Chapter 139

As the Raptor sped away, I relaxed into Bedelia’s lap.  The loss of the pedestal left me drained.  It felt like I had lost something significant—a part of myself.  Andromeda no longer had a link to me, and I could not communicate with her.  I already knew I was going to go after her.  There was no point in debating it with myself.  Carrie had told me I needed to, and I trusted Carrie.

With my eyes closed, Bedelia stroked my hair, and I started to figure out how to get to Andromeda on the planet Mercanious. I could travel up the layers to an Earth with spaceships. My incubus ability allowed me to go directly to the other end of a transit. Even with that fast travel, it seemed like it would take a long time to find a ship and travel in the void of space.

My second option was opening a portal similar to how the invading orcs arrived on Earth to cause mayhem. That would require me to seek out Rincewind. I had no idea how to do that or accumulate enough aether to open such a portal. My third option, which seemed the fastest way, was to contact an acquaintance.

When I was in Miami at the sex party with Chloe, I got a ride to the airport from a taxi driver who was a race called Genasi. They were an elemental race birthed from a union of a human and a powerful djinn. The taxi driver was named Shimiheesh, or Shim for short. I had gotten his number, and that might be my next call.

Everything was terrible timing. I was dealing with the Alaire elves, Agatha’s interference, and now Andromeda’s disappearance from my mind space. It was like wave after wave of bad luck was hitting me. My phone rang, and I handed it to Bedelia to answer, keeping my eyes closed.

“Apollyon’s phone, who is calling?” Bedelia asked as no caller ID showed.

“Is Apollyon Silverhorn available?” An unfamiliar voice came through the speakers. I opened my eyes slightly as the tone of his voice struck a cord. I shook my head no.

Bedelia answered, “Not at the moment. I can leave a message, and he can return your call at this number.”

A slight pause before an answer came, “No need. Just tell him Archbishop Esposito is nearby, and he is coming to collect his daughter.”

I sat up and grabbed the phone, “You sick bastard, Aurora is free. The Church kicked you out, and if you come anywhere near me or Aurora, I will not hesitate to end your interference in her life permanently!”

Archbishop Esposito had been in charge of the Inquisition by the Church. He had adopted Aurora due to her strong aether core and trained her as an Inquisitor. One of his subordinates, Grand Inquisitor Delgado, had controlled Aurora with his magic. He had dulled her senses and mind and made her obey his commands. Rincewind had stepped in and freed her and others from the Inquisition. Archbishop Esposito had been exiled with the Grand Inquisitor. Rincewind had told me to be on the lookout for him, but I did not think he would contact me.

He laughed on the phone, “Ah, demon, it is good to hear you have spirit. We will see each other soon.” He hung up, not waiting for me to scream at him again. I wanted to throw the phone.

“Shit. I was told bad things happen in threes; this is my fourth headache in the last two days. It is like the world is collapsing around me!” I protested out loud.

Artica spoke from the front seat, “It is just the Inquisition. They are easy to deal with.”

“I think he has something planned. He sounded too confident. I just do not know if he is planning to come after me or Aurora,” I said, calming down and thinking the call through.

Bedelia offered an opinion, “He is probably smart. I think he probably thought to provoke you to come after him and set a trap.”

Artica agreed, “That is what I would do. Threaten someone more powerful than me and then spring a trap to take him out.”

“Fucking Inquisition. I do not have time for this bullshit. He is right. I am going to come after him,” I laughed darkly. “He does not know what I bring to the table. Plus I have all of you in support.”

Bedelia said, “You know Caleb, if you present this to Aurora correctly, she might let you enhance her core to get stronger.”

“I am not concerned about her at the moment,” I said, finding Shim’s number and calling him. Bedelia looked curious but waited. No answer. Damn it. Maybe he had moved on and was not even on Earth any longer.

“Who was that?” Bedelia asked curiously, “Someone to deal with the Archbishop?”

“No, it was a Genasi I know. I wanted to see if he could get me to Mercanious,” I responded, frustrated.

“You are going after Iris’ parents now?” Bedelia said in disbelief. “Are there not more pressing matters? Agatha may be licking her wounds, but knowing her type, she will be plotting something indirectly against you.” She held up her hands in surrender, “I agree killing would not have been wise since she was Jade’s mother and connected to the Catkin Council, but letting her live without oversight?”

“I disagree. Killing her would have been the perfect solution,” Artica said from the front seat. “Still, I expect Jade will work to tie Agatha’s hands with the Catkin Council further. Jade’s father is flying out to meet Jade and then talk with Agatha.”

