had a great physique, he was dressed in fatigues, his olive drab T-shirt hugging a well formed chest and arms. His hair, was long and so blonde it was nearly white. He stood tall and defiant. But the mask, the mask was unnerving. She wondered if he used it for just that purpose. Well, she wasn't going to let this guy get the best of her and knock her off balance. "So, are you deformed or something? What's with the silver service on your head?" She asked and a tiny almost insignificant smile twitched on his lips. The phraseology she'd used was disarming. She seemed undaunted by him, he liked that. "It serves a purpose." Was his vague answer. "I'll bet it does." She said still smiling and turning on her heels. "See ya around Zechs. Do try and keep up." She said confidently. Zechs couldn't help but chuckle. If anything, she was sure of herself. Again, a trait he liked in people, especially when it was justified. He'd seen her stats too, she was one hell of a good soldier.

AC 193 (March)

Noin collapsed in the grass, out of breath. The field exercises today were rigorous to say the very least. She learned quickly that the phrase "There's always someone Better than you" was true. Zechs was incredible, she found herself pushing her limits just to keep pace with him. But he was human, a second figure crashed into the soft turf beside her. "I'm going to be sore for a week after today." The breathless Zechs said as he sprawled in the cool grass. "Tell me about it." Noin said still trying to catch her breath. "I think Devonshire gets sadistic glee in this authorized torture." Zechs added smiling. Noin returned his smile, used to the strange mask that adorned her friendly adversary and competition. "I don't think, I KNOW he enjoys making you and I work for our merits. I'm sure he goes home at night saying 'Okay, what can I do to them tomorrow for kicks'". Noin said and Zechs laughed softly. "Well, if we don't want a worse torture, we'd better get back to the course." Zechs said standing extending his hand to help her up. Noin felt a blush creep un-bidding to her cheeks when their hands touched. But pushed down the strange sensation and took her hand back. Zechs smiled down at her. "Loser buys dinner." Zechs said as he dashed off. Noin stood in shock for about two seconds. "Oh, No you don't Zechs!" She said chasing after him pushing her strides to catch him.

AC 193 (May)

Everything was going fine, the system was functioning normally, when her life flashed before her young eyes. She was testing one of the new Aries flight Mobile Suits when the engines began to sputter. A voice link channel instantly made contact. "Noin! What's wrong?" Zechs' voice sounded worries. "I've lost control! System wide failure! Aft jets, down, gyro stabilizers off-line. Oh God! Power loss to all vernier rockets. I'm going down!" Noin answered as she fought to get out of her harness and bail out. "Get out of there Noin! Now! Hurry!" Zechs voice called over the com. "I can't, the hatch isn't responding!" Noin cried out frantic, her escape route sealed to her. "Strap back in Noin. Hold your head!" Zechs said, nearly as panic stricken as he raced to her to try and help. She felt the sound on metal upon metal as Zechs tried to break her fall with his suit. Then the terrible jolt just before her world went black.

She awoke as she felt her body being pulled out of the mutilated suit. She tried to rationalize her surroundings when she felt strong arms wrap around her. "Just hang on Noin. I've got you, help is coming." Zechs said as he lifted her from the wreckage. He laid her upon the grass and gently began seeing to the multitude of lacerations she'd received. She opened her eyes and looked into the sky. No, not the sky, but eyes of the same brilliant hue. Wispy white bangs fell over those glorious eyes and the unknown face looked upon her with worry, yet smiled tenderly at her. "Look at me. Talk to me, what's your name?" He asked and She tried to focus, the voice was... "Zechs?" She asked and He smiled. "That's my name, I asked yours." He teased as he wrapped her bandages. She reached up a tentative hand and laid it to his cheek. He leaned into her touch before taking her hand and laying down upon the earth. "Why do you cover up that face?" She asked weakly. Zechs brushed her bangs from her face. "Why do you?" He asked in return locking her eyes with his. She blushed involuntarily. Zechs cupped her face in his hands. "You stay with me. Don't die on me Noin." He said seriously. "You're just afraid of not having any competition." She said and Zechs smiled at her. "Yes, I love the competition." He said as he brushed her lips with a tender kiss. She drifted into oblivion with his lips warmth against her own. "Sleep Noin, but stay by my side, please." he asked as he held her hand, waiting for the rescue team to arrive. He slipped his mask back on as he heard them approach.

