Chapter 91

After talking with Iris and Bedelia about our transit delve, I ended up in Iris’ bed.  We changed the sheets to some brand-new silk sheets Iris had purchased.  Iris had locked her bedroom door and threw herself at me.  She wanted to experiment with some different sexual positions.  After some heavy kissing, we were naked in her bed.  The first position had us on our sides, spooning, with me entering her from behind, spooning her.  Her top leg was then raised straight up so she could administer to herself while I entered her in a steady, repeated motion.  It hit her G-spot and brought her to multiple soft screaming orgasms, with a tiny amount of saliva helping her along.  As I wore her out, we never got to the second position she wanted to try.  After satisfying Iris, I found my harvest was a disappointing seven life essence.  At least Iris was happy sleeping and satisfied.

The boxes from Europe were in the basement, and I decided to try bringing the items into my mind space.  When I opened the locked bedroom door, I found Vida standing there.  She had been listening.  Vida whispered, “When is it going to be my turn?”

I had no plans, but maybe I could motivate her,  “If you can graduate high school with honors, I will spend a night with you.  I promise.”  She stared at me.  I thought I was delaying anything with Vida for two and a half years.  Hopefully, by then, she would find someone else.  Vida stared at me, and slowly a mischievous grin formed, and she turned and left.  I almost stopped her to ask what that was about but decided to get to the basement.

I separated out the Puccini chocolate packages and brought them upstairs.  Then I got to the good stuff.  All the items I had bought in the Amsterdam bazaar.  I unpacked everything and laid it out on the floor.  I picked up the heavy aether pistols, the Guardian model that took an entire unit of aether to fire.  I held it for a few minutes and then focused.  It was time to assimilate items into my mind space.  It took a good minute and was like swallowing a golf ball.  It was more than a little unpleasant doing it.  I eagerly entered my mind space to see how it had worked.

In the pedestal room, the pistol was on the white marble floor.  I picked it up and rotated it in my hand.  I spun around, looking for Lilith, but I didn’t see her.  I created a weapons rack in the dojo and placed the pistol there.  Thinking it might not be a great idea to fire the actual weapon in my mind, I took a few moments to make a replica.  With the actual weapon being in my mind space, it only took seconds to make a mind space replica to practice with.

Lilith walked in, looked around, and picked up the real pistol off the wall rack.  I screamed, “Don’t fire that in here!”

She gave me a look like I was an idiot, “It takes aether to fire.  I can’t draw aether.  Besides any damage you did in here, you could easily repair.”  She shook her head, acting disappointed, and left me in the dojo.  There was something about Lilith, like she thought she was better than me.

With her gone, I went and added all the gear in the packages to my mind space, and then I went to the garage and added the duffel bags of equipment I purchased in the DC bazaar.  I was getting used to the uncomfortable feeling when I assimilated items.  It was actually a incredibly remarkable ability.  In the real world, when I pulled the item from my mind space, it materialized from my hand out—like it was 3D printed in about two seconds.  The fact that it was not instantaneous was good to know now rather than when I was engaged in combat.

Sending the item back to the mind space after I had assimilated took almost no aether, and I no longer felt like I was swallowing a golf ball.  I found that I did need to be in physical contact with the object. The only thing I hadn’t added to my mind space was all the meal bars.  I actually could live without eating and just live off life essence.  Using my life essence to assimilate the meal bars seemed like a waste since they would be consumed. It was best just to pack them in the backpack and carry them.  After adding all the gear, I had already burned through half of my aether.  However, I was always going to be armed and equipped now. I ended up organizing all the gear and weapons in my dojo, creating a wall of storage.

It was getting close to sunrise, and I felt comfortable storing and retrieving my items.  My thoughts turned to Lilith.  I needed to make a decision.

When I reentered my mind space, I had plans to end Lilith.  Dismissing her and ending her existence.  I found her again reading a book in the park section of my mind space.  She was wearing some of the clothes I had made for Pandora.  Her top was a loose pale pink silk top. The bottoms were a conservative black pair of denim jeans.  She still had the thick-rimmed glasses on that I had made her.  I caught the title of the book as she looked up at me,  *To Kill a Mockingbird*.  It was one of the books for my AP Literature course.

“Is it time?”  She asked.

“We are not going to be practicing in the dojo today,” I said solemnly.

“I know.  You are here to kill me,” she said without emotion.

“How?  I didn’t give you access to my current thoughts,” I asked, befuddled.

She shook her head, disappointed in me, “Think Caleb.  What was your state of mind when you created me?  For what purpose did you manifest me here?”  She stood in front of me as I pondered.

