Chapter 106 Protecting the Home Turf

I was searching for something to say when Pandora voiced, “She likes this one the best.”  Crap.  How many did they watch?  Was the Mandy one in there?  No, I had been too ashamed of my actions to include.  What other time was I a terrible person—Anya, yes, I had that video on the shelf.

Nashira broke the silence, “I have wandered your mind space, young demon.”

“Why are you calling me young?  You are a day old!” I retorted a little aggressively as I was preparing to defend my actions in the tapes.

“A day old with millennia’s worth of knowledge and wisdom,” she replied cooly.

Lilith chimed in, “I like her.”

“Lilith, you are not helping,” I scolded the disciplined aspect of my subconscious.

Nashira seemed unfazed, “I do not see anything wrong in these videos.  However, I have not watched them all.  Your demonic aspect allows you to consume a person’s core by exploding it with pleasure.  You have not done so...at least in these videos.  I do find it odd you save your creations here in this format.”

I pointed at Pamdoda immediately, “She did it!  I mean, she wanted them.”  I felt like a teenager trying to explain to his mother why he had an ammo box in his closet with a lock on it containing raunchy porn.  Maybe if I didn’t need Nashira’s defensive skills so badly, I would not be trying to explain so hard.

Nashira stood and walked before me, “Do not be ashamed.  The couatl usually lives in flights of four or five, and we freely indulge each other’s sexual natures.”  Her solid white pearl eyes gave nothing away.  Was she pulling my tail—trying to be funny—making a pass at me?  I also had to point at Pandora to get her to stay back, as she had a massive lecherous grin on her face.   Nashira said softly, “I have scoured your large mind space, and I have not found anything that prevents me from assisting you.”  I exhaled, relieved.

Rincewind suggested I give her a job.  Maybe I could ask, “Can you train Lilith and Pandora to defend the mind space as well?”  Casper made a whiny sound. “Casper, too,” I added, and he started wagging his massive tail.  I definitely should have made him smaller.

“More videos,” Nashira offered in reply.  Pandora was excited until Nashira added, “The rest of the Big Bang Theory, for one.”  Shit.  I didn’t have time to watch all those episodes, but maybe I could just assimilate the DVD collection.

“Ok, give me some time to get them, but it is feasible.”  I left my mind space and took the Ford Raptor to Target.  Yeah, this was a much more ride than my Nissan Pathfinder. In Target, I bought a cartload of DVD series. I rolled them to the truck, sat in the driver’s seat, and added the first two seasons of Emily in Paris.

In my mind space, I tried unsuccessfully to play them in the player. Lilith told me I needed the actual device to make it work. The current setup was a mental creation and lacked true mechanicals. I drove over to Best Buy and bought an 85” TV, Bose speakers, and a DVD player.

I drove home and assimilated the setup into my mind space, burning a fair amount of aether doing so. When everything was assembled, I scratched my head on the plugs. The last TV didn’t even have plugs. Lilith shook her head and just turned it on. It was wireless power. Soon episode one was playing, and I made the tad-da motion for everyone who ignored me and started watching. Did I just make four couch potatoes?

At least I just solved my mind-constructs entertainment issues—for $17,965.45 and 298 aether and four hours of my time. “So, do we have a deal?” I said, holding up all twelve seasons of The Big Bang Theory.

“Yes,” Nashima said. “You treat your constructs surprisingly well.” I noticed she was wearing some of Pandora’s clothes. If anything happened, it was going to be my mind space corrupting this couatl. “Oh, I do not think so, Caleb,” Nashima smiled. Damn it, I forgot she could read my surface thoughts. “Consider me the angel on your shoulder—advising you when cross that line you are so fond of referencing.”

Damn it. I really had just installed a mental ethical guidance counselor. Maybe after she taught Lilith and Pandora how to defend the mind space, I would not have to be on my best behavior. Before Nashima could respond to my thoughts, I left my mind space. A little childish way of getting the last word, but it did show who was in charge. I brought the packages of DVD series collections into the cabin house and only added the complete Game of Thrones. That was enough for them to start, and my aether reserves were 409/1000.

It was late on Sunday, and I had dinner with my parents. They had sushi while I had orange chicken and fried rice. We talked more about my plans to graduate high school early and go to college. I was pressing to take a gap year and travel. My mother was not thrilled, but my dad seemed to think it was a good idea. He was even willing to give me money with the stipulation that I accept a hockey scholarship. I tentatively agreed to his proposal. I, of course, had a different idea when it came to travel.

I checked out the results of the figure skating. Anya finished third. I watched the video of her performance, and she fell once, which caused her to lose points. I sent her congratulations. I relaxed to get some sleep. It was almost midnight when my Apollyon phone rang, and it was Rincewind. I immediately picked up.

“How did it go?” I asked the old wizard.

“You seem to find all interesting problems Apollyon, or do you prefer Caleb?” The wizard asked.

“Appollyon is fine. So is Aurora still bound to the church?” I inquired, losing hope for her.

