Chapter 116

I went home Sunday night to sleep in my own bed and to show my face so my parents knew I was ok.  We ordered subs and ate while we talked.  My parents sensed my depressed mood and kept asking me what was wrong as the conversation cycled.  Eventually, I admitted I had a fight with my friends and just needed time to work things out.  We would have talked it out in the past, and they would have offered advice.  Now I felt too out of touch to listen to their advice.  I was an all-powerful demon, and they were just humans.

My dreams that night had me in a swath of nightmares.  I relived every sexual encounter and killed my partner in everyone.  At the end of the dream, I was alone.  I was powerful, far more than I was currently, but I was alone. It felt like this might have been a different path I could have traveled.  I woke in a sweat, and my mind was sharp.  I wanted to be a good demon.  I did not want to become what had haunted me during the night.  But I also wanted to make my partners as powerful as possible.  It was a dilemma.

In the morning, I stopped to check on Carrie.  Lezerath said she was doing well, and Carrie smiled, saying it would be fine.  Unnervingly she said she had seen her own death, and it was not for quite some time.  Lezerath called Carrie a Fateweaver.  Her visions could see a person’s fate choices, and she could help them down a desired path.  She would need training from an experienced Fateweaver so she needed to travel to one of the higher layers.  It was all very disconcerting to me.

At hockey practice, I was distracted.  At school, I learned I had passed my chemistry test.  My test on Friday was AP Chemistry which was college freshman chemistry.  Normally there would have been a lab associated with the class, but instead, as part of my Friday exam, I was going to have to run through two simple experiments in front of the test administrator and then submit the lab reports for both on the following Monday.

Hazel was smiling when she came for her tutoring session.  She was happy since they had won their game against their biggest rival on Saturday.  I did not follow women’s basketball but knew they were good, just like most sports at our school.  I felt a little bit like an asshole because she knew all about my hockey season.  We did not get much done in the tutoring session, partly because we discussed her season and future playing college basketball.

After lunch, I called and checked on Carrie.  She was tired but doing fine.  Lezerath said she had called Rincewind, and he was contacting some people to prepare to get Carrie a mentor for her abilities.  I wondered how Rincewind knew so many people in so many different places.  I was hoping to ask him some questions about it eventually—maybe after the aboleth was eliminated.

I left school early and planned to see Carrie but received a call.  It was Dexter.  I pulled over so I could focus on the call.  I aged myself, so my voice was deeper.  Dexter spoke, “Mr. Silverhorn, thank you for taking my call.  I am calling at the behest of an individual who wishes to help you.”

I did not think I needed any help, but maybe this was in relation to the aboleth.  “You can proceed.  What is the nature of the assistance?”

“The person in question wishes to schedule your transit services on a regular base and wishes to send you a permanent liaison.  His offer is generous.  Six scheduled portals a year.  Six million US dollars paid annually,” Dexter said smoothly.

I was a little off balance.  That was six times the going rate, from my understanding.  It seemed like one of those offers that were too good to be true.  “That seems excessive from what I understand.  Is this person associated with the Magus Arcanum?”

Dexter said calmly, “This offer is outside my prescribed duties for the Magus Arcanum.”

“Do you loan out your services to the highest bidder?”  I asked on reflex.

Dexter sounded steely when he responded, “Mister Silverhorn, there are two worlds.  The world of the arcane and the mundane world.  I am the bridge between them.”

“What can you tell me about this offer? Why such much?” I asked respectively. I did not need the funds, so I planned to say no but would hear Dexter out.

“Thank you for hearing the offer Mister Silverhorn. You are familiar with the man. He is Dakkon Dustwalker. Also known as William Oalf Masterson,” Dexter said with gravitas. William Masterson was one of the ten richest people in the world. From the news, I knew he held dual Canadian and American citizenship. He came from old money and rode the tech wave and crypto to turn his billions into hundreds of billions.

“It seems like he could buy any number of transit openers,” I said cautiously.

“True. Many would drop what they were doing to come to a request of Mister Dustwalker,” Dexter paused. “He is not a man that takes no for an answer.”  Dexter’s tone changed, “I would suggest caution in your dealings with him.”

Dexter was telling me to tread carefully. “How would this work?”

Dexter sighed, relaxing. I figured he was being pressured. “You would be on retainer. The transit openings would be scheduled prior to the signing of the contract. Any additional portal openings would be negotiated through me.”

I thought for a long moment and decided to delay my answer, “Can you send me the requested dates for the portal openings? What is the liaison you mention all about?”

Dexter’s voice was cool now, “I will send you the dates when I have received them. I just sent the request to Mister Duskwalker.” I heard the light tap of keys, “The liaison is someone he wishes to be close to your residence so he can contact you if you are needed. It is also stipulated quite clearly you can use the liaison to contact Mister Duskwalker if you require assistance from him.”

