Chapter 138 Broken Chains

I needed to confront Agatha.  As I put on my transit delve gear, I realized I could not fix everything with my incubus tool.  I believed I had screwed up with Vestra and Constance.  I realized my incubus nature and human mentality were warring with each other on the correct path to resolve issues.

Kiri was not going to come with me when I confronted Agatha. She was still giving me the woman’s evil eye as I prepped.  Kiri was probably going to be angry at me for quite some time.  Even if my gamble with Constance paid off, she would probably continue to be angry with me for not listening to her advice.

That left just Beledia, Artica, and me driving together to Georgia.  I would have brought some additional muscle but I did not want to endanger anyone else.  Bedelia would scout for me with her ability before I went in and talked with Agatha. Artica would stay with Bedelia and be available as backup. Artica climbed into the back and quickly fell asleep, still getting the pain medications out of her system. She was just happy to be coming along.

I was driving the Raptor as we left the cabin.  Bedelia was quiet for a while before asking, “So you attempted to turn an enemy into an ally?”

“That was the plan.  I do not think it worked.  Even with my charm, I could not convince Constance to attack Bastian, Eilina’s father.  I could have pressed, but it would have been suicide. I did use my charm to erase all knowledge of Eilina.” After a moment, I added, “On the bright side, I did add 110 life essence.”

I was about to turn on the radio when Bedelia questioned me, “I think you just drew attention to yourself.  Even meeting with Constance in Dakkon’s presence was probably not a great idea.”  Bedelia turned to me, “Caleb, you are too trusting.  Especially when it comes to the female gender.”

“Not true, it took me months to trust you, Bedelia?” I joked in response.

“Yeah, thanks for making me the exception to your normal stick ‘em first and figure things out later mentality,” she chirped back.

“It is working out for you, is it not?” I was a little too terse with my words, and she flinched. There was another long period of silence.

“If it was me, Caleb, if I was a succubus, I would have learned the binding contract ability you mentioned,” Bedelia said softly.

“You did not want to be bound, Bedelia. I do not like the idea of enslaving anyone.” I countered.

“There are degrees. You could bind people to silence or not to take a specific action. It does not have to be slavery. In the supernatural world, it is normal to have such contracts. I am working on learning a spell now to do just that,” she admitted.

“Are you planning to control me like a puppet,” I asked her. I tried to sound unconcerned, but something tickled at me, remembering how helpless I had felt when Iris captured me in her basement’s containment formation.

“No, I am learning it to protect you! After we left Australia, you left a trail of breadcrumbs. Those Aussie girls might not figure it out, but you enhanced them, did you not?” I nodded slowly. That is what you do…you take a woman’s life essence and give your partner a gift in return. I don’t know—maybe out of guilt. We have talked about…”

“You all have been talking about this?” I asked a little heatedly, not liking everyone talking behind my back.

“Well, Iris, Abigail, and myself mostly. We want to protect you, Caleb. To protect you from yourself. You tell us everything you do so freely. We know more about incubi than anyone else on the planet,” she said passionately. I had kept secrets from them. Not many, but I had secrets.

“Andromeda warned me, you know. She said everyone would betray me given enough time,” I replied, and it was met with silence.

It was a good hour before Bedelia said, “I am no saint, Caleb, but I have morals. If you started killing people for life or just killing indiscriminately, I would confront you.”

I asked slowly, “Would you try to kill me?”

“No. I think I would try to reason with you first, and if that did not work, I would just leave.” Bedelia fidgeted in her seat, uncomfortable at her admission. Bedelia’s core was being raised very slowly, so if she wanted the maximum effect, she had years at my side to go.

Seeing her discomfort, I replied, “Do not ever be afraid to talk openly, Bedelia. I think that is the only reason why everything sort of works. I do not lie to all of you; you are all honest with me.”

“Damn straight!” Artica interrupted from the back seat. She sat up and belched loudly. “Ugh, hospital food disagrees with me. Are we getting close?”

“The GPS on the dashboard says 36 minutes. I will park a mile away and let Bedelia scout the estate,” I noted as Bedelia zoomed in on the map to find somewhere to park.

Artica started stretching in the back seat, and soon, I parked the truck where Bedelia indicated. It was early morning, and we were on a dirt farm road. The plantation manor was about a mile and a half away, according to the map. Bedelia relaxed into the passenger seat and sent out her senses, her eyes going the familiar white.