I thought of my state of mind when I created Lilith.  It had happened directly after Mandy.  When I had lost control and abused her, I punished her.  I had also been tricked by my friend James and Mandy.  Did I?  I voiced my thought, “Were you created to help me be more aware?  To help me keep my control?”

Lilith smiled and suddenly looked too beautiful, “That is the crux of it.  I was created from your subconscious reasoning.  I was given the purpose to keep you grounded and guard against manipulation.  To keep you in control and give aid to your thought.  A sort of counselor or sounding board when you get stumped.  I am here to help you see purpose and puzzle out the actions of your enemies.”

I folded my legs under me and fell to the grass.  Lilith followed me to be Indian style across from me and continued, “You had to come to this conclusion yourself.  You had to want actual advice.  I am not a tool like Pandora.  I am more of a sounding board.  And no, you should not give me access to everything in your mind space.  I should have access to your conscious thoughts and interactions, though.  The more data I have, the easier it is for me to process the motives of others and offer advice.”

“So, if you are my reasoning and mental guardian, what is Pandora?”  I asked.  I had a feeling but wanted to hear Lilith voice it.

“You created her as you were leaving Miami.  She is your manifestation of lust and deceit,”  she said with a smile.  “That was why Andromeda took her.  She wanted to ensure she wouldn’t betray you in the future.”  I had that cold feeling spread through my body.

“So, how best should I use you?”  I asked, starting to trust Lilith.

Lilith had several suggestions to help fortify my mind from outside influence and even Andromeda’s influence.  She even suggested that once I repaid the essence that Andromeda had invested in my creation, I should brooch the topic of renegotiation.  I was still intimidated by her, but maybe with Lilith’s help, I could overcome that fear.  Lilith had secured her existence in my mind.  If she proved her usefulness, I might even add another mental construct.

I went and showered in the bathroom in Iris’ room.  I left early for some flight practice.  Thursday flew by as I added over thirty books to my mind space at school.  This time it was a selection of psychology books for Lilith.  Yes, I admitted, she had won me over.  She may have a slightly condescending attitude, but I needed someone to keep me grounded.  Every other woman in the real world was throwing themselves at me.  Lilith was my constant reminder I was not infallible and that not everyone was out for my best interests.

Thursday night I spent with my parents.  We had dinner and joked and talked about the Amsterdam trip.  My mother was complaining about the new sales staff she had trained.  They were flying in the next week to finish their training in DC and then flying to various cities in the United States.  Mom liked to say they had more bod than brains.  We listened to her stories while eating dinner.  Dad laminated returning to the dealership, but we all knew he loved his job.

After my parents went to bed, I went into the living room and added another forty books to my mind space, mostly classic novels.  I then entered my mind space to talk with Lilith.  I hoped she might have softened slightly after adding so many books over the last few days.  Lilith was in the dojo handling the aether pistol I had replicated.  She looked up, “You need to build yourself a training ground in here.  Research some SWAT training scenarios.  Having a weapon is not the same as being able to use it.  One of the books from Iris’ library mentioned shielding bracers.  They are expensive and draw a lot of aether, but defense is just as important as offense.”  We walked to the library, and she showed me the reference to the bracers.  There was also a shield belt, but the bracers created a forward-facing tower shield that was much stronger.  The belt created a weak shield around your entire body, good for melee combat but not so much for ranged combat, where the enemy was attacking from a single direction.  I planned to purchase both.

I spent a few hours with Lilith in the dojo training. This time she actually taught me.  We started with the pistols and then moved on to the tetsubos.  We finished with some hand-to-hand combat.  She was rougher than Pandora, lacking experience even though she had all my knowledge.  When we did grappling training, she made no effort to get a cheap feel or offer flirtatious banter like Pandora.  I found that I missed that.  It made the training much more fun.  This was more like work.

Friday’s hockey practice was very short, as everyone was still recovering.  Coach Adams added two puck entry plays and worked the rest of the time on defense.  The guys worked hard, but we were playing a very good team.  Classes flew by, and I told everyone at lunch that I didn’t want them wasting time driving up to Philadelphia.

The bus left at 3 pm after school for Philadelphia.  We got a little send-off from the students, including my array of friends.  I sat alone with my headphones and worked on my Apollyon phone.  The auction for the artwork was set up for March 15th to March 19th.  The items had been received by Christie’s and cataloged.  Their authenticity was in process.  The minimum acceptable bids looked outrageous.  For an opening bid, two hundred and seventeen items ranged from $50,000 to $5,000,000—jewelry, paintings, sculptures, and furniture.  The sprawling estate was up for bid starting at 90 million and already had three bids.  Taxes were going to be killer, but I wouldn’t have to worry about money ever again.