“When did this all happen?” I asked, not liking that I was unaware of Jade’s father coming for a visit.

“Just before you passed out at Agatha’s. Jade tried to call you and then called me when she could not reach you. Her father was trying to broker Agatha’s safety somehow. Jade’s father must still have feelings for the manipulative bitch. Maybe Jade still cares as well,” Artica explained.

My phone rang, and it was Shim. I picked up immediately, “Shim, thank you for returning my call.”

“No problem. I was in the middle of a fare when you called. Are you in Miami and need a lift?” he asked helpfully.

I chuckled, “Yes, I need a lift, but not in Miami. I need to get to another planet. Mercanious. You said your ancestors could be bargained with to accommodate passage?”

He was silent for a while before responding, “Possibly. I know a Marid that I have dealt with in the past. He is not very pleasant, though.” He seemed to think, “I know a fire genasi in California. She is young, and her father is an Efreet. She said they have a good relationship. I can try both and let you know. If either bites, I will call you back with details. The cost will not be cheap.”

“I can send you a consulting fee now. Is twenty-five thousand enough?” I responded, wanting to stay on his good side and motivate him.

He had a joyous tone, “Most acceptable. The djinn will ask for something in return. They operate more on a barter system for transporting non-genasi. That is why I think the Efeert may be the better option. My Marid contact, Aassismual, will probably want you to leave a human woman with him.”

“Yeah, I do not think I would go for that. How long to sort out a trade for the transport?” I asked. Bedelia was squirming uncomfortably in the seat.

“I can let you know in a day or two as long as the planeswalkers respond,” Shim said. “After that, we need to set up the ritual bridge where they tell us. Gathering materials and drawing the formation circle should take maybe a week.”

“Let me know as soon as you do, and thank you,” I hung up.

Bedelia was irate, “You can not be considering dealing with a Madrid or Efeert? That is just insane, Caleb!”

“Why?” I asked.

“Greater elementals!” She spat, “They are as trustworthy as a demon.” She realized what she had said, and I smirked. She continued, “They do not live on this plane of existence and do not care for corporeal beings. They may even hate demons. I think this is a big mistake. Why do you need to get to Mercanious now anyway?”

I confided in them, “It is Andromeda. She has been captured, I think. She had her fleet inbound to Mercanious. She was helping me look into Iris’ parents. My fainting in Agatha’s house was me losing connection to her.”

Bedelia’s eyes got three times their size, “That is great! You are not beholden to her anymore! Just let her rot in whatever prison she found herself in.”

“I might have done just that, but Carrie told me this was coming before she left. She said I have to go to Andromeda or bad things might happen to planet Earth,” I replied resignedly.

Bedelia’s jaw did not work for a moment. “Carrie…” She sat back and slapped her thighs in frustration. “Damn you, Carrie!” She fumed in her seat. “Fine. I am going with you. This must be what she meant when she said you would have the dumbest idea ever and that I needed to support you even though I thought it was completely foolish.”

I did not know what to say other than, “Glad to hear it.” I offered her a smile.

Artica piped from the front, “I want to go as well. Never been to another planet before.” She had on a stupid smile like this was just a normal day.

The ride back had me making excuses over the phone for my absence from school today. My parents also needed an explanation, and it took the entire drive back to smooth things out. Once Shim got back to me, I may be missing for more than a single day. I secretly hoped this might have me postpone my trip to Tennessee to raise Paige’s core.

“We will deal with who is going when Shim gets back to me. I need to focus on the problem in front of us right now: the Archbishop. How do we find him?” I asked Bedelia.

“I can do it. My father probably has still not changed his passwords for his Magus Arcanum logins. It shouldn’t take me long to track him down. They keep tabs on everyone in the supernatural world. I will confirm with my scrying and then let you know.” Bedelia said with confidence. She was already on her phone.

“Great. If it was a trap, he would have made the trail easy to follow. In the meantime, we need to keep Aurora close. If she is his target, we must protect her from him.” I voiced my thoughts aloud. I called Iris and left a message for her and Aurora to move to the cabin with everyone else. She was in class, so she could not answer her phone.

“Caleb! I have the Archbishop’s flight. He came in two days ago, and look at these names…” She showed me her phone. I recognized Arturio Delgado, the Grand Inquisitor. Also, there was a name I did not think I would ever see again. Rose Melanson. She was Mary’s best friend and had absconded from the country with her parents when she learned I could do magic.