Luckily, Noin suffered little serious damage. A slight concussion and some stitches saw her right as rain in a few days. However, She was still sore when they released her from the infirmary. Zechs was there to take her home. His arm snaked around her for support as he lead her down the corridors. She frowned up at him, the infernal mask was back in place. She vaguely remembered him kissing her, she wondered if it had been the concussion. Once he'd gotten her back to her quarters, and the door shut behind them, he reached up and took off his mask. Her heart began to

race as the Beauty of Zechs washed over her once more. He helped her to sit down, setting his mask on a nearby table and he sat on the floor in front of her. Resting his chin upon her knees and closing his eyes. "You scared me." He said softly. Noin brushed his hair from his eyes. "And you broke my fall. I'd be dead without you Zechs." She said and he shook his head. "I was too late Noin, I did nothing to stop that fall. You bounced right off my suit. You've got a friend upstairs." He said, his eyes misty as he met hers. She studied his handsome features smiling at him. "You once told me that Mask served a purpose. I can't see it, It should be a crime to cover that face." She said and he looked sad. "Noin, I'm not who you think I am. That mask does serve a purpose, it hides me from those who would kill me. I've worn it in public ever since the day I became an orphan." He said looking up to her. "My name is not Zechs Merquise. He is the Man in the Mask. Without my disguise, my name is Milliardo Peacecraft." He said and Noin's eyes went wide. "Prince Milliardo of the Cinq Kingdom?" She asked and Zechs nodded. "Why are you telling me this?" She asked and Zechs hugged her legs as he laid his cheek to her knees. "Why? Because I trust you. You are the most Loyal, dedicated, dearest friend I've ever had in my life. I love you for that Lucrezia." He said still resting his cheek in her lap. "I had to tell you, I can't keep secrets from you. I admire you so much, I wish I had your spirit." He said with a sigh. "But you're so fast, so strong, surely you have a drive I can never hope to match." Noin said and Zechs shook his head. "My drive is not pure like yours. Mine is survival, and yes, revenge. Those who murdered my Family will pay for the evil they wrought. One day, justice will be served and My Father's ideals for a Peaceful world will be a reality. Even if I have to start a war to make that final peace a reality." Zechs said as he unburdened himself to Noin. "Oh, Zechs, let me help you. Please." She said tucking his hair behind his ears. "Let me stand by your side?" She asked and Zechs rose to his knees and met her at eye level. "I can't think of a place I'd want you more than by my side Lu." He said as he kissed her again.

Her arms practically flung themselves around his neck as they mutually deepened the kiss. Her hands running through his thick mane of flaxen silk, as their bodies pressed against each other. Their hands heatedly exploring the other in silent pleas for more. When his hands cupped her breasts, liquid fire raced through her veins. They both knew where this was going and neither of them planned on halting. Noin had never slept with a man before yet, she had no fear of the Man about to make love to her now. This was right, he was right, and she wanted him. She broke the kiss and stood up, she dropped her shirt to the floor as she walked to her bedroom. Zechs followed, shedding his clothes along the path to the bedroom as well. Noin and Zechs stood naked, looking at one another, when a sigh escaped his lips. "You are so Beautiful." He breathed as he grappled her to him and devoured her mouth in a passionate kiss of molten fire. They literally fell into the bed. In a tangle of limbs. His hands, how many did he have? Noin thought to herself as he teased her body in promising caresses of pleasure. She gasped his name as he brought her to the edge of oblivion with his attention to her flesh. She felt him move, then gracefully claim her as only a man can claim a woman. They were as close as two people could possibly be, he was inside her. The pain momentary and brief. He stopped. "You, you're a Virgin." He said softly as if he were in agony over that fact. "I was." She corrected kissing him softly. "You should have told me." He said and Noin smiled at him. "Would you have stopped?" She asked. "Yes." He said and Noin pulled his face down to kiss him. "Perfect argument for me Not Telling you I say." she whispered kissing him softly. "Please don't stop." She added almost inaudibly. He smiled back at her "You never cease to amaze me Lu." He said before assaulting her lips again. He began to gently make love to her. All through the afternoon, they discovered each other in a playful wrestling match of twisted limbs and sheets. They laughed and loved and just held each other as they learned what Trust and Loyalty meant to them in their hearts. What They meant to each other, and that such trust and loyalty was the foundation of a love that would last a lifetime.