Chapter 18

I started to read the books I got from the library and sped through all three of them.  The first book focused on demon lore through the ages in various cultures.  Another was a supernatural book focused on the occult.  The last book was mostly a picture book of demons in art through history. I was able to piece together all three into a thirty-five-page paper.  I couldn’t believe how fast I typed and how clearly ordered my thoughts had been. It seemed I could recall what I had read if I focused.  I thought the paper was pretty good.  Much better than anything I had done in the past.  It was also 3:09am.

I decided to try my hand at sleeping in my mind space.  If I could get eight hours of rest in 8 minutes why not try it?  When I entered my mind space something was off.  I found three books. Picking them up I was shocked…these were the three books I had just read.  I had somehow added them to my mind space after completing them. I wished I had some shelves and a tall floor-to-ceiling shelf appeared between two banners. I walked over and put the books on the shelf.

So my mind space was an archive of my knowledge. But only knowledge I gained after I had obtained my mind space.  Could I add other things here…like a bed?  I went to the real world and went online and found a nice king-sized canopy bed.  I studied the image for ten minutes trying to burn it into my mind before entering my mind space.  I then forced my will to generate the bed.  It took a minute but I now had a large and fancy bed in here.  I next tried the same trick with a windup alarm clock but the windup clock didn’t work.  I needed to understand the mechanical nature of the device.

It was 6:54 am when I finally had a simple clock in my mind space.  It was more of a windup timer but close enough.  I set it for six hours and lay down on the bed…oh this needed a little work too. The sheets were coarse and the mattress a little lumpy.  Well, let’s just try sleeping and see how it goes.  When I woke I jumped back and 7 minutes had passed and I felt great!  I showered and got ready for school in a fantastic mood. I spent time in the mirror using my chronomancy ability to push my age forward just a little bit.

My little mental library would help me with the aether manipulation exercises that Iris had mentioned.  Maybe this is what she meant when she said people with mental spaces could learn magic more easily.  I was also giving the space some serious interior decorating considerations.

The space was a circular chamber with eight panels forming an octagon.  Four of those panels had banners.  Two of the banners had the writing on them.  Two were blank.  One of the blank panels now sported a shelves with room for a few hundred books.  The other three were blank walls.  I slide the bed to one of the blank walls.  The chamber itself was forty feet across with a large pedestal in the center.  The pedestal was actually my conduit to Andromeda.  It is how she collected her life essence tax and I could use it to contact her.  On the pedestal rested my incubus handbook.  I had read it a few times but decided to spend some time studying the other life forms before school.

The bestiary had a few color images and then a few paragraphs on each demi.  It was best to understand your foe.  Iris said there was no real animosity on the 23rd layer between the demis and humans.  The higher you went the more factions warred with each other.

I  showered and met Rob at the bus stop.  Sophia was grumpy because her mom took the $100 I bribed her with.  I talked with Rob about hockey on the way to school.  We were both Capitals fans and Rob would probably come to my home games.   When we got to school Adam found me.  I was a little shocked to see him and was on guard.  Sophia had said the rowing team was planning something.  But Adam was just trying to recruit me.  I told him I made the hockey team and couldn’t join the rowing team.  He was persistent though.  He said I could always row after hockey season ended.  His argument was based on the fact that he had gotten a half scholarship to Syracuse and Jake was using his rowing to help him get into an ivy. I left him in the hall telling him I would think about it.

My day went mostly smoothly after that.  Iris had lunch with me and Rob but didn’t say much.  I asked her if she could pick me and a Rob up in the morning and drive us to school. Might as well get some reciprocity in this relationship.  She agreed and even gave Rob her phone number.  After math class, Mary caught me in the hall.  I was behind in responding to her text messages so she was making sure I was ok.  I assured her I was fine.  I checked out her core now that I had a better idea of what I was looking for.  Her core was healthy and vibrant.  Larger than most teens in the hallway but nothing spectacular.

So I guessed my aether-infused aphrodisiac saliva was the catalyst like we thought.  If I wanted to improve someone’s core then that had to play a role. A few more experiments and I would be certain.  Maybe they needed a full dose like Lydia to promote to a tier 1 core…but that was dangerous. I didn’t trust my control yet to risk anyone.

“Are you going to the winter dance?” Mary asked as I was trying to break away.

“What dance?” There were usually just four dances each year at the school; freshman, sophomore, junior and senior prom.

“The junior class winter dance!  I know you and Iris are…good friends. So are you going together?  I am not jealous.  Just asking.” Mary said.

Did she want me to ask her, “Are you going? Thought you were grounded.”

“My mom convinced my dad to let me go,” she answered with a smile.

“Yeah sure I can take you,” I said in knee jerk reaction. Her eyes widened in shock. Did I misread the situation?

“YES!” she squealed. She came in for a hug and whispered in my ear. “My curfew is 1:00am for the dance.” She pulled away and said, “I will get the tickets!” She was all excited and I guess I had made her happy. I should probably check and add the date to my calendar so I didn’t forget. I found a poster in the hallway…December 11th. I added a reminder to my phone. I would need to rent a suit…or buy one. I should accelerate my aging a bit so I wouldn’t grow out of a suit that I purchased.

