Chapter 79 Amsterdam

My parents went to an airport shop near our gate, and I moved and sat next to Artica.  Artica was in jeans and a blouse, a far stretch from the suit she wore when on duty for Jade.  She was much shorter and smaller than her sister.  She had a gymnast’s body, while her sister looked more like a bodybuilder.  I asked Artica, who had a look of bemusement as I sat, “Jade can spare you?”

Her face was cute under her white pixie-cut hair.  Her blue highlights were gone.  Artica grinned, “For some reason, she thinks someone needs to keep you out of trouble, and I volunteered.”

”Volunteered?  I am flattered.  So how do I pay you?”  I asked teasingly, looking into her golden brown eyes.  I remember Jade had said Artica was possibly open to having a session with me to increase her power.

“There is no need,” she said, standing and showing off her body as her blouse stretched and showed her curves.  She was just under 5’6” but moved smoothly and with grace as she gathered her carry-on.  “Although Jade was able to find what flight you were on, she didn’t find what hotel you were staying at.  Care to share?”

I took out my phone, went to my emails, and paged through to find the itinerary.  I looked up and said, “Hotel V.  I think my parents got me a private room,” I said with a suggestive smirk.

Artica pulled out her phone and tapped it, “Hotel V Fredericksplein?”

I double-checked, “Yes, that is it.”  As if she knew the boarding was about to be called, she turned, and the First Class was called.  She was first in line and boarded.

I waited with my parents until the next series of passengers were called.  As we boarded, I found Artica lounging in her first-class seat with a glass of amber liquid.  She toasted me as she passed.  We were in business class…well, my dad and I were.  Mom had a first-class seat from her company.  I got settled in and was seated next to my dad.  After all the passengers were on board, I went to first class and asked my mom if she wanted to sit with dad.  She declined with a smile, and I took the walk of shame past a giggling Artica.

The flight to Europe was fine, just long at over 8 hours. It was the red-eye overnight flight.  I noticed two demis on the flight when I went to the bathroom—a vamp and a foxkin, both males.  That was about all the excitement for me. When we landed, we reunited with mother and took a taxi to the hotel.  It was early, 7:00 am Amsterdam time, when we arrived at the hotel.  We got our rooms, and my room had a single bed and a nice view.

As I was unpacking, I quickly found my Apollyon phone worked much better than my Caleb phone.  I was on my phone when my parents knocked, they wanted to get breakfast, and I decided to join them.  My parents were willing to let me do whatever I wanted but wanted me to check in at breakfast every day.  They had a planned tourist itinerary and hoped I would join them for a few things.

I looked at the list, and it looked like a lot of couples activities.  I told them to enjoy themselves, and I would see them for breakfast every day.  I would entertain myself.  I saw Artica eating at another table in the restaurant, looking a little blurry-eyed. I texted Jade asking for Artica’s number.

A few minutes later, I was texting Artica, ***So you are my guide?  Where are we going?  I want to see the local Bazaar***

Artica replied to the text, ***You are not going to let me sleep?***

I typed out ***No problem. You can sleep.  I have the address already.*** Artica looked up from her phone at me across the restaurant with some annoyance in her eyes.  Well, it wasn’t my fault she didn’t sleep on the flight over.

I told my parents I was going to walk around the city for a while before napping in my hotel room.  As I left the restaurant, Artica fell in beside me.  She seemed content to walk beside me as I used my GPS to bring me to the Bazaar in Amsterdam.

It was a long walk to the city’s north side, and Artica was quiet. I prompted her, “So have you been to Amsterdam before?”

“This is my first time. The catkin general settled around the Mediterranean. Southern France, Eastern Spain, and Italy,” She replied evenly.

“Is that where you are your sister were trained?” I asked curiously and tried to draw her out a little.

Artica seemed to consider her response before replying, “The testing facility is in Barcelona. When a catkin comes of age, we go there for a month to assess our abilities. If we have good enough results, we are sent to Naples or Madrid for our training.”

I looked over at Artica, and although she looked like she was walking normally, her eyes were scanning everything in front of us diligently. I asked, “Do all catkin undergo assessment? And where did you train? Jade said you were an adept?”

“No. The only catkin who go for assessment are those who want to work for the Pride Alphas and the Council. I trained in Naples with my sister. Madrid is for those with magical aptitude. That is rare among the catkin. Most of our kind are adepts. Adepts use aether to enhance their physical skills. We can harden our body, increase our movement speed, see farther, hear better, and increase our strength, among other things,” She answered while continuing to scan the surroundings. She paused as we crossed a bridge, and I followed her sight line.

Two men were in a boat and paddling. I could see both were some type of wolfkin in my abyssal sight. I asked Artica, “Can you see through the wolfkin guises?”

