Chapter 69

The waiter returned with the wine interrupting introductions.  Rincewind took the bottle, frowned, and asked for two bottles of white wine he had prepared for his visit.  “Since I’m paying, I’m going to get some vintages I prefer he explained.  Shall we sit?”

I moved to sit and thought about dialing the Lion King of New York.  The waiter went through a big display of opening the bottle of wine that Iris had selected.  When he poured a glass for Iris and me, he went to get Rincewind’s selection.  Iris asked Dexter, “So you knew my parents?”

Dexter folded a napkin in his lap and poured himself a glass of red for himself before responding, “Yes, I oversaw their reports to the Magus Arcanium when they started their research some twenty years ago.  Your father is a brilliant man, and your mother keeps him grounded.”

Iris asked eagerly, “Do you know where they are?”

“Sadly, no, Ms. Cartwright.  I do believe they are alive.  I was shocked when the Magus Arcanium did not make a greater effort to locate them when they disappeared.  I made some inquiries, and it appears one of the Circle ended the efforts, but he also has guaranteed the Cartwrights future return.”

Iris asked angrily, “Which of the eight is he?”

Dexter shook his head, “That information will not help you, Ms. Cartwright.  What I can do is refer you to my friend here.  Arch Magus Rincewind believes he knows where your parents are. They are out of reach, even with the power of your demonic friend here.”

Iris’ eyes moved to Rincewind, who had been buttering some bread.  Iris looked impatient as Rincewind ate the bread. He hummed in pleasure at the taste, “This bread is from my favorite bakery in New York.  You should try it.”  He ignored Iris and looked at me, “So, who holds your leash?”

I must have looked ready to bolt because he waved his hand in the air, “I don’t care who you serve.  The games of the demonics and angelics are of no concern to me.  I am more a spectator.”

Iris interrupted, “Where are my parents Archmage Rincewind?”

He held up a finger, signaling her to wait, “It was bold to take a name that literally means the devil.  Apollyon…it does flow off the tongue quite well.  The reason I am here is that I am concerned about one of my students.  Yasmin Rowan.”  Rincewind held up his hand to stop me from talking and continued, “She is special.  She has a high affinity for magics involving divination.  I had plans for her, but I will let her choose her own fate.  Her father has already scanned her for all outside influences at my insistence and found nothing.  That is why I decided to meet you.  Why would Yasmin throw her lot in with a demon?  I wasn’t sure you were a demon until I met you a few minutes ago.  Yasmin is smarter than that.”

“She knows I am a demon and still wishes to work with me,” I replied testily.  Rincewind’s white eyebrows went up in surprise.

He sat back, and the entire table was quiet.  Then Rincewind asked, “Do you mind if I ask her myself?”

“Go ahead,” I said without hesitation.  My mind was focused on what I could do to get Iris and me out of this room.

The archmage stood and took out a phone.  When someone answered, he waved his hand, and a bubble appeared around him.  The bubble looked like something a child would blow, clear and a kaleidoscope of colors.  Rincewind turned his back to us as he talked on the phone, and we couldn’t hear anything through the bubble.  Eventually, he finished his call and turned back to us while the bubble burst with a small popping sound.  He returned to the table, but before he could talk, the waiter came with his two bottles of his wine.  We had to wait while the waiter repeated the show of opening and pouring the wine.  The waiter then took our orders.  My anxiety rose the entire time, but I kept my face neutral and even managed a congenial smile.

The waiter left, and Rincewind sipped his wine and finally spoke, “Yasmin was a bit surprised to hear from me, but she confirmed everything for me.  I also talked with Mr. Rowan as well he checked again that she is not under any outside influence.”  Rincewind reclined in his chair with his wine.  “So, Mr. Silverhorn, more to satisfy my curiosity, I will ask you again. Whom do you serve?”

I felt the need to get answers and searched for something to say to get Rincewind to offer information in kind. “She has left me to my own devices. I have no goal on this planet other than to get stronger so I can join her on the higher layers. I am a seed she has planted to grow.”

Rincewind looked at me and took another slice of bread, and muttered, “Truth.” Did he have some type of lie-detector spell active? Rincewind digested the information with his slice of bread. “So, Mr. Silverhorn, you have no aspirations to start a new conflict?”

