Chapter 67

I met Jade as she pulled up in a Cadillac Escalade.  Two young women got out of the front of the vehicle in sharp suits.  Jade got out of the back with a large man.   I activated my abyssal sight, and the two women were snow leopards.  The male was obviously a lion with a massive mane hidden under his illusion.  He was middle-aged, so I wasn’t sure if he was one of Jade’s guards or someone important.

He stood by the car and started looking around, on alert.  Jade came up the steps and gave me a hug.  She had definitely gotten stronger, but so had I.  I returned it while I watched her trio of guards.  Did Agatha, Jade’s mother, play a role in getting them assigned to Jade to discover my secrets?  The three seemed to be scanning away from the house and not looking at me directly.

Jade spoke, “We can go inside and talk.  I have a lot to tell you.”  As we entered the house, Jade started sniffing.  I could still smell the lingering scent of sex in the air as well. Vida walked out of the living room, followed by Eilina.  Jade looked at me and raised her eyebrows in question.

I shrugged, “Guess I have a lot to tell you as well.  This is Vida, our resident orc shaman.”

Vida waved and said, “Caleb spared my life, and I am working on increasing my magic while getting ready to go to school in a few weeks.”  Vida was well behaved but she was still under my charm effect. I wasn’t ready to remove it out of caution.

I explained, “She was sent with others from another planet to thin the population of undesirables.”  Jade nodded even though her face said she needed more explanation.  “And you probably remember Eilina from the transit.  Her sister Kiri is downstairs…resting. They live here now, and Eilina is going to school in the spring with Vida.”

Jade sniffed the air again, “Can we sit down somewhere?”  We all moved to the living room to sit down.  The two young woman guards came inside and stood in the large archway.  Jade introduced them, “This is Frost and Artica.  They are sisters from the same litter.  They are like me and adapt mages, using their aether to enhance their physical ability.  They are both low tier 1 mages.”  Jade’s eyes focused on me.  “They were available from the trained pool of bodyguards because of their low tier. Most catkin have upper tier 1 cores,” she explained with a knowing look focused on me.  I think Jade was hinting at me that I could expand their cores…but maybe that was just my fantasy.

I studied the two young women. They were not identical sisters, but it was obvious they were related in their human disguise. I briefly wondered how human disguises worked…was it a set illusion, or did it draw on the person’s genetic code to create the effect? I knew there were multiple ways demi hide their true form, but these two were wearing the standard ring.

Frost was on the left. She had platinum blonde hair tied back in a tight ponytail. Her eyes were an icy blue color. Her square face was chiseled from being so lean. Her thin lips were a very light rose color. I guessed her height to be 5’9”. She didn’t have a pronounced chest, but I really couldn’t see her body under the suit she was wearing anyway. She gave returned my stare and I smiled as I moved to study her sister.

Artica had the same platinum color, almost white hair, but she had a pixie cut with a few streaks of light blue highlights. Her frame was much smaller than her sister’s as well. While Frost’s face hinted at a muscular frame, Artica’s 5’5” height and heart-shaped face, and the smaller shape in her suit made me think she was a gymnast more than a fighter. Rather than give me a hard stare like her sister when I met her golden brown eyes, she gave me a small smirk instead as I studied her.

As I was studying the two guards, Jade had continued speaking, “The guard outside in Monsoon.  He was a gift from my father.  He served him for over 20 years. He also trained me to fight when I was little.”

Eilina asked, intrigued, “Why do you have guards?”

Jade smirked, “I have been elevated to a leadership role with the catkin clans, Eilina.  It basically means I am recognized as someone who needs to be protected.  I am responsible for the oversight of the 582 registered catkin in my territory.”  She seemed to have some pride in that fact.  “I am judge, jury, and executioner…well, I don’t think I will be doing too much executing.”

Kiri walked into the room under the scrutiny of Frost and Artica.  She smiled at seeing Jade, they exchanged a quick private verbal exchange during a brief hug.

I turned the conversation to our circumstances, “We have another member of our little crew.  Her name is Bedelia.  She has some good scrying skills.  We are hoping to enter the transit soon and continue our search for Iris’ parents.  I hope you can join us.”  I noticed Frost and Artica who had been stoic this entire time finally showed a crack and looked at Jade questionably.

