Chapter 98 The Good Samaritan

On the drive over to see Frost, I was nervous.  Maybe a better word would be intimidated.  The few times I had met her, she had one of those ‘I know better than everyone else’ auras.  I pulled down the private road for Cloud Nine Ranch.  It was the property that Jade had purchased to be the seat of her rule.  The ranch was an old horse ranch but currently didn’t have any horses in sight.  The largest structure, a small manor, was where Jade was living, but she had plans to build something more extravagant in the next five years.  She was already renovating stables and repairing fences.

Jade had told me in one of her texts that she loved riding, so she decided on the ranch as the place to set her cornerstone.  The cornerstone was a semi-magical rock but more of a symbol in catkin culture, denoting her right to lead from atop it.

The main residence needed a lot of work with peeling white paint and some visible dry rot.  I parked and walked to the old porch, lit by ancient looking yellow lights.  Monsoon opened the door for me,  “Good evening, sir.”  It was 2:00 am, so I guess he should have said good morning.  “If you will follow me,” he said, turning.  Monsoon already knew I could enhance cores from when he healed Abigail.  He brought me to an office, and a tired-looking Jade was working at a desk.

“Caleb!”  She stood and rose to hug me and kiss me as Monsoon retreated from the room.  “I know it doesn’t look like much, but I got 340 acres.  We are working on restoring the fencing for four pastures, and I have lined up a contractor to refurbish the larger stable and the main house.  They just can’t start for two months.  I am planning to start purchasing some horses soon, though,” Jade spoke excitedly and passionately.

“That is great!  The place is secluded and gorgeous.  You need to get some rest, though.  You look exhausted, Jade,” I said, looking around the cluttered office.

“Ugh, Caleb, you have no idea!  Problems every day!  Mandy now lives here!  Can you believe it!  My mother forced her on me as a favor for getting the bodyguard I wanted to replace Artica,”  Jade said, exasperated.  “He will arrive in a week, or maybe sooner.” She advised, “Be careful what you say while you are here.  I know Mandy is a spy, but at least I know where she stands.”

Mandy was in this house? I didn’t think I would be coming here again. Also, with Mandy here, I decided I couldn’t if I should enhance Frost. Definitely not today. Shit, what about Anya? She lived here, and I had raised her core to lower tier 2, and she was working with Jade. Mandy would run into her regularly. It wouldn’t take Mandy long to sniff out her true tier 2 strength. My head started to hurt as the web Agatha was weaving was actually working.

I asked, “What is Mandy doing for you? Can you just kick her out?”

Jade shook her head, no, “It is complicated. I may be an alpha, but I still answer to the catkin leaders. They gave me the territory, and my mother holds sway and has many favors she can call in, like this one.”

I pondered how to help, “If you have Monsoon, do me a little favor I can help.” I had Jade’s attention, “A friend of mine messed up her knee.  You probably know her from school, Traci, the gymnastics team captain.  If he heals her, I can get some contractors out of her in less than a week. Maybe you can renovate one of the outbuildings and stuff Mandy in there away from you?”  I knew my charm may have faded on the contractor I used on my house, but enough of his drive to please me should be lingering to get him out here.

“I don’t know her.  Getting Mandy out of the house would be a good start.” Jade was in deep thought but suddenly pivoted the conversation, “I heard Vida, Eilina, and Abigail joined the track team,” Jade said.  “Is it okay if I join them?”

I hadn’t been aware of them joining the team, but it made some sense.  Abigail was like Vida’s surrogate mother.  I responded casually, “Really?  What events?  Do you even have the time?”

“I just need something to do to vent.  I was thinking of pole vault.  I would just need to train four days a week for an hour.  There are seven Saturday meets in the spring.  Vida is doing shotput and discus.  I think Eilina is trying the long and triple jump, but I am unsure.  I am usually focused on work at lunch and just catch snippets of conversation,” Jade admitted.

“And all of you complain about me competing with humans.  And here you are, joining the track and field team,” I teased Jade.  It was obvious why she wanted to do it.  Jade wanted to get closer to the women around me to inundate herself with my family and friends.  Or pseudo harem, I guess.