It was thirty minutes before she blinked, “Agatha is there. She has nine men guarding the perimeter and two men inside. Mandy is in the house with her. There were four cars in the barn, and one was damaged, front right fender.”

Artica practically crawled out of the back seat, “It was them. That confirms it. What is your plan, Caleb? Fly in and take them by surprise?”

“Well, it is daylight outside, so I thought I would just walk to the front gate and try to converse rationally with Agatha. If that did not work, I would try to be more persuasive,” I cracked my knuckles. Bedelia rolled her eyes.

“How will we know if you need help?” Artica asked. I just thumbed my finger at Bedelia. I got out of the car and tried to appear as non-threateningly as possible. I was in all-black tactical gear. I pinged Aria in my mind space for a change of clothes. I decided to go with my shock-weave Armani suit. Then, I began to walk back to the main road.

Why walk when I had the Raptor? Because I had just lost my new Cadillac Escalade to these men, and I did not want to lose Artica’s luxury truck. The driveway to the manor was almost a mile long and concealed by large hardwoods, fresh with new green leaves. The smell of spring was in the air and would have been refreshing if not for my current mission.

As I approached, the five men in the front of the house had their hands on their weapons. “I am here to see Agatha Corleonis. I do not have an appointment. I hope that is ok?” I smiled as non-threateningly as possible. I was not worried, knowing the bullets could not penetrate my skin. At most, they would leave a welt.

One guard entered the house, but I could see Agatha on the back patio through the windows with breakfast in front of her. The catkin guard returned, “She said she would talk with you. Right this way.”

I walked around the house instead of through it. I did not want any surprises. As I rounded into the stone patio, Mandy sat stiffly beside Agatha. I helped myself to one of the two open seats. The table had fresh fruit and small pastries. “Do you want some tea or coffee, Caleb?” Agatha finally asked flatly.

“Coffee, black,” I said, nodding at her hospitality.

Agatha told Mandy, “Go get our guest coffee from the kitchen,” Mandy jumped to do so, happy to escape the tension. “So, are you here to punish me? I was told to await your arrival by the Catkin Council.”

“Oh really? Interesting.” I took a strawberry and ate it. I was trying to act cool and relaxed. If the Catkin Council was against Agatha, then I would have to thank Jade.

Agatha looked constipated. If I had known she had been backed into a corner like this, I would have driven straight in instead of walking. Agatha burst a little, “What would you have done in my position, demon? You took my daughter from me. You took my money from me. And now you are taking my allies from me.”

I hardened myself, “You are going the sympathy route, Agatha? I thought better of you.” My eyes harden on her.

Mandy came and put the coffee cup on the table, and she was shaking in fear. I also looked at her face and could see it in her eyes. Mandy thought I was here to kill Agatha and probably her as well. Agatha’s face had morphed from pitiful to hard, “You can not blame a lady for trying.”

This encounter was going just like my meeting with Constance. The wheels had already been greased. I pushed the cup of coffee away, “I think I will avoid drinking anything you prepared for me, Mandy.” Mandy flinched, and I looked at Agatha, “So if you were in my position, what would you do? I have been drugged, spied on, and there was an attempt to kidnap one of my friends. What do you do with your enemies, Agatha?” I asked calmly.

I could see Agatha’s throat tighten, and she did not speak. I let the silence hang until she finally answered. “I would remove them from the board,” my truth sense ability rang that she was telling me the truth.

“Perfect!” I said, clapping mockingly like a villain. Mandy looked ready to bolt. I directed my gaze at her, “Mandy, why are you here? And why are you so fearful today.”

Mandy was paralyzed, and Agatha answered, “We were told you were a tier-four demon.”

“By whom?” I asked sharply. I did not like where this was going.

“I…I was seeking allies, and when I contacted the Vampyre Lord Del Roy, he told me last night it was better to be a friend with the most powerful demon on Earth instead of his enemy. He called you his close associate,” she swallowed hard.

I understood that in terms of power on Earth, the vamps were right below the Magus Arcanum. Agatha continued, “Dakkon abandoned me, and late last night, Constance Alarian broke off contact with me. The Catkin Council has sanctioned me. You have put me on an island so far from shore…”

She stopped speaking, and I could sense her cracking, ready to break down, maybe in genuine tears. This was not her attempt to garner pity either. She really was cornered. I let her stew for a few minutes while Mandy was shaking next to me. I enjoyed the power this gave me, and I tried to find compassion for the woman. “What did you hope to accomplish by taking Artica?”