Dexter ended his explanation and waited for me. “I will wait till he send me the dates to make a decision,” I relayed. It would give me grounds to so no, as I did not want to tie myself to a wolfkin. I asked before Dexter could respond, “What enemies does he have?”

I could hear Dexter smiling on the phone, at least, that is what I imagined. “Very astute, Mister Silverhorn. The Russian Wolkfin clans and the Vampyres in Africa both have issues with Mister Duskstlaker. In the business world, there are too many to count.”

“Thank you for mediating Dexter. When I hear from you about the dates, I will make a decision in regard to my own schedule if it is feasible,” I tried replying with the same tone as Dexter.

“Very good. Enjoy your evening,” he said before ending the call.

When I got to the cabin, I found Carrie walking around, “Should you be walking around in your condition?”

Carrie laughed with a confidence she did not have before, “My condition? I am not pregnant. I only nearly had my soul obliterated by a demon.”

Lezerath was right on her heels, “She is fine, Caleb. She is healing remarkably fast. I could release the weaves around her core even now, but I will wait a few days. She only complains when I follow her into the bathroom.”

“She offered to shower with me, Caleb,” Carrie rolled her eyes. “She can stand next to me when I pee and poop but standing naked in the shower with me. I draw the line there.”

“Well, if you need me to help you in the shower, just let me know,” I said, trying to be funny.

“No. Well, not today,” She eyed her Lezerath shadow. “But can you go to my house and charm my father not to worry about me?”

I bowed respectively, “As you wish,” copying The Princess Bride. Then I added, “Mistress Seer of all things yet to be.”

A shadow fell across her face that she said seriously, “Caleb, there were things I did not want to see. But I can not unsee them. In the span of an hour, I viewed a dozen different lives. Each one hundreds of different ways. I can not tell you how close it brought me to teetering on madness.”

I offered, “I am sorry for doing that to you. For putting you through it.”

Carrie smiled weakly, “Do not fret, my incubus. If you had not done what you did, the future would be more bleak. Now I can play a hand and maybe direct the future in a more positive way.”

I raised my eyebrows, “You make me feel so small. You feel like the adult here.”

Carrie started laughing musically, “Oh Caleb, I am so insignificant in the grand scheme of things. I am but a grain of sand on a beach, trying to stop the incoming ocean. Changing the tide of fate is not my purview. I can, however, attempt to shelter other grains from that inevitable tide for a while in hopes they can—become something more substantial.”

I was stunned and needed to say something, “Holly shit Carrie. That was poetic and daunting. I am assuming I am the grain of sand you are referring to.”

Carrie smiled knowingly, “Well, the hubris on you. You are just one of many I hope to impact in the blink of an eye that I will exist in the cosmic realm.”

Lezerath interrupted, “You should pity her, Caleb. I have only met two other Fateweavers in my existence with a tier three core. Both appeared wiser and burdened by things beyond our understanding. They all have the ability to perceive time differentially. To them, time is not a book you read from start to finish. It is a library where they read one chapter and then take another book and read another chapter. It will not be long before her thoughts become muddled. She needs help soon, or it will overwhelm her. Rincewind is coming for her tomorrow. You should say your goodbyes now.”

I looked to Carrie, who nodded, “Please, do not forget to charm my father. I will not be able to see him again.” A small tear fell from her eye, but her eyes did not show the sorrow of it. I really had doomed Carrie to some fate only she could comprehend.

I spent an hour with Carrie, and we just talked. When I left to talk with her father she handed me an envelope, “Open this on this day,” she tapped the letter. I read November 11th. She continued, “Not before Caleb. It will help you make a very important decision.” We hugged, and I left.

Driving over to Carrie’s house, I realized how little I actually knew her. She was a quiet person and a skilled artist. I wondered what fate had brought us together. It felt like my purpose was completed, and I might not ever see her again.

When I got to her house, her father was haggard and fretful. He had received multiple texts from Carrie’s phone and wanted to see her. I reluctantly used my charm on him and fed him a story. Carrie had been accepted to an art institute in Europe. She was on full scholarship, and I embedded the thought that she was fine and he was not concerned about her person. She was living her dream, and he did not need to see her. He would call the high school tomorrow and tell them she would no longer attend classes.

It was too easy. Too easy to make someone disappear from the minds and thoughts of those that knew them. Would I someday do the same to my parents—make them forget me as I traveled to the higher layers? Would I give them the choice of trying to extend their life—Bedelia said it was possible on the higher layers. There were ways to extend a human’s life. I began to think about ways to tell my parents about what I was. I needed more time as I still feared they would reject me for what I had become.