“Definitely,” the two guards eyes went wide. “I have to settle in first.  I have to assert myself among my subjects.  I think I can be ready in a week or two.  I need to find someplace to set up as my hearthstone.  That is a large stone that serves as my throne.”

“Are your bodyguards going to come with us?” Iris asked while assessing the two catkin women.

Jade looked over at the two, “I can probably take one with me.  Monsoon is stronger, being upper tier 1, but he is not an adept. Monsoon does have some limited magic and a weak healing spell.  Frost and Artica have more potential.”

I revealed my bracer and indicated the two catkin guards, asking Jade’s permission to read them.  It took her a moment to recognize it, but she nodded when she pieced my gesture together.  I started with Frost, 0.42.  I then read Artica, 0.45.  “They are on the cusp of upper tier 1 for their aether core.  Are they good at ranged or melee combat?”  The two catkin bristled under my assessment but remained stoic.

Jade answered, “They both are proficient with dual wielding 20-inch kopis blades.  They have Glock 17 pistols and tested out as S class in marksmanship.  That rank means they are unparalleled.”  I could see the two bodyguards’ body language showed pride.

“That is great!  Can they use aether pistols?”  I asked.  I had learned regular ammunition was unreliable in the transits.

Jade responded, “Probably.  They would just need to get used to them.”  Jade shifted her seat and looked at me seriously, “Caleb, I wanted to see if you would be one of my deputies.  It would let you live in my residence; all you need to do is be present when I judge my subjects.  It is really closer to a bailiff than a deputy, I guess.”  Jade waited for my reply.

“I don’t have the time right now.  Maybe after we find Iris’ parents,” I offered.  Jade nodded.

“Caleb, I am staying at the Marriott hotel.  Do you want to come back with me to talk further?”  Jade asked suggestively.

The bodyguard Frost spoke for the first time, “Lady Jade, you have two meetings tonight starting at 11:00.”  Jade rolled her eyes.

“Rain check, Caleb.  I have to do the handover of the territory tonight from the locals.  I should probably go and prepare.  Maybe we can spar tomorrow Caleb?  I want to show you my new power,” she said with a soft purring sound.

It was a half-hour more of small talk before Jade, and her guards left.  Once they were gone, I looked at Iris, “Soon, Iris.  Hopefully, we learn something in New York this weekend.”

I left the house feeling good about getting life essence and reconnecting with Jade.  If Jade had a lesser tier 2 core now, then I was going to get a lot of life essence the next time I used my vortex of her.  Her two guards were attractive as well.  Both in their early twenties in their human disguise, they had a white coat with black mottled spots in their natural catkin body.  Remembering how soft and wonderful Jade’s fur felt when we fucked I hoped Jade would task me with increasing their aether core in the future.

Unless they were planted by Jade’s mother—Maybe I shouldn’t rush that until I confirmed they were loyal only to Jade.

I returned home and went to my room.  I surprisingly had actually made my curfew.  Up in my room, I washed the popcorn and coconut smell off my body.  Kiri had been an incredible harvest, and I was already halfway to advancing another ability.  I was looking forward to training Mary and Rose tomorrow.  Maybe I could get them into the sauna and have sex with Rose to get some good essence.  After my shower, I planned to text them but I already had a text from Mary.

***Caleb, I am not feeling well.  I talked with Rose, and we are going to take tomorrow off.  We will resume on Monday.  Thanks, Mary***

Well, that was disappointing.  I texted her and hoped she felt better and looked at my other messages.  Nothing important as I made quick replies and took both phones off silent mode.  I packed my suitcase for New York before going into my mind space for some martial arts lessons from Pandora.  I spent days training with her. For every hour in the space, I burned about one aether, and I was almost full at 920/1000. It only took 100 aether to open a portal to the transits, so as long as I kept it above 300, I didn’t mind using it up.  I spent weeks in my mind space, and when I finally emerged, it was 4:38 am.  It was Friday, and I snuck down the fire escape steps to my car with my suitcase.