“So you don’t want me to join the track team?”  She asked, sounding hurt.

I clarified, “No, do what you want. You do not need my permission.” I smiled reassuringly, “I was just trying out my hand at irony.  So where is the indomitable yeti, Frost?”

Jade’s expression changed to discomfort, “She is on the second floor.  Take a left at the top of the stairs, last door.”  I could tell Jade was not happy at essentially ordering her bodyguard to have sex with me.  I nodded and headed up the stairs.

The floorboards creaked as I walked and knocked on the door.  No answer.  I opened the door and found Frost sitting on the bed, fully dressed and glaring at me.  “Hey, Frost.  You look excited to see me, not in a good way.”  A flash of amusement appeared on her face before returning to a glower.

Her words were sharp, “Let’s get this over with.”  She stood and began undressing.  Frost was quickly down to her bra and panties.  She had a muscular build with square shoulders and several scars.  I didn’t remember seeing scars on Artica when we were intimate.

“Stop,”  I said with a soft command in my voice.  I walked to stand before the tall catkin.  She had a hard stare while I reached out, and she flinched when I touched her shoulder.  I traced a scar that ran along her bicep, “How did this happen?”  I asked softly.  She was about to make a snide retort, but I added with genuine concern, “The truth, please.”

Frost’s face hardened but softened slightly, “Combat training.”

I traced two more of her scars.  She had dozens.  “Why does Artica not have scars?”  I asked empathetically.

Frost heaved an aggravated sigh, “We got fewer healing tokens among the trainees since we were so weak.  I…”  Her eyes misted slightly, but she regained her composure quickly, “I gave most of my tokens to her.  If I could hide a wound, I would,” she admitted while gaining back some of her stoicism.

“You love your sisters, don’t you, Frost?”  I asked. I knew Frost and Artica had given themselves to a life of servitude in exchange for their other two sisters to have a chance at a better life.

Frost looked indecisive.  She probably felt she had told me too much, and I hadn’t even used any of my abilities or her.  She didn’t respond to me, and I felt the armor of the tough woman cracking.  I spoke slowly, “We are not going to have sex tonight.  You can put your clothes on.  You are not ready for it.”  Shock and relief appeared on her face.  She wanted to say something but slowly dressed instead while watching me.

As she dressed, I sat on the bed and asked, “We haven’t you asked Monsoon to remove the scars?”

She looked at me, “They don’t affect me.  My looks do not affect how well I am able to do my job.”  She finished dressing but didn’t put on her shoes.  “So what now?” She asked plainly.

“Nothing.  Jade can select someone else if you do not want what I offer.”  I paused, “I can access a permanent strength elixir if you want it.  Artica took it.”

“That was you too! Werewolf shit.  When we practiced a few days ago without using our aether enhancements, she was able to out-muscle me.  I thought she was cheating even though she professed she wasn’t.”  Frost was within herself now thinking.  She was deciding if taking a gift from me would breach the wall she wanted to keep between us.  At least, that is what I assumed she was considering.  I hoped she would say yes and then want the core enhancement in the future.

It was a good fifteen minutes while I waited patiently.  Frost finally said, “Okay, just do not tell Artica.  I want to be able to surprise her next time when we spar.”

I went downstairs and obtained a cup, then went into the bathroom and created the elixir into a cup.  It took longer than it should have.  I should have attempted this before and looked at what I was producing.  It looked thicker than normal semen and slightly off-color with a volume of half a cup.  It looked and had the consistency of melted vanilla ice cream.  I sniffed it…not unpleasant.  I would describe it as new leather.  The aether inside the glass was swirling in my abyssal sight.  It was still active, and I walked upstairs and brought the glass to Frost.

She looked at it skeptically and sniffed after taking it from me.  I was waiting for her to ask where I had gotten the elixir.  She considered me and the glass.  I prodded to her a little, “The potency does fade over time.”  I was going to say something else, but she downed the glass like a shot of whiskey in one motion.