Agatha considered, “To leverage the leopardkin to find allies and maybe get you to assist me.”

“That is not going to happen,” I said harshly.

“I can…” Agatha started.

“No, you can not, Agatha. You have forced this situation, and it is out of your control. You can not make amends and fix this. You will do what I tell you. You can start by releasing Mandy from your service.” I turned to Mandy. “You can go. Have one of the guards drive you to Jade and beg her forgiveness for spying on her.” Mandy’s eyes flashed to Agatha but quickly returned to mine and bolted from the patio, not waiting for the matriarch’s permission.

Agatha recoiled when my attention returned to her. She blurted, “You could use me. Increase my core and make me serve you as my daughter does.”

I laughed, “Even now, trying to find an advantage. I am sorry to let you know, but Jade is not under my thumb. We are friends.”

Agatha did not look convinced, “She is not the daughter I raised. You have more influence over her than I ever had.”

I relaxed in my chair, “Be that as it may, Agatha. I do need to neutralize you.” I let that sink in, and I think she considered calling for her guards. “Jade has asked me not to kill you, but I need to ensure you can no longer interfere with me.” She relaxed slightly, sensing I was not going to kill her.

Agatha reached for a thread again, “What will you do if the angelics return? I could be your eyes and ears in Europe. They are not going to let a demon operate in their playground.” It caused me to pause in announcing my judgment.

Agatha had a point. The angelics had abandoned Earth, but they still claimed it as their own. Rincewind had a better handle on this than Agatha and more connections as well. “I do not need you as an informant. You can remain here on this estate and spend your days thinking about your decisions. If I learn you have exceeded the confines of this plantation with your machinations, my next visit will not be so cordial.” I stood and started to walk away. I felt powerful and in complete control.

It really was a very nice estate to retire to. I decided to walk through the house on my way out. I reached for the French doors and suddenly felt very lightheaded. Like I was falling—intense vertigo. I was immediately suspicious that Agatha had pulled a trick. But that was not the case. This was something else. I focused inward and immediately realized something was rocking my mind space.

Unsteady on my feet, I shifted to my mind space. I was in the pedestal room, half expecting to find Andromeda here. Instead, the pedestal that connected me to her was cracking slowly. I watched the pedestal slowly crumble into a pile of stone and then turn to dust. My tether to Andromeda was severed? Nashima found me staring as the crumbled remains slowly turned from dust to nothing—completely disappearing.

“What does this mean?” I asked her.

“Your master is either dead, sent to the void, or captured and bound,” she answered. I knew the answer immediately as Carrie had foreseen this. Andromeda was exploring Mercanious on my behalf. She had been captured and cut off from her servants.

“If she has been captured and is freed, will the connection reestablish itself?” I asked Nashima, who was studying the area where the pedestal used to be.

“No. It would require you to form a new connection and consent to it. I think you are free from her influence.” She looked up at me and smiled, “Congratulations, incubus. You are now free to do whatever you want.”

I nodded. Of course, this meant I would get the complete harvest from my partners. My strength was about to go up leaps and bounds. When Carrie had told me I had to go and rescue Andromeda, she had not mentioned this. Why would I go after her if I was free of her?

I did not wait for the others to find me in the pedestal room. I returned to the real world and still felt the aftereffects in my head. I raised my hand to the door again, and my world went black, and I passed out from the backlash of losing my connection with my powerful demon master.

I woke in a bed with Agatha hovering over me and screaming, “Can you please tell your girls to stand down! They think I did this to you! They killed two of my guards and are outside the house!”

I sat up but still felt woozy. It was like I was suddenly in an unfamiliar body. I nearly fell down the stairs as I walked to the front door. The mid-day sun seemed way too bright, and I was blinded. Artica ran to me with an aether pistol in hand. “Caleb, are you alright? What did that bitch do to you?”

“It was not her.” I leaned on her for support, “I will be fine.” She helped me as we went to the Raptor, which now had bullet holes in the hood and side door. “Shit,” I said, fingering one of the holes. “Get me home. You killed two of Agatha’s men?” I said, climbing into the passenger back seat with Bedelia.

“Just one. The other should live.” Artica went around to drive, sounding unconcerned with their fates. I lay down, put my head in Bedelia’s lap, found myself exhausted and quickly fell asleep as Artica spun out, leaving the driveway.