My confused face gave Rincewind too much information. “How old are you Mr. Silverhorn?” When I didn’t answer, he asked, “Not your physical age. How long have you been a demon? I am guessing you were not sired by a demon but raised to your status.” My slight panic caused Rincewind to continue, “I am no threat to you. I am just inferring from your prior statements. You didn’t refer to her as ‘mother’ or hold any affection for her. Transmuting other races to their kind is a favorite pastime of demons, binding them.” He sipped his wine as I remained quiet, not wanting to say anything else and give away more information to the perceptive man.

 Iris bailed me out, “Archmage Rincewind, do you have information about my parents or not?” She asked impatiently.

“Yes, dear. I think your parents have been abducted—or loaned out to another power. A transit threading another planet far from here has become unstable. Your parents—and others were brought in to consult,” Rincewind said unconcerned.

I dug into my memory of the transits. There were 23 layers or planes. Each layer was a mirror universe. The transits were the threads that ran down from the source through each layer, bringing aether to the planets from the source. If a transit was destroyed, then all the planets below that layer that were fed aether by that thread would be starved of aether.

I asked, “So they are worried about their planet becoming dead like Mars?” Rincewind looked at me and nodded slowly.

“Yes. Mars once had its own transit before the last Angelic-Demonic war in this star system. In the end, the demons conceded Earth to the Angelics,” he said with a studious tone.

I couldn’t help myself but ask, “Am I in endanger? Will the angelics hunt me?” I was internally swearing at Andromeda.

Rincewind chuckled and looked much younger when he did, “Maybe. But not because you are a demon. Planets on this layer are relatively unimportant in the grand scheme of things. As your master told you. Seeds are planted here in hopes they grow into something more—substantial.”

Against my better judgment, I decided to trust the archmage. I slowly said, “I am less than two months old.” A knife clattered to my left, and Dexter dropped his buttering knife.

Rincewind smiled, “Good. That wasn’t so hard, was it? Two months….” His thoughts were interrupted as the waiter came and brought our entrees. During the service I realized that Rincewind must have used a spell on me to lower my reluctance to answer his questions. I slipped into my mind space.

Everything looked hazy. I found Pardora sleeping on my bed. She had never been sleeping when I entered. I straddled her and gave her a slap. She didn’t stir. I shook her violently and willed her to wake up. Finally, she started to move. She yawned, “Is it morning already?”

“No. But why are you sleeping? I need help. A mage is trying to get answers from me. And I am giving them to him. Suddenly the haze in my mind space disappeared, and everything was clear again.

“Oh, shit!” Pandora stated. “Well, this is new.” She had a constipated look on her face for a moment and then said, “Ok, I think it is cleared up. It was some type of spell that lowered your mental resistances. I will be on guard, and it won’t happen again,” she assured me. I returned to the real world.

I had been in my mind space for about ten minutes, which equaled a few seconds in the real world. Rincewind was smiling when I returned, “Young but sharp. Do not get angry. You have earned the right to ask what questions you will of me.”

Iris was confused at the exchange but took the opportunity, “What planet are my parents on? And who kidnapped them?”

Rincewind started eating his risotto and talked while he ate, “The member of the Council who loaned out your parents was Estrade. He is probably the third most powerful angelic on Earth. I believe they are trying to salvage the transit between the 22nd and 21st layer on the planet of Mercanious. Well, it is called Mercanious on this layer anyway.”

I suddenly had so many questions. I started with my first, “Why is there an angelic on the Magus Arcanium Council? And why do they care about a planet populated by ice orcs?”

Rincewind smiled and spoke, “As I said, the demons gave up on this star system. The angelics have been in charge for millennia. They have fostered a culture that angels are good and demons are bad. The truth is there is not much difference between the two. Both only want to grow their own power. Since the angelics controlled the narrative on Earth, most people think of them as good.”

Rincewind shifted in his chair, “The angelics also control Mercanious. I am not sure of all the details, but the so-called orc invaders that come every few months is an orchestrated purge of their undesirables. Why do you think the Magus Arcanium knows exactly where they appear? It is predetermined. Then they can say, ‘Look how powerful and all-knowing we are! We stopped them again!’”

