Chapter 140 Meeting the Father

My parents were eating dinner when I got home.  They did not even text me anymore, asking what I wanted for dinner.  “Hey guys, sorry I have been sleeping at Iris’ house.”

My mother was eating chicken parm and put down her fork, “Caleb, the school sent you a letter.”  I was nervous for just a moment, “They changed your status to a second-semester senior.  I think Ms. Henderson thought you might want to be applying to colleges and sent an updated transcript.”  Mom said pointedly.

She handed me the letter, and I started to review it.  I had ‘A’ in all the classes I tested out of.  I still needed one English class, one Science or Math class, and any third class to fulfill the requirements for graduation from high school.

“We are proud of you, Caleb,” my father said with a smile.

“Thanks. I am still planning to take a gap year and travel the world before considering college,”  I replied, disappointing my mother.  “Are you going to see Paige race in Tennessee this weekend?”  I asked, changing the topic.

Mom sighed, “No, I have to fly out to San Diego and retrain a quintet of bimbos.”

Dad sighed, “Dave’s mother died, so I have to cover for him this weekend.”

I was kind of relieved they would not be there. “I am thinking of going. Iris got us a room.”

“Good! Paige thinks they are going to have their best season ever,” Mom said, smiling.

The conversation devolved into small talk. I had a box of hockey recruiting letters in my room, most likely left on the bed by my mother. I tossed the box on the floor and fell onto my bed. I slipped into my mind space. The emptiness of my pedestal room was apparent. I went to the library, not willing to brave the bedroom.

Lilith was into the books with Nashima in a plush leather chair reading as well. Her feet were using Casper as an ottoman. The massive white wolf was belly up, and she was rubbing his stomach with her feet. Lilith looked up, “What do we owe the pleasure of your visit today?”

“I just wanted to get everyone’s thoughts on what is going on,” I admitted. Technically, I was asking myself…well, Nashima would give me a different perspective.

“Aria and Pandora are in the battle arena. They are practicing.” Lilith put down her book. “Well, in regards to going after Andromeda—I wouldn’t. There is no point. We are free. The universe is a huge place, and there are twenty-three of them. If this Earth is finding itself in trouble, just move on. Do not put yourself out there for a planet of humans.”

Nashima stood, leaving Casper, “I disagree. If you left this planet and everyone died because it was cut off from the Source, you would lose your humanity completely. You have to go. If Carrie is right, Andromeda is going to play a role in saving the planet, and you know it.”

“That is not exactly what she said,” I started to say.

“You will figure it out,” Pandora said, walking in. “We promise to be right with you no matter what you decide!” She was smiling broadly, and Aria walked in, morphed into Pandora’s body. “I thought since you never had identical twins before, you might want to practice with us.”

My mind was bewildered as they were both wearing the same tiny black dress. “Wow. You both look great, but this is not the time. And it will probably never be a time for it.”

I left my mind space without waiting for a reply. All I could do now was wait for Shim to get back to me. I left my mind space. I spent my evening practicing with the collar Rincewind had given me. It was to help me improve my fine aether control. It was something I could work on. Maybe I could learn to use aether to cast spells eventually.

In the morning, Bedelia texted me, saying she would pick me up. She arrived on the motorcycle I had purchased for her. “I just picked it up! It is awesome, Caleb!” She tossed me another helmet. “You can ride bitch. Hold on and tight.” I climbed on and snuggled up tight. I wrapped my arms around her thin waist, and she spun to the road and quickly shifted gears to gain speed on the road.

I noticed the Raptor moving out to follow behind us. Artica was driving, and Iris was in the passenger seat. They waved, and I waved back. Bedelia was enjoying being in control as she drove us to the school. We got a lot of looks in the parking that I didn’t mind. Rob was getting out of Yuki’s car and would not make eye contact with me. I thought about trying to talk with him, but now was not the time if I was going to chase Andromeda.

I wandered into the library and found Hazel there. She smiled, and I returned it. Flirting with her again was fun. She was going to pass her Algebra class and was looking forward to our celebratory date. I told her I was also looking forward to it but had no idea when I would be back from going to help Andromeda.

I might not even return in this lifetime…that was a scary thought, and I put it out of my head. After tutoring, I put the textbook for my Friday exam into my mind space. AP Physics. It was just one book at least, and it should cover my science/math requirement to graduate. I could not believe graduating high school was still on my mind. It was going to be a cover for my human guise…how relevant that was now…maybe for my parents. I would try, at least, to get a diploma.

After school, I skipped the motorcycle and took the Rpater to the cabin. Bedelia was not happy, but I promised her a core enhancement session tonight to placate her. I wondered how much essence I was going to get now that Andromeda was no longer siphoning from me.