The rest of the classes were good and I handed my paper to Ms. Cunningham early to her shock. It was much longer than the 10-page requirement as well. We were actually spending the class today reading other students' papers and giving feedback.

I got paired with Molly Bullock. She started reading my 35-page paper while I started on her 6-page draft. Her paper was about inequality in politics based on demographics. Her point was quite valid, an unfair representation based on socio and racial demographics. I made a number of grammatical corrections and notes on what points were not clear. I placed the paper down and noticed Molly was just on over halfway through my paper. She kept looking at me. She must have gotten to where I did my analysis of the paintings. I included the photos in my report so the reader could reference them. I waited till she got to the end.

Molly spoke, “That was good. It was very convincing that demons are just a manifestation and excuse for our darker thoughts.” Molly played field hockey I think. It was one of the few teams at our school that was just average.

“Thank you, your paper was good as well. I think you should reference how our politics are a representation based on who holds the wealth and not the demographics. You keep alluding to it but don’t come out and say it. Maybe use it in your conclusion,” I offered. Molly started with her blue-green eyes and lightly freckled face.

“Yeah, I was sort of thinking the same thing. As you can see from my paper I am terrible at grammar. I have good thoughts but trouble putting them on the paper.” She licked her lips. “Could you help me?” She paused, “After school? I have practice till 5pm but after? I'm sorry you probably don’t have the time.” She retreated into herself thinking she overstepped. She was shy.

“Sure do you want to come over to my house this evening or should I go to yours?” I said and her eyes brightened. Her eyes were her best feature. She was short, maybe 5’3” and her Irish red hair and freckles made her cute but plain looking.

“I only have a driver’s permit, no license so could you…come over?”

“Yeah, no problem. Be happy too,” I said giving her a smile. We exchanged phone numbers and I got her address.

During the last period of the day, I was in the library when Ms. Henderson found me. I went to her office to talk about colleges. “So Caleb I looked at your grades and class rankings. I think we can get you into UVA if that is your first choice.” I was a little shocked. “You will need to take some slightly harder courses over the next two years but we have a number of contacts in admissions that should help your application. You will also need to keep your class rank in the top 33%, you are right at that cusp now.” I was a bit shocked.

I paused before replying. “Do you think I could graduate next year?”

Ms. Anderson stared at me and then spoke, “We talked about this before and with your parents. You didn’t want to take summer courses to make up the credits.” She huffed a little. Then she tapped on her computer. “You will need four courses to get enough credits to graduate next year. Those courses could be taken at the community college online or we can get you enrolled in a summer program. I don’t know if you handle extra courses online.”

“Do I take the courses in the spring semester online?” I asked.

“It is rolling enrollment. You have 14 weeks to complete the online modules and then you schedule your final exam on campus. You need to score at least 80% on the exam to pass. I have a list here of available accepted courses. You can do them one at a time and get your four courses completed by the end of next year to graduate with your friends. I assume that is why you want to do this?”

I paused before confirming her insight. I really just wanted to spend as little time in school as possible. I also thought college might be a slightly better place to harvest life essence from women. “Thanks Ms. Anderson. I will look into this. You noted I need one math, one English, one science, and an elective course here?”

“That is flexible as you can always double up next year on what you are missing. Most of the science courses have a lab requirement so you can’t take those online.” I thanked her and took the list. The school was already getting out and I had a text that Iris went home since I wasn’t waiting at her truck. I knew she was focused on preparing so we could talk tomorrow on the way to school.

Mary saw me walking toward the bus in the parking lot. She drove her Highlander over, full of her teammates getting ready for practice. “Hey Caleb! Need a ride?” I thought for a second and yeah if she dropped me off on the way to the boathouse I could get home quicker than the bus.

“Got enough room for one more?” There were three girls in the back and two in the front.

“Squeeze over girls!” Mary said and her teammates squeezed over and opened the door. I didn’t recognize anyone in the back seat. They were all small girls, probably freshmen who just joined the team this year. It wasn’t too cramped since they were small. “Where to Caleb?” Mary said from the front.

“The boathouse is fine. It is close to my house so I can walk home from there.” I told her. The young freshman I was sitting next to me kept staring at my crotch. She had seen me race last week and was probably curious. The car was pretty silent on the way to the boathouse and I thanked Mary for the ride.

When I got home I found all the new hockey equipment in the living room. Dad had picked it up so I opened it all and spent some time swapping out gear in the garage. Dad found me and I got permission to take his Land Rover over to Molly’s house later. He was slightly confused when he said he thought Iris was the girl’s name from yesterday. I told him Molly was a different girl in English class and that I was just helping out since I already finished my paper.