I needed to make sure Paige was with me when I told them. That meant bringing Paige completely in. Fulfilling her desire to become a mage. Sitting in my car, I picked up my phone and sent Paige a text message. I then drove back to the cabin to tell Carrie I had done as she requested. Carrie was gone. Lezerath said Rincewind had sent someone to pick her up and bring her to France. From there, she was going to meet someone to bring her to a planet in our galaxy. From there, she would be escorted up to what amounted to a Temple on the twentieth layer.

Lezerath assured me she would be well looked after. I asked, “What faction runs the temple?”

Lezerath looked at me with what I assumed was a pity, “The draconic faction. It is where Archie came from. It is a city of dragonborn and ruled by Versimilia. An ancient bronze dragon. She is hundreds of thousands of years old. She is a Fateweaver herself. Carrie is in good hands but never travel there without an invitation. Consider her lost to you.”

“How does Rincewind know so many people across so many places?” I asked, trying to get to the mystery of the mage.

A slight smirk appeared on Lezerath’s face. She sat down and indicated I should as well, “He is older than dirt himself. At least, that is what he tells people when they ask. I do not know his true age, only that I met him for the first time about three hundred years ago on the Earth on the twenty-first layer. I was being hunted by githyanki. I am githzerai.”

Seeing my confusion, she tried to clarify, “The Githyanki and githzerai splintered after the Liberation of our people. While my people sought solace and discipline, the githyanki sought power and might. They built a brutal militaristic society predicated on strength. They are warriors to the core.”

I nodded in understanding, and she continued her story, “Yes, while I was being hunted by a sarth. A sarth is a leader of a company of ten githyanki. I was running through a great woods—trees thicker than a house and reaching a thousand feet into the sky. I knew my life was over, and I was regretting many life decisions. Then I stumbled on this middle-aged human man cooking in the middle of a clearing. I told him to run, but he just stood and watched as the githyanki surrounded us. When their leader, the sarth, entered the clearing and went in a monogloue, Rincewind interrupted him. Well, he called himself Merlin back then.”

Lezerath laughed before continuing, “Merlin asked the sarth if he had any salt for his stew because he was out. The look on the sarth’s face—one of my fondest memories. The sarth drew his blade to cut down the insolent human, only to explode in a mist of gore. The battle after that was short, and we were victorious. That was the first time Rincewind saved my life.”

“Why was he there? In the forest?” I asked.

“Ruins. He was looking for ruins that were older than the trees. I traveled with him for a while, but we only found a few foundations not buried with time, and he did not find what he was looking for,” Lezerath said thoughtfully.

“What was he looking for in the ruins?” I asked, intently listening.

“I think he was looking for signs of his ancestors. Rincewind is human but not human. I have seen him a few times over the centuries without being altered by magic. He looks barely older than a human of twenty years,” Lezerath finished and was happy to see me astonished.

Rincewind was definitely more than he appeared. Was his core only lower tier three? I doubted it after Lezerath’s revelations. If he was so powerful, why couldn’t he just take on the aboleth himself?

“Rincewind is a powerful friend and a terrible enemy, young demon. His motivations are his own. The fact that he seems somewhat vested in you tells me you are special.” She laughed, “Well, the fact that you just created one of the most powerful Fateweavers on the 23rd layer is enough evidence of that. I was ready to ask you to do the same for me, but Carrie said it would not go well for me—or you.”

I was more nervous than ever. Three months a demon and I was playing at the big kid’s table. I thought of something, “Is Earth special? Why is Rincewind here? Merlin was famous in our fictional lore as well.”

Lezerath smiled, which was kind of creepy with her canines. “There are thousands of inhabited planets in your universe Caleb. The aether from the Source makes sure life develops on planets connected by the threads—sorry, you refer to them as transits. Is your planet Earth special? No more to me than any of the other thousands of others out there.” She seemed to pause and think.

“Although,” she paused again, “It is strange how humans are the only accepted species on the planet. You should ask Rincewind why demis need to hide, and magic is concealed from the general population. I am sure he will offer you an explanation. That is one thing the man is always good at—explaining or convincing.”

Bedelia came up and asked if Lezerath was going to teach them tonight, and she went to do so. Everyone was in a somber mood as one of their own had left for good. Not that Carrie had ever been very vocal. She had been more like the background of a painting. I grasped her letter and assimilated it into my mind space, so I would not lose it. Whatever decision I had on November 11th was probably going to be momentous.

Tuesday, the day dragged out, and I still had not heard back from Paige in regard to my text. I thought she would have called me right away or at least responded. I checked my phone again and looked at the message I had sent, wondering if it had been a mistake.

**Paige, if you want magic, I can give it to you.**