Chapter 84 Bag of Holding

After Lord De Roy left, I woke Artica. She was extremely upset she had succumbed to the vamps spell. She professed she would have been able to resist if she had been awake. She also told me to wake her next time; I just needed to pinch her really hard. Sudden pain would break the spell.

As the frustrated leopardkin went to the shower in a huff, I retreated into my space, went to the banner, and started to try and figure out if I could create my own storage. Even with Pandora’s help, I made no progress on adding anything to my banner. Maybe I couldn’t do what the vamp Lord could. That didn’t make sense, though. Andromeda said that all the knowledge was in genes and I could manifest the power by expending accumulated life essence.

I found it hard to believe that there was no magical way to replicate the vamp tricks. Where the hell was my bag of holding? Seeing my frustration, Pandora suggested, “Caleb, you should focus on something else. Let’s get some practice in the dojo.”

“I will pass Pandora,” I said in a huff. My frustration had reached the point I thought I might do something extreme. I went to the altar in the center chamber and touched it. Andromeda?

She said I could call her, and she would decide whether to answer or not. If I paid the 100 life essence, she would definitely come when I called, but I didn’t have the 100 life essence required for her to answer my request to meet. I waited, and Pandora went and started watching the *Big Bang Theory,* no longer interested. Nothing happened. I left my mind space and returned to find Artica dressing.

Artica asked, “What is the plan today?”

I looked at my phone and had to meet my parents for breakfast in 45 minutes. “Can you look like you are a teenager? You can come to breakfast with me, and I will introduce you to my parents. If you are going to be my bodyguard, you will be seen around me when we get back. We can say you are going to my high school.”

Artica looked at me for a moment, then grinned, “I can get papers. Are you a senior? I can be in your classes?”

“You don’t actually have to go to school. We will just tell my parents you are,” I told her.

Artica shook head with a half-smile, “No, I think it will be easier to be your bodyguard if I am in all your classes and enrolled.” She straightened, “It should be more fun than Naples. For once, I will be the alpha. Well, at least working for the alpha.” She punched my arm solidly. “Maybe I can challenge you to be the alpha?” Her look told me she was not being serious.

“Ok. We can call Bedelia and see if she can arrange it. Keeping you close is probably a good idea. Make sure you stay out of trouble,” I said with mock seriousness in return.

At breakfast, I introduced Artica to them. My dad remembered her from the flight, and that made things awkward as breakfast started. My mother was having trouble wrapping her head around the fact that I had a new girl. To Artica’s credit, she acted like a proper teenage girl. She had even created an elaborate backstory. I watched Artica intently, and she would be able to manage. She was a good actor. It kind of made me rethink if she was acting during all of her interactions with me. I was suddenly so unsure of Artica’s behavior that I decided my next ability would *discern truth*. Artica agreed for both of us to join our parents for dinner.

I told my parents that Maya, Paige’s teammate, would visit tonight and planned to meet her. My mother said she loved Maya and insisted that she join us all for dinner tonight.

I spent the day with Artica, walking the city and clothes shopping. It was mostly me buying clothes for Artica. She modeled some bikinis and convinced me to have a small inground pool, and jacuzzi put in at the cabin. I texted Amelia after Artica came out in a yellow string bikini. Why do women look hotter, nearly naked, instead of completely naked?

By the time we had to meet Maya at the airport, Artica had a complete casual wear wardrobe. She was becoming a money sink to keep her happy. Still, having a lower-tier two bodyguard at my back would be worth the investment. I would have to draw a line for her familiarity with me.

As we were dropping off the packages, I broached the subject, “Artica, we need to talk about how we interact in public.” I had a serious voice.

I continued before she could respond, “When I am morphed into an adult,” I rolled my age forward to emphasize. “I am Apollyon Silverhorn. You will need to act like a professional bodyguard. When I am in my teenage form,” I rolled my age back, “You will need to read the circumstance and act accordingly.”

She nodded slowly and finally said, “I understand. When we are alone?” she asked tentatively.

“You can act like my lovesick kitten,” I said, compromising. I offered a reassuring grin.

Around 9 pm local time, Maya called me and told me she was in the lobby. I met her in the lobby alone, “Maya, you look great!” I said reflexively.  She was dressed in tight black pants, a beige shirt, and a dark brown coat.  She looked slightly haggard from her travel but smiled brightly on seeing me.

“Caleb, I just want to shower, and maybe we could hang out in your room,” she licked her lips.

“There will be time for that later, but we have dinner with my parents first.  I told them you were coming, and my mother insisted on you joining us. Also, I have a friend staying with me.”  I moved to carry her carry-on upstairs.

She followed, and I asked, “So, how is rowing going?”

“Actually pretty good. I feel like the off-season weight training program is going well. When the team heads to Florida, I hope to make a run at the varsity eight. I think I can beat Hiedi out for three seat,” she told me in the elevator.