That reminded me to submit the paper. I went upstairs and spent an hour making a few adjustments to the paper that Molly suggested. Most of them I discarded. I then used the school portal to drop the paper in Ms. Anderson’s inbox. She might send it back to me with some more edits but at least it was mostly done.

I just answered texts on my phone until 4:45 pm rolled around. I then drove over to Molly’s house and rang the doorbell. A large middle-aged man answered. He was jacked and a bit intimidating. His eyebrow cocked in question, “I am here to help Molly with her English paper.” I said as I moved up a step to get eye level with him. This was obviously her father. He looked me up and down.

“She isn’t home yet. Her mother is picking her up at practice.” Screams rang behind the man and two boys and a girl around age ten went screaming through the house. Their red hair made it obvious they were Molly’s younger siblings. “You can sit in the kitchen and wait,” he said as he went to calm down his other kids.

The oven smelled good and I checked and saw a casserole inside. An oven being used in a house, the horror I thought at my parent's inability to cook. The father came in and I stood and introduced myself as Caleb and shook his hand. Best to be polite. He sat down after getting me a Coke and started talking to me. The conversation went to football and we had a lively bitch session about the Redskins. At 5:47 pm Molly and her mother walked through the door talking.

Molly stopped and her freckled face turned bright red, “Oh Caleb I am so sorry I forgot! I am such an idiot!” Then I remembered a bit about Molly, she was a bit of an airhead. I checked her core and it wasn’t very strong compared to other teenagers.

“No problem. Do you want me to come back tomorrow?” I said and her mom interrupted.

“Nonsense! Molly go shower! You smell like a goat! Your friend can have dinner with us and then you can do your schoolwork in the kitchen.” The woman was firm, funny, and bossy all rolled into one. She had a slight accent and I guessed she might have grown up in Ireland. She was tall, maybe 5’8” and with Molly’s dad being about 6’1” I wondered how Molly had stopped growing at 5’2”.

Molly scurried upstairs and soon there was an orchestrated setting of the table and the younger siblings were all glued in place. Molly came running down the stairs and sat next to me at the table her hair still wet and fragrant with shampoo. Molly’s mother, the obvious matriarch of the family, gave me the inquisition.

I answered all her questions but she didn’t seem to buy that I was just there to help her daughter. Molly for her part said it would be easier to get the work done in her room as her siblings were a terror of noise and bedlam. I was shocked when her father actually supported Molly. Whose father let a strange boy go to their daughter’s room?

Molly had to do the dishes so I helped and soon we were in her room. I looked around and it was what you would expect a teenage girl's room to be. The walls were a mist green and all the furniture was white. Her bed was neatly made and the clothes hamper was overflowing with dirty clothes that my sense of smell easily could pick up. Her desk was close enough to the corner of the bed that I could sit there while she worked in the girl at the computer.

The closet door was partially opened and I could see a number of stuffed animals tossed on the floor. She had probably done a quick cleanup when she came up to shower. I wasn’t here for anything nefarious. I sat on the corner of the bed but her father came in pushing another chair for me.

With both of us at the desk, I supported Molly as she brought out her note cards and we worked on her paper for three hours. It was kind of fun being the teacher for once. It did take Molly a little to calm down her anxiety and excitement about having a boy in her room. I could tell her mother was a mother hawk in her protection. She walked by the bedroom door at least six times while we worked.

The paper was 12 pages when we finished at 10:09 pm and seemed pretty good to my readings. I got up to leave and Molly stopped me by grabbing my wrist. She looked nervously at the door and then kissed me. I still didn’t count myself a good kisser but much better than Molly who pressed too hard and was trying to finish before her mother returned.

We broke and she was breathless, “Caleb are you going to the sophomore dance? Do you want to go with me?” She started to deflate the courage of the kiss now fading. Another dance invitation? I didn’t even know how to dance! Molly was just a sophomore too, a year younger than me.

“Sure I can take you. I am not dating anyone though so it will just be as friends if you are ok with that?” At least if I bought a suit I could get some use out of it.

Her smile was immense and I just hoped I didn’t just open up another round of spam texts from another girl. I drove home and checked my messages. Iris had asked me to come over about two hours ago. Mary had sent me three texts since she dropped me off. And my Aunt Amelia sent me a reminder that I was helping her this Friday afternoon.

My parents were asleep when I got home and I went to my room. I answered my texts and went online to look at the community college courses. As Ms. Anderson had said I could start them anytime and I had 14 weeks to complete the online module which had an online quiz at the end of each section. These quizzes accounted for 20% of my grade. The remaining 80% would be attributed to an exam I took on campus with the professor overseeing the course.

I sorted the courses and selected four that I liked. Pre-calculus, American Novelists, Introduction to Geology and Macroeconomics. If I could complete all these courses with a C+ or better before the end of the summer then I could enter school next fall as a senior. It was a good goal. Each course cost $900 to enroll. Tomorrow I would have to deposit some of my cash in my bank account. I pulled out $4000 and stuffed it in my school bag. I would stop by the bank tomorrow after school. I could probably get Iris to drive me if she did leave so quickly again!