I watched as she inspected the empty glass.  The tiny bit of fluid in the glass quickly lost any remnants of aether in my sight.  Frost spoke with some mild humor, “I hope that wasn’t a joke.” She gave me a hard stare and suddenly said, “I can definitely feel my muscles changing.  They are warm….”

I stood, “It is working.  You will need to eat more over the next week or so.  The enhancement is permanent.”  I left Frost reflecting on the changes happening in her body.  I was sure if I ever told her where the elixir came from, she would not be happy with me.  I drove to my cabin house and was ready to crash but found Artica sprawled naked across my king-sized bed.

She had heard me enter and rolled over provocatively.  “How did it go?  Did you tickle her into submission?  Anything left over for me?” She teased while pretending to cover herself ineffectually.

I slowly took off my clothes, tossing them in a pile.  “Frost wasn’t ready.  I do need to release some sexual frustration if you are game?”

“Only if you can catch me!” Artica got on all fours and arched her back.  She leaped off the bed and tried to sprint past me into the living room, but I grabbed her around the waist in mid-air.  She had let me catch her and squirmed in my arms as I brought her back to the bed.

I pinned her arms above her and took my bodyguard as she purred in pleasure.  She was more aggressive than normal and even scratched my back with her nails.  While she was aggressive, I remained firm, soft, slow, and passionate, taking her over and over beneath me well into the morning.  After I wore out Artica, she curled up under the sheets at my side.  She mumbled as she fell asleep, “Promise you will eventually do the same for Frost.”

I just rubbed her shoulder assuringly as I entered my mind space.  I looked at the banner.  I had replenished some aether with Artica but still wasn’t comfortable harvesting life essence from her.  Lilith was at my side and said, “Getting close.”  She was referring to life essence, which was almost at 200.  It sat at 195/220. “What’s the plan?” Lilith asked.

I smiled, “Get stronger.  Let’s train.  How about we set up a tactical course to practice with the aether pistols?” I had added a number of SWAT and military tactical books to my mind space library.

Lilith’s face was uncertain in indecision, “You are not going destroy the park, are you?”

That was a good question.  Where did I have space in here?  I tried to feel out my mind space.  The center chamber had four hallways off of it.  They led to the library, dojo, bedroom, and the park.  I had some unused space as the mind space outer walls were circular.  So there was space between the four rooms.  I extended the park as much as I could toward the library and bedroom.  It didn’t give me much additional space, but when I was extending the park area, I noticed something that shocked me.

The outer wall of the park could be extended further as well.  It was a few feet, but I was certain that I had pushed the park wall to the limits when I created it.  I went to my other rooms, and all the outer walls had increased.  My mind space was growing.  Not much, but it was getting bigger.  I left my mind space and pulled out Iris’ aether core reader.  I had taken it from her space and assimilated it to store it in my mind space.

My core was larger from when Iris read it at 4.004. It now read 4.015—an increase of one-hundredth of a point. It didn’t take much math to see as my maximum life essence increased, so did the size of my aether core. It seemed I was growing fairly quickly in just three months. It was another thing I needed Andromeda to explain. Over millennia, I would be able to raise my core to ridiculous heights at this rate.

I returned to my mind space, but Lilith did not have the answers for me. She did have an epiphany for me. I had failed to realize that my mind space was a sphere. I had only considered it a large circular disc and hadn’t realized I had height and depth to work with.

I now had a massive basement with a twenty-five-foot ceiling to build a combat playground. The stairs were located in the dojo. Lilith directed me excitedly to create the small cityscape labyrinth. We even added a second subbasement to the mind space, for now, this level was just one large room.

We didn’t touch on the additional levels above us. Apparently, I was massively underutilizing the space. We then played our own version of laser tag. It wasn’t as fun as my time with Traci. Getting shot with Guardian heavy aether pistol burned a hole through my body. The smaller Gunslinger model wasn’t as effective and just penetrated deeply.

We found my incubus form was much more resistant to the damage than my human form. Lilith had taken to wearing a black body suit I made for her and preferred to stalk from the shadows. I was a bumbling idiot to start and slowly learned some modest stealth skills. We played for hours, and Lilith kept score, Lilith 162, Caleb 3. I was pathetic, and one of my wins came when I altered the lighting to daylight brightness in the middle of the match.