“Do you plan to use your powers to help?” I asked curious. Maya was a water dryad and had confided in me that she had used her powers to help her get into college. I was sure most of her gains had come from the minor enhancements I had done to her core. I had not pushed her core expansion to the limit; looking at it now, it had already healed. So I couldn’t enhance it further. I stealthy used my bracelet on her. Her core read 1.21, lower tier 2. Fairly strong, and I should get some good life essence.

Maya gave me a mock punch, “I told you I wouldn’t do that. My sister would kill me if I did. I also want to earn it for myself.”

We started down the corridor to my room, “My friend is a catkin.” I opened the door and was surprised to find Artica in a red dress I bought her today. She had used her illusion charm to give her long hair. “Artica, this is Maya, Maya—Artica.”

The two stared at each other, and finally, Maya held out her hand for Artica, who shook it and smiled. They started chatting, and I changed into pants and a button-up shirt. I realized that all the shopping today and all I had gotten for myself was a pack of silk boxers and a pair of running sneakers.

I had changed in front of the woman, and they had snuck some side glances. Maya moved into the bathroom to shower while I told my parents we would be ready in 30 minutes. “I like her,” Artica said.

“She is a good sort. I hope to help her with the strength seed tonight,” I said, listening to the shower running.

Artica beamed, “I would be happy to help with that.”

“If she is open to it, then I don’t mind. You look amazing, by the way. What else can your illusion stud do for your hair?” I asked.

“Color, highlights, and length. It takes a few seconds in front of a mirror to change,” she said.

The shower had stopped, and shortly after, Maya came out in a skin-tight royal blue dress. Her olive skin and white smile made her look amazing, I smiled. Her tight dress made her hips sway as she walked in front of me. She even looked over her shoulder at me and smiled.

The restaurant was high-end, and my parents had already ordered appetizers for everyone. The conversation centered around my two lovely dates. Both my parents delved into their pasts and how things were going for them.  Artica once again did a marvelous job playing a teenager.  Maya acted much more properly, but it was obvious that my mother liked her.  Immediately after our entrees arrived another seat was placed at our table and Lord William De Roy stood by it.  I tried to hide my irritation as I had hoped to avoid dealing with this vamp again.

“Mr. and Mrs. Silversmith, it is a pleasure to make your acquaintance. I am Lord De Roy,” he smiled and kissed the back of my mother’s hand, and I could see his face was fuller and healthier now.  “You have raised a remarkable son.  I met him when he toured the museum a few days ago.  I wanted to let you know the meal is covered, and I will not take much of your time.”  My parent’s eyes glazed over, and the vamp lord turned to my dates.

“What can I help you with, Lord De Roy?”  I said, trying to hold back my anger.  I didn’t want to show concern for my parents because he might try to leverage them in the future.

He looked at Maya and Artica, “Interesting.  Tier 2 and strong enough to resist.”  Maya looked confused, and Artica looked ready to jump in front of the table to defend me.

I told Maya straight forward, “Maya, this is a vamp lord.  We helped one of his descendants escape a purge.”

William focused on me,  “Ah, I thought you came to see me. I own this restaurant. I thought maybe you had reconsidered my offer and called in reinforcements.” He nodded his head toward Maya.

“No,” I said firmly. “I would have called the number you gave me. If you could leave us to enjoy the dinner.” A sudden pain in my temple had me wince. I knew what it was and immediately entered my mind space.

Andromeda was in the dojo beating the crap out of Pandora. I was worried at first but then noticed a grin on Pandroa’s face as she got up after being thrown into the wall. “Ah, there you are, my young incubus. Interesting construct,” she motioned at Pandora. “My fleet is in orbit over a newly acquired world, and I have time. I forgot how time-demanding new offspring were.” I think that was a slight against me, but her bright smile made me uncertain if she was angry, amused, or something else.

I realized that calling her here for something so petty as not being able to create a dimensional space was probably a mistake. I proceeded anyway, “I was having difficulty with manifesting my powers. I thought you could help. I apologize for calling you for something so petty.”

Andromeda’s clothes transformed into a sheer black dress. Her fiery red hair cascaded around her shoulders. Her smile seemed predatory, ok she wasn’t happy to be summoned for something so trivial. I added, “I am also entangled with a vamp lord at the moment.” Her eyebrow cocked.

“You are fighting one of the lost?” She asked, slightly curious.

“Fighting is too strong of a word. I am somehow getting stuck in the middle of a power struggle between two vamps,” she stared, not saying anything, so I added the reason why I had summoned her, “I was seeking a way to create a dimensional space like one of the vamp lords, and I couldn’t add a power to the banner.” She cracked a knowing smile.

She had a devious grin, turned, and focused on Pandora, “A trade then. I will solve both your problems for your construct here.” Pandora seemed to recoil. “Oh, I will just bring you to my mind space for a time to relieve some boredom.” She spun on me, “You can always create another in the interim. When I tire of her, I will return her to you. You did such a good job with this one. She almost has free will.”

A cold, tingling sensation went up my spine. “Free will, but I thought she was just a facet of my subconsciousness?”