I went back to my room and walked downstairs at 6:00 for breakfast.  I made a bowl of cereal and cut up a banana on top of the Cheerios.  As I was eating, my dad came out.  We chatted for a bit, and I told him about Jade.  I also told him that Iris were going to DC Saturday and staying in the city for a date.  I didn’t mention that we were flying out of DC and the city we were staying in was New York.

I left with Rob and Sophia for school.  Rob was all talk about his girlfriend, Yuki.  It sounded like things were going extremely well.  Sophia seemed disgusted by all her brother’s lovey-dovey talk.  I encouraged him.  I envied him having to only focus his efforts on one woman.  Sophia mentioned my car smelled much better but asked about my suitcase in the back.  She had to be the nosiest person I had ever met.  I told her I was staying at a hotel with Rose on Saturday.  I was good at giving the partial truth and did not elaborate on her further verbal probes.

The school still had not calmed down from the rumors about the hockey team.  I got pointed at and talked about behind my back as well as everyone else on the team.  The newest rumor was there was a sex tape of our team gang-banging the coach.  I just ignored the noise.

At lunch, I sat with Iris and Bedelia.  Abigail had a meeting with the track coach to set up a tryout.  Bedelia and Iris talked about magic while I just ate the lunch Abigail had prepared for me.  A meatless lasagna and carrot sticks with a Greek yogurt dipping cup.

During the last period, I drove to a martial arts studio that had been extremely highly rated.  The studio was a mixed martial arts studio.  A bear of a man was sparing with a younger man half his size.  It was a friendly match, and I was shocked by my abyssal sight.  The bear of a man was, in fact, a bear man.  It was a beastkin sub-race that was not in my incubus handbook, so I  was fascinated by him.  The younger man was a common beastkin, a wolfman.

The two men paused, and the large bear man bowed to me, “How can we assist you?”

I bowed back, mirroring him, and asked, “My name is Caleb. I was just hoping to get some exercise with some experienced fighters.”  I was not sure of the procedure or if you could just walk in and ask to fight.

The large man paused, then smiled, “What do you practice?  I am Nautilus, and this is my dojo. This is my friend, Armon, who visits me every once in a while to practice.” They both seemed happy to meet me. Nautilus was slightly taller than me but twice as wide. Armon was shorter than me by a head.

“I kind of blended a few different styles together. I have been practicing for about two years,” I responded. Two years was a guess. I figured I had spent about 400 hours under Pandora’s tutelage. I added, “My teacher was named Pandora, but you are probably not familiar with her.”

They looked at each other, and each shrugged, “No, we are not familiar with her. Do you have your Gi with you.” I paused and realized my practice uniform was in my mind space. I didn’t have any in the real world. I noticed the store in the side room.

“I was actually visiting the area and didn’t pack one. I see you have a store in the side room. I have cash. Can I purchase one?” I asked, embarrassed.

Seeing a sale, the bear man smiled, “Of course!” We wandered to the small store, and I selected two Jiu-Jitsu-style white Gi for $150 each. When they asked what belt I wanted, I just took a white belt, professing that my teacher didn’t assign me any rank.

My first partner was Armon. He was middle eastern and quite fast. I quickly found out that practicing with Pandora in my mind space was different than in the real world. My muscle memory was there, but it took time to process mentally.

After a handful of exchanges, Armon said, “Damn Caleb, you are as strong as Nautilus and as quick as me. You know everything but keep hesitating. I am guessing your sensei hasn’t sparred with you a lot. You need to react on instinct rather than process it.”

Nautilus scoffed, “As strong as me? I think it is my turn, Armon.” I didn’t want to tell Armon I had been holding back. The bear man stepped in and we bowed.

The clash was intense as he turned up the intensity as he figured I could handle more and more. I was taking Armon’s advice and thinking less and just reacting. When he got me in a hold, I increased my strength and forced my way out of it. The bulging veins in his arms and neck told me he was giving a full effort.

“No fucking way!” Armon said in shock. Nautilus rolled onto his back after my reversal and tapped out.

“I think I strained my shoulder,” the bear man said. “Caleb, you can not be human!” He exclaimed.