He grunted, “No. She is headed to Paris and then London. She will stay at my academy for a week and then will be off the Magus Arcanum Secretorum. After she is educated there, she will be free to do whatever she wants.”

“So that is good then?” I asked, confused.

Rincewind grumbled a bit, “Four others are joining Aurora, and the Inquisition is up in arms. Lezerath pointed them out as being imprisoned in their own minds, and the Magus Arcanum representative confirmed the geas on the individuals. It is some politics, some power-grabbing, and some assertion of pecking order. The Inquistiton is far from its height power in the 1700s. This is just another blow. They do serve a purpose but have lost their way. Archbishop Esposito and Grand Inquisitor Delgado are being questioned for their methods as we speak, and I expect the political pressure will see them expelled from the church.”

“Do I have to worry about anything?” I asked, concerned.

Silence for a moment, “My impression of the two men is that you should keep one eye open. They do realize that you initiated this investigation from Tristram Rowan and my involvement. If they do travel to the States, I will be sure you are notified.”

“Well, thank you for freeing Aurora. I hope she finds a place in this world,” I said with sincerity.

“You are one unusual demon, my boy. I hope we can remain on good terms,” Rincewind finished the conversation and hung up.

It was 2 AM when my Caleb phone rang, and I checked it. It was Jade, and she was angry, “Caleb, they took her. They said her flight was mixed up, and she was on another plane, but she did not depart when it landed. Then I got this fucking alert from the Council of Prides that the Pride Master in California is claiming Anya.”

Jade was heated, and I tried to calm her, “Explain it to me so I understand what is happening.”

Jade seethed for a moment before explaining, “There is a hierarchy among the Alpha Pride leaders. Part to do with age, aether core strength, and fighting strength. The higher up the ladder you are, you can request those lower on the ladder. The Pride Master in California is the fourth highest on the ladder. He offered me fair compensation for Anya to be wed to his eldest son. The same thing happened to me, but I defeated my husband-to-be. Anya does not have the fighting skills or control of her aether magic yet to stand a chance.”

“Can someone stand in for her?” I asked.

“No. No one can unless—unless there is another who claims her for their bride,” she said with some hope.

“Really? Is this a little archaic, pit fighting for the right to marry? Whatever happened to the Me Too movement?” I said, perplexed.

“It is how it has been done for 4000 years. So are you in? It has to be a male, and even though you are not a catkin, you qualify,” Jade said hopefully.

“Well, thanks. But do you not think this was Agatha’s plan all along? How long before things are decided?” I asked, looking at the problem objectively. Was Anya even my problem?

Jade was thinking on the other end of the line, then said, “Maybe. I thought the two hated each other. Agatha has enemies, and the alpha in question, Petros, has always been a thorn in her side. So maybe she is using this to achieve two objectives. Draw you out and deal a blow to Petros. Ok, I am flying back to California to talk with Petros in person. I will let you know how it goes.”

“Do you want me to come with you? I hate to have to rescue two of you,” I said jokingly.

“No, I can handle myself. I will have my three bodyguards,” she paused. “If you do not hear from me by Tuesday morning, though, then you know where to find me.” Jade hung up, and it seemed I was kicking a hornet’s nest no matter where I looked.

Monday passed with hockey practice in the morning. The teacher responsible for my first exam left me with six history textbooks in the library for my Friday test. He was unhappy with this compromise and was trying to test me. An hour into study hall, I added all the books to my mind space. I started working on the dozen antique books I brought from the cabin. By lunch, I was done and bored.

I had a lot of free time on my phone. Lezerath was on her way back and would arrive in DC around 11 PM. Artica would pick her up. After school, I had a session with Bedelia, and we discussed including Mary and advancing our intimacy. Mary had rowing practice, and we decided Sunday would be the best day for our first joint session.

That evening Bedelia was focused on helping everyone with their magic. Tomorrow we would resume our mind defense classes with Lezerath. I could see the tension between Vida and Eilina. Normally they sat next to each other and helped each other. Now they were at opposite ends of the table and ignoring each other. Kiri and Abigail were trying to mediate, but it was not going well.

I wandered the house, not wanting to deal with drama. I went into Artica’s room, and damn, it was a mess. Clothes everywhere—mostly dirty with her body odor. Not that I found it unpleasant, but the woman was a slob. On the other hand, Bedelia’s room was meticulously organized, like someone with OCD. Artica was organized too, and got things done for me, but when it came to her own things, she appeared careless. I started to pick up empty boxes of chocolates and wrappers and throwing clothes into the hamper.

“What are you doing?” she asked from the doorway.

“Cleaning up a bit,” I turned, and she tackled me hard onto her bed, and I let her straddle me.

“My room, my mess.” She growled, “And you bastard,” she squeezed my hips with her knees. It didn’t hurt and was kind of erotic. “You gave Frost a muscle enhancement and did not tell me! We just spared, and she won!”

“Wait? Frost did not go back to California with Jade?” I asked, throwing her up in the air. She landed softly.