The good news was I was improving. Lilith’s learning curve was just faster than mine—I lot faster. I exited the mind space to escape the grinning and overconfident Lilith. I knew what I had to do. Instead of storing them in my library, I needed to study books and hide them somewhere she couldn’t access them to get ahead of her knowledge curve.

The empty basement in my mind space became my man cave. I cut off Lilith’s access and planned to divert knowledge there mentally. Maybe I was being slightly petty, but 162 to 3? That was just embarrassing.

It was Sunday morning, and Artica was still sleeping when I woke. I went into the kitchen and made some burnt toast and eggs. Maybe I needed to tell Abigail about this place so she could cook for me here. I did not want to become my parents, order takeout every night, and have cereal for breakfast.

I opened my phone and called someone who I did not think I would. “Bedelia? Are you up?”

A groggy Bedelia answered, “What? Yeah, Caleb?”

“I wanted to check how things were coming with the land purchase and getting that contractor for the cement warehouse,” I asked.

“Caleb? It is 5:30 in the morning. And I think you mean bunker. The plans I was sent were a two-story concrete warehouse that could survive the apocalypse,” she started to sound more lucid as she woke up.

“Well, I am sending you an address. Come on over, and we can talk,” I said, hung up, and sent her the address.

Bedelia was over forty-five minutes later drinking a black DD coffee. As she entered, she exclaimed, “Damn, Caleb. You have yourself a secret villain’s lair here. Where is the tank of sharks with lasers?”

I preened slightly at Bedelia being so impressed. She was wandering the house on her own now. She was getting increasingly excited as she went from room to room. Twenty minutes later, she was in front of me, rolling to her tippy toes and then back on her heels repeatedly with her hand behind her back. I dodged the expected question, “So now that you know where my place is can you get a property somewhat nearby and get the concrete bunker built anonymously?”

Bedelia puckered her face slightly, “Hmm, Caleb. You said I could renegotiate my contract. The one that is completely verbal and has nothing in writing anywhere?”

“You can have one of the rooms, Bedelia. That is why I invited you over here. I felt bad about your living situation. But can you start to work on the new project, and how are the plates coming for the Bentleys?” I said, taking joy in her growing excitement. I had taken the last step in this relationship, giving her the key to my house.

She stumbled on her words, “Oh, well, yeah, that is what I was going to ask, a room, yeah.” She collected her disappointed thoughts and continued, “I got the plates already and sidestepped the taxes with Dexter Briar’s help. He asked for a bottle of the Macallan 30-Year-old single malt from your collection. Since he saved you around $70,000 in taxes, the $6,000 bottle shouldn’t be an issue.”

Artica was up and dressed, “I will take care of it, Caleb.” Artica was working on moving everything to the house over the next few weeks. Her first priority was setting up the security system, which had not arrived yet.

Bedelia wasn’t thrilled to see Bedelia coming out of the bedroom in just a tee shirt. She also smelled strongly of sex, standing next to us. Bedelia had a forced smile, and I hoped the two would get along. One thing that I liked about these two was their organizational skills. It wasn’t long before they were at the kitchen table and talking about the logistics of getting things moved. Before I knew it, the two were off in the Ford Raptor to pick up Bedelia’s things and move them into one of the rooms.

I was alone in the house and showered. Bedelia was a calculated move. She was living on her own, and I was trusting her more and more. She knew my big secrets and so far hadn’t revealed any yet.

Later in the morning, I called the contractor, who was happy to hear from me, even on a Sunday. As I had thought, he was willing to take on Jade’s renovations almost immediately. It wasn’t long before Jade sent me a thank you text and confirmed Monsoon would heal Traci. That was going to be a bit tricky, but I thought I could just charm her to forget.

Around lunch, Beledia and Artica were back and talking like long-lost friends. They had all of Bedelia’s things in the truck. They had also bought lunch for themselves and not me, which was a queue for me to leave.

My parents were happy to see their long-lost son, and I spent the rest of the day watching the AFC and NFC championship games with my dad. It almost felt like I was a normal high school kid for the evening.