We ordered Vincent’s pizzas, and I was not surprised that Aurora had stayed with Kiri at the cabin all day. I sat beside her on the sofa and asked, “How are things going? Do you want help escaping the country? I can call a friend in Australia, and you can stay at Rincewind’s compound there. When he returns, I am sure he can sort things out.”

“I think I am comfortable here. More comfortable than before.” Aurora looked at Eilina, who was lounging on the couch, waiting for the pizza to arrive. Everyone else was in their room or the kitchen. “I like how you all band together to protect each other. It is something I am wanting.” She added quickly, “I am not ready for the rest of it, though. I just want to be friends and help to deal with the Archbishop.”

My phone rang, and it was Shim, so I answered. “Caleb. The efeert is willing to bargain with you. You will not know what it is he wants until we complete the ritual circle for the travel. The fire Genasi is named Vanhi Konda. She is from Mumbai, India. But Caleb, the site of the ritual is…well, I think her efeert father is just being an asshole. It is on top of Devil’s Tower in Wyoming. They can select anywhere, and he chooses a location that will take a bit of work to get to.”

“That is fine. When do we go?” I asked.

“April first, midnight of Thursday to Friday,” Shim said.

“That is just nine days away. That was quick. What do you think he will ask for in compensation?” I inquired.

“No idea. He only said the demon and Vanhi needed to be present for the request, so I assume he wants you to do something for her. Whenever I talk with Vahi, she always says how Haibaikel is helping her.” Shim revealed.

“Good. That works out. I did not ask about others going with me. Can I bring others?”

Shim paused, “It does not take the djinn any more effort to send a dozen than it does one, but I expect the price he requests may go up.”

“Thank you, Shim. I will deal with the efeert then. I am sending you another seventy-five thousand for your help,” I tapped on my phone to complete the transfer of funds.

“You are most generous. I am sorry my Marid ancestor was not more accommodating. When he heard you were a demon, he flatly refused to help you. I am sending you Vanhi’s contact info now. She will call you in a few days to figure out the logistics of getting to the tower’s top. She will have the materials to construct the bridge to the efeert.” Shim hung up, and everyone was in the living room waiting to hear my decision.

“You probably heard. April first…April Fools Day…but I do not think this is a joke. Devil’s Tower out in Wyoming. So I think I will be taking four people with me.” They all sat down, waiting to hear my choices. “Bedelia is coming,” she gave a fist pump. That selection was easy since she had told me Carrie expected her to come and her presence was important.

“I want to go,” Aurora said, shocking everyone.

“You are not strong enough,” I said flatly. She was only an upper-tier one core. Her aetheric chains whipped out and tried to restrain me. I was able to move, just slower. She focused harder, reinforcing the chains, and I just approached her, and she released the chains as I reached her. She had beads of sweat from the effort.

“How are you that strong?” She fell back on the coach. “You were not even affected.” I did not tell her it had been an effort to walk to her. I probably could not have fought very well with the chains on me.

“I am as strong as I need to be,” I answered crypticly.

Abigail said, “He can make you stronger, Aurora. We told you about how.” Aurora grimaced slightly. “He will not bind you. I promise,” Abigail added. I could tell Aurora was afraid she would lose control of her fate again.

“It is your decision. Your ability is useful; if you want to be raised, you could be one of the four,” I stated before returning to my position.

“That is not fair!” Vida voiced. “Whose spot would she take?”

“Vida, you are coming. But we need to enhance your core before then,” I responded to the orc.

“What!? Really?!” She jumped up on me, wrapped her legs around torso, and gave me a massive hug. I patted her on her back until she released me.

“It is not what you think, Vida. But I hope the method would get you to lower tier two,” I said, peeling the excited orc off me.

I continued, “Iris, the third spot is yours if you want to come. Part of the reason we are going is to find clues about your parents.” I actually felt Iris was too weak to come, but I had made her a promise to find her parents.

“The fourth person will be either Aurora or Danila,” I announced.

“What?” Eilina shouted. “Why would my mother come to Earth to go with you?”

“She owes me a few favors,” I stated. Kiri already knew I would ask their mother and remained silent.

I think Artica looked the most upset with my selections. She was barely lower tier two. I tried to placate her, “I need you here, Artica, to manage everything. The auction finished, and there were almost two hundred million from the sales. The new concrete warehouse plans are almost finished, so construction must begin on that. Also, you need to help Kiri keep Eilina safe.” My words did not make her happy.

A lot of arguing erupted, and I noticed Aurora was silent and thinking. Maybe if the sybian worked on Vida, she would want to be enhanced the same way. As they argued, my phone rang. It was Jade, “Hello, Caleb. My father is at Cloud Nine Ranch. He would like to meet with you if you can.”