I wasn’t sure what to say. I had probably shown too much. I also enjoyed the practice. “I can tone it down a bit. I am learning to apply my knowledge effectively,” withholding anything about my true nature.

Armon said, “Caleb, I don’t think either of us can match you.” He paused, “Who are you really? Nautilus is the strongest person I know. No one should have been able to break that hold.”

I pleaded, “Can’t we just continue to practice?” The looks on the two said probably not until I gave them a little more. I went with a stretch of the truth, “I am associated with the new catkin alpha pride leader for the region.” They looked at each other.

Armon spoke, “I heard old Sampson was giving up some of his territories to a new pride leader, Nautilus.” Nautilus nodded.

I was curious about the demi politics, but asking for details might blow my cover story. “So, can I come here to train with you?” They looked at each other and seemed to consider.

“That is fine, Caleb. We could use a challenge. Can you introduce us to the new pride leader for the catkin?” Nautilus asked. “Armon here is the brother of the wolfkin pack leader in Virginia. I…well, most of the bearkin live in Canada, Russia, and Scandinavia. I am pretty much the only one within five hundred miles.”

When I was changing, I thought about using my bracelet on the two masters but decided I didn’t want to ruin the positive rapport I had developed with them. I left the dojo after a bow and handshake.

I confirmed on my phone that the house sale was complete, and that was my next stop. I wanted to check out what one million dollars purchased.

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Rose’s POV

*When Mary showed her the video she at first thought it had to be a joke. Mary’s cousin worked in Holywood, so she assumed it was a massive practical joke. There was no way those erg times were real. The whole video had to have been doctored. She remembered the test and had not even gotten a new personal record. When she saw Caleb hypnotize them or something in the video, she felt chills up and down her body. Mary didn’t seem overly concerned about this deception, so Rose pushed the feeling aside for now.*

*Mary was her best friend, and they would do anything for each other. Mary offered, “We should go to the boathouse after school and do a test. I already told Caleb we were not coming over to work out.”*

*Caleb was a nice guy, attractive and seemingly sincere. When Mary fell for him after the infamous boathouse showdown, she figured Mary would eventually drop her infatuation with him. That didn’t happen even when Caleb barely responded to her text messages anymore. Rose tried to help her friend out by offering to ask Caleb to train them. Rose figured it couldn’t hurt and needed motivation over the winter break to lift weights.*

*This didn’t go as planned. Mary unabashedly gave Caleb blow jobs in front of her. At first, it disgusted her, but watching Mary’s utter pleasure from servicing Caleb—it turned her on. She had already had sex, unlike Mary, and her boyfriend was not that large. She imagined what it would feel like in her mouth…inside her vagina.*

*When her friends showed pictures of her boyfriend with his ex-girlfriend, who had moved to Baltimore, Rose had been devastated. Mary convinced her to get back at him, but fucking Caleb after the junior dance. Rose knew Mary just wanted to see Caleb in action, but she conceded. She wanted—needed it to feel like she got some type of revenge.*

*The evening was amazing! Caleb was so much more than her ex. The amount of pleasure and powerful releases were beyond anything she could have imagined. She craved to experience it again but didn’t want to upset Mary, who was still pining after Caleb in private. She knew Mary was getting closer and closer to giving him her virginity and dropping her pledge to only have sex with her wedded husband.*

*As they sat next to each on the ergs at the boathouse butterflies roiled in Rose’s stomach. Mary seemed determined to prove the video was real and was intense in her preparation. Mary said, “Go all out from the beginning Rose. Don’t save anything. If we fly and die, that is fine. I need to know the truth.” That was how they attacked the piece, pushing from the beginning and not letting up. Rose couldn’t believe her tank never run out as she just kept digging deeper and deeper into her reserves.*

*They were both sucking wind and nearly falling off the machines when they finished. Rose peaked at Mary’s screen, 6:41.8. Rose’s own time was 6:46.6. When they caught their breath and worked out their legs, they just looked at each other in disbelief. Rose’s mind was churning—these times were better than anyone out there. She was only 152 lbs, much lighter than the world-class rowers that pulled times like this—she could make the national team if she wanted.*

*Mary said seriously, “I will talk to Caleb alone so he can explain.” Rose nodded dumbly.*