“You gave her life essence to animate her and then allowed her access to everything in your mind space. When you create a construct, you need to set boundaries.” Andromeda waved her hand around, “This construct had complete access to everything in your mind space. She might have gotten strong enough to cede control in a few millennia.”

Pandora looked at me with some fear, “I wouldn’t have…I was helping you…I wanted you to…”

Andromeda said, “Next time you create a construct, you set the boundaries before giving it a gift with life essence. Boundaries include where it can roam in here and what knowledge it can have access to.” Andromeda took Pandora’s hand and led her to the pillar in the center of the mind space. “Touch the conduit, Pandora,” Andromeda ordered.

Hesitantly she did as ordered, and it looked like she was sucked into the pedestal without a sound.

Andromeda turned to me, “Don’t worry, my young one, I will train her for you.” Yeah, that didn’t sound ominous at all. Seeing my worry, she added with a smirk, “There is nothing sinister in my offer.” Her face went serious, “You are bound to me. Your strength is my strength. Although your growth is slow, you are doing well.”

Still hesitant, I asked hopefully, “You said you would help me with the vamps and dimensional storage?”

Another smirk from the red-haired demon, “You already have a dimensional space.” She gestured around the mind space. “Once a being reaches tier 3 in their aether core strength, they can assimilate real-world items and store them here. Once an item is assimilated, it can be exchanged freely exchanged back and forth.”

I asked, “Do I have to use life essence to assimilate an item?”

She shook her head, “Just aether, and the amount depends on the object’s mass. I think Earth uses kilograms these days…so about two aether per kilogram. But objects that have life essence can not be assimilated. I suggest you don’t try it as the effort to do so is very unpleasant.”

I was quiet for a while she waited patiently on me, “I actually thought you would have figured this out by now. Last time, I gave you a rather large hint by saying you were on the right track by creating physical constructs in your mind space.”

I lost my temper, “Hints?” I pointed at my Incubus Handbook, “General and incomplete knowledge. If you just told me everything clearly, I wouldn’t be stumbling around in the dark all the time!” I forced myself to calm down, realizing that angering Andromeda wasn’t a smart move.

Fortunately, she didn’t seem upset by my outburst, “Caleb, I have been raising demons for thousands of years. I have had more success by giving limited knowledge and making my young demons acquire the knowledge through trial and error.” She moved across the central room to my banner.

“Caleb,” she started seriously, “I am a demon lord of lust, passion, devotion, and deception. I gather power by lust, and passion. I am devoted to the ones who are loyal to me and deceive all others.” She suddenly looked tired, “One day, I will tell you my tale on how I switched my allegiance from the angelics to the demons. You shouldn’t encounter any angelics on Earth but know they are the same, devoted to other angelics, and everyone else is fair game to use toward their own ends.”

I asked an unbidden question that forced itself forward, “Did you know there is a plot to remove the planet Mercanious from the transit thread?”

Andromeda thought, “No, I typically don’t follow the politics on this layer. But that is interesting.” She looked thoughtful for a moment, “That thread is controlled by the angelics. Have you traveled there? I didn’t sense you moving to that region of space.”

I surmised Andromeda could track me by the pedestal that linked us, and this confirmed it. “No, but I think I will eventually have to travel there. A friend of mine’s parents were sent to help prevent it. We may need to save them.”

Andromeda came and stood before me and looked sad, “Caleb, you can not trust in friendships. But that is a lesson that may take you a thousand years to learn. Eventually, you see the need to bind others to your will.” She turned and looked at the banner, “A give you a choice. I can either help you with your vampyre problem or give you the ability to bind your followers with a contract.”

That sounded like slavery and still put a foul taste in my mouth. “My immediate problem is the vamp. I would be foolish to look beyond that,” I said carefully.

Andromeda looked disappointed or maybe resigned by my decision, “So be it.” A new ability was written on the banner.

Cleanse Death Essence Upper Tier 2 NA

“That ability is a remnant of my angelic blood. You would have never been able to manifest it as a demon. Using it will destroy any vampyre with a tier 2 core. If they have a tier 3 core, you may have to use it a few times to completely destroy them, but it will be possible. You shouldn’t run into any tier 4 vampyres on this layer, but it would only make them sick and weak and not be able to kill them, so don’t try until your power increases further,” she finished explaining.

“Thank you, that is an amazing ability!” I said but suddenly felt a rumble in my mind space.

Andromeda smiled, “The ability is not in your demonic nature. When you return to your body, it will be unpleasant until it settles.” She studied the banner for a moment before returning to the pedestal and putting her hand on it. Before leaving, she said, “Good luck. I will travel to Mercanius on this layer after I am finished on planet of Paradisum. I haven’t had a good clash with the ancestral kin in a while. And I am curious why they are seeking to cut Mercanious from the weave.” She vanished.

The rumble got worse, and the silence in my mind space was deafening. I was already missing Pandora. I bent over in abdominal pain. The pain kept growing. I returned to my body and immediately collapsed from the table and started vomiting. Artica was by my side, instantly asking what was wrong. My senses started to cloud over, and I passed out from the pain.