“No, she just took Monsoon with her. Why?” Artica said, concerned.

“She was going to negotiate with the alpha in California for Anya. I thought she would take all her bodyguards.” I stood contemplating an action.

“When you ask for council with an alpha, you can only bring one person with you,” Artica informed me. “Monsoon is the most level-headed. It makes sense why she choose him.”

I checked my phone, and no messages from Jade. I called her, and it went to voice mail. Shit. Was I going to have to fly to California? I started pacing and thinking, and my phone rang.

Jade started talking immediately, “Hey Caleb, I am meeting with Petros now. I think we are coming to an accord. Agatha did fool him into seizing Anya by saying how valuable the leopard girl was to her during the competition to the right ears. I should be back by Wednesday. If not, you know where to come to look for me.”

“Are you sure you do not want my help with this?” I asked again.

“I am sure,” and she ended the call.

I looked around the room and at Artica. She shrugged, “Maybe you should hire a maid. I clean the rest of the house, and this is my dirty space.”

I imagined Artica in a maid outfit, and my face started to contort in a lustful grin. “Where can we get maid outfits?” I asked.

“There are a lot of discreet maid services…no, I am not wearing a maid uniform,” Artica demanded. I was surprised because it was sure to spice things up, but I respected her barriers.

“That is fine. But you should not have to clean the cabin. What if Abigail and Vida moved in? They could live in the apartment above the garage and handle all the cleaning and cooking,” I said. I explained, “It would give Abigail more time to study with Bedelia. It would give Vida something Eilina does not have. And it would save you time by not having to clean.”

Artica grinned amusingly, “It works. I will order the maid outfits!” I gave her a cross look but was already aroused by the thought of Abigail in a French Maid outfit. Artica grabbed her keys, “I am off to collect the mind mage at the airport. See you tomorrow.”

A short while later, when I broached the subject with Abigail and Vida, they were excited as I had thought they would be. Abigail’s mother had returned from her extended time away but had not asked Abigail to move back home. Abigail said her mother was dating again, and not having Abigail home made the process easier for her. Abigail also turned 18 on March 7th, which would give her adult status fairly soon.

It would make Iris’ house have just her, Kiri, and Eilina. I was hoping to make progress on finding her parents. We had our school break coming from March 6th to March 14th. But my plan was to explore Rincewind’s library in Australia during that time. I was hoping to find some books on conjuring magic. I was still lacking in my ability to cast conventional aether magic as well. Maybe that is something I could ask Nashima about.

I got home late, told my parents I had eaten, and went to my room. I showered and then entered my mind space. Everything seemed in order. Checking my mental map, Casper was in the park with Lilith and Nashima, and Pandora was in the training room below—running around and firing the aether pistols. I thought I would find all of them watching the TV, so this was good.

I went to the park, and Nashima and Casper were squared off in a duel. The winter wolf breathed a cone of cold which the couatl easily dodged. Nashima then twisted through the air and transformed into something that resembled a griffon with a draconic head. Casper was actually slightly larger than Nashima as they tumbled in a ball of feathers and fur. I came and stood next to Lilith.

Lilith explained, “Nashima is helping Casper learn to fight. She has the knowledge of her ancestors. He does not. When others invade your mind space, they send their constructs here, and a metaphysical battle like this can unfold.” It was not long before Nashima pinned Casper’s neck to the ground with her dragon-like maw. Nashima went humanoid and walked over to us.

“He is doing good. His progress is phenomenal,” she praised Casper, who shook his coat like a wet dog, then plodded over to us and sat beside Lilith, who mindlessly stroked his coat.

“I am glad you are all working hard,” I said, praising them.

Lilith laughed, “Oh, we spend half our day in front of the TV and the other half training. All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.”

“You do know that is from the movie The Shining? Are you planning to go off the rails?” I asked Lilith.

“No, just telling you I am a Stephen King fan and to add more of his books to the library,” her face was trying to look as innocent as possible, and she started laughing.

I just shook my head. “So, do I need a bigger army to defend the house?”

Nashima answered immediately, “Definitely. You need two beings specializing in keeping invaders pinned down while the others care for them. But you are not here to add creatures to your bestiary.”

“No,” I admitted. “I wanted to know if I can learn aetheric magic to cast spells yet?”

Nashima answered, “My magic works as yours does, demon. Gifted by blood and developed with time.”

Lilith had a tight smile, “I am getting closer. You are giving me what I need. It is just learning all the different languages to read the ancient magic tomes is taking time.”

“If you can learn aetheric wards, you can add them to your mind space as additional defenses,” Nashima suggested.

“OK, let us do that! And I want to be able to cast fireballs, too,” I said jokingly.

“More books Caleb,” Lilith reiterated, “I need more books for references to understand the barriers you have to aetheric magics.”

“I am working on it. Let’s go play in the maze with Pandora,” I said, heading down to my training basement.

Nashima walked next to me, “So, do you want some advice on what other constructs to bring into your mind space to help your defenses?”