She looked at me surprised, “No. I can just smell them. I was just surprised to find wolfkin in Amsterdam. The vamps control the city and typically don’t get along with any beastkin. Vamps think themselves superior and treat the beastkin like animals.” I was about to say that technically beastkin were animals, but I was smart enough to hold my tongue. Artica continued, “That is why Jade sent me. She was worried the vamps might take her lover,” amusement coated her last statement.

I chuckled and kept walking, “I am her lover? Is that what she calls me?”

Artica paused, then said, “Sorry. I need to learn to hold my tongue sometimes. She just talks about you incessantly. So I assumed. Usually, we are not asked many questions in our role as bodyguards. I am sorry if I am being too genial with you. Just let me know if my tone crosses a line.”

It took me time to figure out that Artica’s training was somewhat strict, and I was violating it by being familiar with her in my tone. I didn’t care. I probed, “So, how old are you, Artica? And how many languages do you speak?”

She looked over at me, surprised at the question. “I am twenty-five. I speak Spanish, French, Italian, and English. But my illusion artifact can also translate any language for me.”

“Wow, I thought you were at most twenty. Your sister, Frost, looks like she is twenty-five,” I said congenially. Artica laughed.

“Caleb, we are twins. Well, not identical, but from the same litter,” she said with slight sarcasm in her voice. “Jade told you that.”

“So, are you locked into serving Jade for the rest of your life?” I asked after a pause.

Artica skipped a step, “Jade said to answer all your questions.” She paused. “I have been trying to keep my answers to general knowledge. Contracts, when we sign up and are assessed, are personal. They can vary greatly.” I was ready to drop the topic but she continued, “My sister and I are snow leopard catkin. We are rare among the catkin. Our contract was for our two sisters to be able to procreate to produce snow leopard offspring.”

I was confused but didn’t have the chance to inquire further as she continued on her own, “Snow leopards have lower tier 1 aether cores. We are weak among the catkin. When we mate to procreate, the stronger partner’s aether core usually determines the catkin variety of the children unless magic is involved.”

“I thought humans were blanks and demis could breed with them,” I asked, recalling some information.

“True. But human males that would breed with us are not going to have strong aether cores. Our contract is for our sisters to be matched with an upper-tier 1 human. In hopes, their children will have stronger cores,” Artica said seriously.

“Are you kidding me,” I looked at Artica through my abyssal sight. “There have to be a hundred million horny teenage boys that would love to make love to a cute girl like you!” It was a leading question, but it was not a lie as she was quite attractive in her human and catkin forms.

Artica scoffed, “A catkin would never lower herself to mate with a male who wasn’t stronger than her.”

I eagerly replied, “So all I need to do is beat you in a fair fight, and I get the goods?”

“Beat me?” she said jokingly but with skepticism. “Because you are a decent mage doesn’t mean you can dominate me in a fight. Besides, I don’t fight fair.” She wore a grin that was clearly a challenge.

“So what are we betting? And where can we go?” I said earnestly.

Artica looked at me with a cocked eyebrow, “Really? If I win, you do your magic to advance my core. Although I am still skeptical, Jade seems to think it is possible. If you win, which won’t happen, I will blow your mind with the best sex you have ever had since that is all boys your age think about. It should motivate you to try.”

I slowed as we walked, considering what Artica had just given away. They thought I was a human mage, not an incubus, which was good. But also, Jade hadn’t told Artica that my method to increase an aether core involved sex which confused me. She might have told Artica that and the sly woman was planning to collect the reward whether she won or lost.

“Ok, Artica. Where can we go?” I asked again, committing.

“The Bazaar should have private combat rooms for training. Are you sure you want to do this? I will not hold back,” she said with a toothy smile. She was clearly eager for the challenge. As we walked, I slowly aged myself closer to my adult form.

The address was a large stone building that looked like a manor. This is the address, so we went and knocked on the front door. A tall wide man came to the door and looked surprised to see someone here. I asked, confused, “This was the address we were given for the Bazaar.”

Imposing at almost seven feet in height, the man shook his head and spoke in broken English. The entrance is through the alleyway to your left. There is a club entrance there. It will bring you to the Bazaar. We thanked him and took the wide, worn alley to a large door. We knocked and were let in by a man in a black suit. He confirmed our IDs and let us into a door with large, worn steps going down.

We descended, and I could tell with my direction sense we were moving deep under the manor we had knocked on first. My only guess was perhaps the manor was the original entrance, and they switched it for safety. The stairs opened into a lobby that looked could be in any high-end hotel. There were a number of reception desks. To my sight, all the attendants were human.

Artica took the lead and went to a counter. I listened as Artica was given the quick rundown about the exchange room for trading, the plaza for shopping, the judiciary room for filing a complaint with the Magus Arcanum, rooms for out-of-towners, and the private training rooms.