I called Mary immediately and left a message, “Mary, Caleb here. Just wanted to let you know that Rose is back in the country. If she contacts you, do not go and meet her. Call me immediately. She is traveling with some really bad people.”

I barely saw Mary as her parents had her on a tight leash and did not like me. She wanted me to raise her core, but we had not gotten around to it. Something seemed to always be in the way, blocking it.

“Caleb,” Bedelia said concerned. “This name…it triggered something in the Magus Arcanum database. It is an alias for an angelic.” I looked at the name, Adym Kushiel. “I would have thought it a coincidence, but he was seated next to the Archbishop on the plane in first class.”

“Who is he?” I asked.

Bedelia tapped some passwords into her phone and went through the Magus Arcanum private sites. “Some type of warrior. Not much info other than he has been present when powerful creatures needed to be dealt with.”

I laughed, “So an aboleth couldn’t bring him out, but he was willing to come and deal with a demon who saved the planet from it?” I griped, “The Angelics have terrible priorities. What have I done to them to be hunted?”

Bedelia tried to calm me, “It probably was not the Magus Arcanum. The Inquisition has always had a unique relationship with the Angelics. They control the Church from the higher layers. And before you ask, I have no idea why they did not send help for the aboleth.”

“Maybe Aurora will know more. How powerful are angelics?” I asked Bedelia.

“I am not certain, but probably upper tier two or three. But this one is over a thousand years old by the notes of his appearances in the database. He probably has centuries of fighting experience, Caleb.” Bedelia said, concerned.

“Well, at least we know why the Archbishop sounded so confident. What about Rose? She went to an organization called the Purists, according to Mary. Can you see if there were more of those on the plane? Maybe they are allied with the Archbishop?” I asked.

Bedelia was working on her phone, “Yes. There were nine…let me.” She hacked into the flight records. There was a block of twenty-one tickets bought together. Twenty were used…” she looked up at me with a heavy tone, “They brought a pretty large force with them, Caleb.”

“Yeah. This all smells rotten. I will stay on guard,” I said, trying to sound unconcerned.

“I am not leaving your side, Caleb,” Artica added from the front.

We stopped for a long lunch as Aritca and Bedelia were starving. We spent two hours in an Applebee’s and would arrive at the cabin just after school got out. When we arrived at the cabin, I went inside to find everyone waiting. Jade looked up expectantly, and I told her, “Your mother is alive. One of her guards was killed, but that was his own fault.”

Jade nodded, but she had obviously already known. “My father is flying in to talk with me and then go talk with her. I think he wants to meet you as well,” Jade said from the sofa.

Aurora was seated between Iris and Abigail, and she looked slightly out of place. “Thank you for coming to help, Aurora. I am sorry to inform you, but Archbishop Esposito called me. He said he was coming to take you back.” I stopped her from talking, “I think he brought some angelic support and plans to target me as well. Most likely to kill me for revenge.”

The room broke out in a cacophony of shouts, “Enough!” I yelled, silencing everyone. “Aurora, what can you tell me about the angelics that work with the Inquisition?”

Aurora had all eyes turned on her as she licked her lips and then spoke, “The Grand Inquisitors can request aide. I know it usually takes time for the request to get there…usually days. It is almost always denied. At least in my time, it has never been responded to with aide sent.”

I nodded, “My understanding from Rincewind is the angelics are on a higher layer and do not care about the Earth on this layer. Why did they answer the Archbishop now?…maybe it is all a rouse. Whatever the case may be, we will figure it out. Everyone stays at the cabin and keeps their phones on them.”

I decided to trust everyone here, even Aurora. I explained my problem: “Andromeda has been cut off from me. I think she has been captured on Mercanious. I am trying to find a way to go there.”

“I am going with….” A number of the women said.

“No, let me figure out first how I am getting there. I might have to go alone.” Everyone started talking again, and I just let them talk over each other.

Vida thought she had to go because it was her home planet, and she was the best possible guide. Bedelia said she would be my eyes and ears. Artica said she was my bodyguard, and I did not have a choice but to take her. Iris said her parents were there, and she needed to find them—I had promised to find them. Kiri and Eilina were largely silent. Abigail was just looking extremely worried about me leaving.

I announced, “I am going home to talk with my parents and call my sister. I will see everyone in school tomorrow.”

“You are still going to school tomorrow?” Aurora asked incredulously. Everyone else had the same look of disbelief.

“Of course, this is just my new normal,” I replied with a smile. I had a thousand things going through my mind. A normal day in high school was just what I needed. Nothing could go wrong there, right?