“Sure, I am heading over now.” Getting away from the estrogen storm in here. I thought to let things mellow out a bit. “Artica. I am going to be heading to meet Jade’s father. Could use you watching my back.” She smiled for a brief moment before giving me her angry eyes again at being excluded from the Mercanius team.

We took the Raptor, and Artica drove. She finally said, “Why? You know I would put myself in front of a bullet for you. Why am I not good enough?”

I leaned over and rubbed her thigh, “I need someone here on Earth I can trust. You know everything that is going on, and you can respond to threats.”

“What are you going to do about the Archbishop?” She asked softly.

“When Bedelia has more information, I will come up with a plan,” I said, rubbing her inner thigh, and she opened her legs reflexively before snapping them shut because she was mad at me. I pulled my hand back.

“Bedelia knows they are in Baltimore,” Aritca said.

“She has not told me anything yet,” I said, surprised.

“She knew you would run off to confront them. She is gathering more intel. See, I tell you more than she does. I should be going to Mercanius,” Artica continued to sulk.

A lot of construction was going on as Jade was building her manor. We pulled up to the old house with other black SUVs parked. Three very large catkin stood on the porch as I approached with Artica. Artica moved in front of me protectively. The cores of all the catkin guards were upper tier one. Jade came out of the house to meet me. She was in a rich royal blue dress and smiling.

Jade came and gave me a hug. She whispered, “Not a word about me wearing a dress. Thank you for coming.”

We went to the living room, where Jade’s father stood from the couch. He was a large man, not tall but wide. He reminded me of Fabio, but with an even more incredible mane of hair that went halfway down his back.

He smiled and held out his hand. We shook and squeezed, and he tried to assert his dominance…at least, that was what I think he was doing. I returned the squeeze, and he winced, “I can see my daughter’s infatuation with you.” He shook out his hand after breaking the handshake.

“It is a pleasure to meet you, Mister Ethan Deleonis,” I replied.

His large eyebrows arched, “Pleasure? My wife has caused you a headache, and my daughter has dragged me out to meet you when you are extremely busy. Yes, the rumor mill has been churning with your associations with the vampyres, wolfkin, and now the elves. My daughter’s demon friend gets around.”

“So you have been checking into me, then?” I smiled cautiously.

“Yes. Yes, I have. You changed my daughter, and I had concerns that you were influencing her. My fears have not abated, but meeting you makes me more curious than concerned. Jade has not given me any info about you that I could not find on my own,” Ethan replied.

“What do you want to know?” I said, sitting on the couch. Jade sat next to me, and Ethan sat across from us. Artica stood behind the couch I was on.

“Did you do what you did for Jade to her,” He indicated to Artica behind me.

“Yes,” I said.

Ethan nodded slowly, “And Anya Deleon?” Seeing my surprise, he continued, “I know Agatha had an interest in her and that she is in Canada for pre-production of a new television show.”

“Yes. Anya is stronger.” I replied.

Ethan straightened, “I am not my wife. I will not harass you, and I hope we can be on good terms. It was good to meet you face-to-face.” The large man stood, “I will not take any more of your time.”

Jade interrupted, “Just ask him, father. You want to ask him to enhance others for you. Just ask.” She rolled her eyes.

Ethan growled at his daughter softly, “Now is not the time.” He looked at me, “Sorry, I will handle Agatha.”

Jade knew I needed life essence and pushed me, almost uncomfortably, “Caleb, give him an answer now so he is not left wondering.”

I did not like being put on the spot and that my ability was in the open. Not that my secret was going to remain forever. I figured I might have to move on then to a higher layer. I tempered my response, “I would be open in the future, schedule permitting. But as you are aware, I am dealing with things.”

Jade seemed to realize she was pushing when she shouldn’t and remained quiet. Ethan nodded, reading my face. “Maybe in the future, then. I will leave it up to you. You can contact me through Jade if you change your mind.”

We shook hands, and he left. Jade looked apologetic, “I am sorry, but I thought you could get life essence from additional partners.”

“And make the catkin stronger,” I finished her thought.

Jade turned red in embarrassment, “Yes. That was a consideration. My father obviously read you better than me. He knew you would not be open to it immediately. I am sorry I pushed. Can you forgive me?” She had a pleading look in her eyes, afraid I may abandon her as she had just done what her mother had.

“Jade, we have a good relationship. Do not spoil it.” I considered, “As I told your father, maybe in the future.”

As we were leaving, Artica gave her input, “You can not blame her. She is an alpha, and their job is to ensure the strength and growth of the catkin.”

As Artica drove us away, I could see it from Jade’s perspective, but essentially, she was asking me to do what Agatha was trying to get me to do but for her father instead. The only difference was they were being upfront about it. Still, it felt like I was being used.