Artica reserved a private training room and then motioned for me to come and pay. It was only $200 an hour. I paid for two hours. We went to the shopping plaza, which reminded me of the one in DC. There were several alcoves, and each alcove had a separate store. We just went in quickly and purchased some Gis to fight in. The corridor to the training rooms was clearly marked, and the attendant there quickly checked our reservation, assigned our room, and started our two-hour clock.

The room was 60 feet square with a 30-foot high ceiling. The floor was a soft dark blue rubber with some five. Artica quickly stripped to her underwear, and I admired her lean body. Her pale skin had no hair, and she wore a light blue thong and black tube bra. Her chest was not large but good enough for her frame. She put on the Gi methodically, and I longed to see her body again.

She turned and faced me and asked, “Did you enjoy the show?”

I smiled as I slowly stripped for her. I got completely naked, letting her get the full view of my flaccid penis before dressing in spandex shorts and donning my own Gi. She didn’t turn away, and she mumbled something I didn’t catch when my cock was briefly visible to her.

When we finally faced off and bowed, she launched into a series of kicks that caught me off guard. She was fast, faster than any person I had ever seen. I guessed that is what she was currently enhancing with her adept powers. I was only saved with my pittance of martial training and superior reflexes and speed.

Artica was definitely surprised I was still standing, and her pixie hair twirled as she spun and kicked. She also started mixing in punches, and her face took on a sheen of sweat as her intensity ratcheted up. She started breathing heavily as she looked to find an advantage that never materialized. The best news for me was I was learning from an excellent fighter.

Artica switched to a grappling tactic, and that didn’t work either. Her speed enhancement switched to strength, but I outclassed her again and threw her hard to the floor time and time again. She wouldn’t relent, though, and kept coming after me. She suddenly surprised me when she dropped her illusion and was in her catkin form. Her claws managed to rip into my Gi, giving her a pivot point I was not expecting, and she swung behind me under my arm and wrapped her arms around my neck and her legs around my upper torso.

She locked her ankles and tried to squeeze my neck and torso. I could feel pressure on ribs and focused on breaking her leg lock first. I couldn’t and thought my best move would be a forward flip and land on my back. I hoped the surprise and shock would get her to loosen for a second. I ran three steps forward and flipped. Artica realized what I was doing and tried to release me, but my hands were on her ankles, and I held them as we spun.

The landing knocked the wind out of her. I quickly rotated to face her, and got my to either side of her hips, pinning her to the ground as she started punching me. She still had claws, and I managed to control her wrists to protect my face. She tried to use her legs, but I firmly straddled her pelvis. Her chest heaved at her futile effort to break free. She then mewed like a kitten in distress which almost got me to release her.

I just put on a smile and said, “Do you yield?”

She slowly morphed back to her human form and lay there until her breathing settled. Then she asked, “Best two out of three?” She had a very happy look on her face, like she enjoyed losing and finding out that I was better than her. She definitely hadn’t expected it.

“How about we just say that I won and you give me some lessons? The grappling aspect in particular. If your sister pulled that on me, I would have lost due to her size,” I said.

She pouted, “I am faster than my sister. She would have never been able to get behind you.” I nodded to let her know I conceded the point. “Well, are you going to let me up?” I cocked my eyebrow. She rolled her eyes, “Fine, you win!”

I stood and helped her to her feet. Even though she was small, she wasn’t light. We spent the remaining time with her teaching me grabbling. She was a good teacher, and I liked her hands-on approach. She did get frustrated with my inhuman strength. When she tried to demonstrate some of the methods to break the holds, I was able to hold her tight. During the two hours, we were in the room, Artica became a sweaty mess. She was sexually aroused as well, but not as extreme as I was hoping. It wasn’t the time to use my saliva, so I focused on learning.

A knock at the door let us know we had five minutes remaining, so we stopped and dressed. I didn’t change back into my boxers and left on my spandex, which disappointed her. She made a full display and changed slowly to give me a good view which I soaked in. She had a few bruises from our bouts, and I asked her how the illusion spell worked to show them. She explained she had a morphing charm. She indicated her small diamond stud earring.

She was no longer the proper bodyguard when we exited the training room. Instead, she was joking with me and smiling openly. I asked, “So when do I get to collect for winning?”

Artica put on a lascivious grin, “How about I get a cat nap in? My room is apartment suite 5 at your hotel.”

I returned her grin, “Ok, I will see you tonight. I am going to wander the shops as I have to get presents for everyone back home.” She seemed to hesitate in leaving, so I added, “Come on, Artica. You just spent two hours seeing I could handle myself.”

She was walking with a slight limp, and I could tell she was exhausted, “Fine, Caleb. Don’t do anything stupid of Jade would hunt me down and gut me.” I doubted that but consented to be careful as she left. I moved up a floor and over to get some shopping done.