Iris asked the next question, “Are you an angelic?” As she asked that, I remembered that Iris had read something about Andromeda when she captured me. She had said Andromeda had been an angelic before becoming a succubus.

“No, I am as human as you are, Iris. Maybe a few extra centuries of experience more than you, but the same,” Rincewind said while pushing a little remaining risotto away from him with a satisfied rub of his stomach.

“Can an angelic become a demon?” I asked in regard to what I knew of Andromeda.

Rincewind started nodding, “Yes. It is known as *the corruption* by the angelics. Demons specialize in manipulation, destruction, and transfiguration with their magics. In contrast, angels specialize in creation, preservation, and order. But don’t be fooled by the connotation of the descriptors. As always, it is how a person uses the power they have that truly determines what type of person they are. I have met malevolent angelics and—not so terrible demons.”

He sipped his wine and then refilled his cup, “Demons can create offspring by transforming them to their lineage,” he pointed at me. “Angelics usually use a host to incubate their offspring. But both can do it the other way, just not as efficiently.” I thought back to how much it cost me to become fertile and understood. I guessed that converting someone into a demon wouldn’t be as large an investment of life essence.

It looked like the archmage was done eating and just planned to finish both bottles of wine. He had emptied one and just started on the second without showing any signs of intoxication. Dexter sensing the exchange was over, spoke, “Mr. Silverhorn, I would like to request you remain open for to receive calls from me for special jobs. I, in fact, wanted to meet you today for a special reason.”

Dexter straightened his jacket, “As you know, opening a transit portal is somewhat tricky. Sometimes I get requests for—off the books delves. I was hoping you could accommodate some of my more secretive clients.”

Rincewind smirked, “Dexter works for the Magus Arcanium in name only. He is actually a privateer. And is quite good at his job.”

I was confused, “Why can’t the archmage here help you?”

Dexter looked perplexed, and Rincewind filled him in, “Dexter, he is young, so he probably doesn’t understand how valuable his skill to open transits actually is.” Dexter nodded, and Rincewind continued, “I am not sure how many aetheric units it takes you to open a portal. I am guessing in the 90 to 110 range. That much aether used all at once is enough to destroy an entire city block. And to open a portal, you have to use it all at once. You can not just dribble it out over a period of time. That would be like trying to break that window with 100 tiny pebbles. No, to tear a hole, you need all 100 pebbles bundled together tightly and through them all at once.”

I was picturing what he was saying but was also apprehensive that I had so much power within me. Rincewind didn’t stop, “The problem is mages can’t expel that much aether at once safely to open a portal. We need a special storage device that can handle that much aether and direct it safely all at once.” He sipped his wine, seeing I was listening raptly, “Angelics, demonics, dragonkin, and some other beings can store and expel that much aether at once. It takes at least an upper tier 3 core—well, you can make do with a lower tier 3 core, but it leaves a lasting mark, if you know what I mean,” he chuckled. I didn’t know what he meant, but let him talk.

Rincewind stood and picked up his jacket from nearby, “I have a few devices, but the time and cost of charging and using them are prohibitive. I will leave you with Dexter, Apollyon. Just be aware I will be keeping track of Yasmin. I may call her for a favor in the future.”

He was walking to the door, and I asked, “Where do you fit into all this? What role are you playing, archmage?” I asked. He had an amused grin at my question.

“I’m retired Apollyon. I conduct research and spectate. I am only here because I liked the young Miss Yasmin Rowan and worried about her. Do try to stay out of trouble.” He smiled and left the room.

He had left a half bottle of the white wine, and I reached across the table and poured a glass. I took a sip, and it was excellent. I could see why he selected it. Dexter cleared his throat, “Mr. Silverhorn, if you have time after your meal, I would be interested in procuring your services for the opening of the portal below this restaurant.”

I choked on my wine, coughing a little. “Hiding a portal in plain sight, are we? The restaurant is called *Portale.*”

Dexter’s laugh was a soft chuckle, “No, this portal is well-known in many circles. Mr. Silverhorn, are you amenable?” He added, “The typical fee is one hundred thousand in cash or money transfer.”

I looked to Iris, who shrugged, indifferent to my choice. “Ok, Mr. Briar. After dessert.”