I paged through the items, and although there were a number of things I wouldn’t have minded keeping, but decided I didn’t need them. The bus arrived at the hotel, and I found myself in my own room, the only one on the team.  The coach wanted to make sure the star got some uninterrupted sleep.  I showered and crashed onto my bed.

The game was at noon the next day, and the arena was packed.  I thought the home team had a great turnout, but I noticed dozens of hockey scouts in the pre-game skate.  There were small sections of fans with signs for me.  I didn’t understand what was going on.  I knew my last game had gone viral.  I had demonstrated unreal stamina and had a ridiculous game-willing goal, but this seemed overkill.  At the bench, coach Adams said, “Damn, being in ESPN highlights seems to have brought the fans out of the woodwork.  Best you don’t disappoint them.”  He had a grin on.

“Was this your doing?”  I asked.

He joked, “What? Me?  No.”

My truth ability told me he was lying.  He had set this up somehow.  Maybe he sent highlight reels of my game.  The section for college coaches was following me as I skated.  So I needed to decide on how exceptional to be today.  No one from Iris’ house had traveled here, so were all the young women in stands trying to get my attention with signs actual fans?  That kind of felt good.  It would have been nice if one could have found me at the hotel last night.

When the puck dropped, it became the most physical game of my high school career.  The other team had three demis on it—a wolfkin, orc, and what I think was a dwarf goalie.  The opposing team targeted me exclusively.  It allowed me to get two great passes to James, and we went up 2-0 in the first ten minutes.  Coach tried to cycle me off the ice, but the other team quickly tied the game.  It looked like I was going to be playing a lot again.

I waved the coach off when he called me in for changes and finished the first in the ice, mostly on defense.  Starting the second, the score was still tied, and the refs complimented my stamina.  I hadn’t really slowed down, so a few minutes into the period, I started to feign fatigue.  I started going in spurts, got a breakaway on a shift change, and scored an easy goal on a give-and-go.  The other team quickly notched two goals in response.  Our defense was exhausted, and our goalie was overwhelmed.  They scored a gain, and the period ended with us down 5-3.  I couldn’t do it alone, no matter how impressive I was.

I went defensive in the third and waited for an opportunity.  I got James on a two-line pass, and he scored to bring us to within a goal.  I had turned down my skating and only went all out for very short bursts.  I even took short periods on the bench, which caused the other team the opportunity to score again.  So we were down two goals with nine minutes left.  I needed to decide if we were going to try and win the game.  My teammates seemed finished, hanging their heads in defeat.

I jumped over the boards, went hard for a few minutes, started a drive down center ice, split two defenders, and took the goalie head-on. A sharp shot to the top corner, glove side, hit the back of the net.  After the celebration, I took a seat on the bench, and my team rallied on defense with us only being down by a goal again.  When I hit the ice again, my team was playing with fervor.  I managed to set up James for a feed to the other winger on a tic-tac shoot for an easy goal.  Tie game, and I hadn’t exceeded human norms during the entire game—well, maybe my stamina.  I stayed on the ice and took a high stick from a frustrated defenseman.  It gave us a power play for the last 1:42 of the game.  We scored the go-ahead goal with 29 seconds remaining.  The time ran out, and we pulled off the upset.  We showered and loaded onto the bus, an excited group.

I slid into the same seat with my headphones and checked my phone messages, ignoring my celebrating teammates.  I had tons of emails from the scouts from various schools over the last few days, and now congratulations for today’s win. I could use hockey for a scholarship, but I didn’t need the money.  I ignored the messages and answered my other messages.  Iris, Bedelia, and Artica were ready to go.  I hadn’t planned on taking Artica with us, but she needed to get accustomed to the transits sometimes.

I filtered the communications with the contractor.  The concrete pouring happened on Friday.  The septic would be inspected on Monday, and I could move in Tuesday.  The work was still going to take time, but the place was now livable.  That was a lot quicker than expected.  I asked about extending the garage.  There was a three-car garage, and I had three expensive Bentleys coming, but having more space would be nice.  Unfortunately, the contractor said the permits for building on the ledge were difficult.  He suggested I build a large workshop by the road at the bottom of the hill.  A sort of maintenance building.

I liked the idea but decided I should just buy something off-site.  Some secret storage that was not connected to Apollyon.  I started searching but didn’t find anything by the time the bus finished the long drive.  The trio of Bedelia, Iris, and Artica met me in my car.  I hopped in with Artica driving.  Artica said, “I got my gear together but couldn’t find the gear you purchased from the Amsterdam Bazaar.”

“It is fine.  I am ready to go.  I am going to take a nap while you drive.”  I fell asleep listening to the three making idle conversation.  We would explore the unknown, entering the transit from a rarely used location.