Chapter 33

Monday’s hockey practice had a new assistant coach present. A friend of coach Sam from college had moved in with her. Her name was Jamie. They played college hockey together. Jamie had been a defenseman and was working with the goalie and defense players while Sam worked with forwards. Jamie was a little rough around the edges. She was short, just 5’5”, and by her short black hair, multiple piercings, and body language, I would guess lesbian. I think she could be pretty if she tried…but she definitely wasn’t trying. The lesbian rumor was swirling around practice with my teammates so I was not the only one.

With our first game just two nights away the team was skating uptight so I used my voice to calm everyone down. The effect had Jamie suddenly watching me intently. I used my abyssal eyes on her and she was just a normal human with no substantial aether core. Maybe my command had impressed her. When the practice ended I noticed Sam and Jamie talking about me as I left the ice. Although I was curious I had to get home, shower, and get to school.

When Rob and his sister showed up I drove them in and got here all the details about Rob’s date Friday night. I had some texts from Rob but they were vague. Now Rob gave me the details. Dinner and a movie and even a half-hearted kiss when she dropped them off at home. They were going shopping on Black Friday together after Thanksgiving. I had thirty $100 bills on my inside pocket for a new phone today and got two and handed them to Rob. He looked like he wanted to refuse but took them anyway.

Sofia, Rob’s sister, in the back seat didn’t see the exchange as she was studying for an exam and was quiet. I told Rob that I hung out with Iris and Jade over the weekend. I had to explain who Jade was as he hadn’t met her yet. Sofia’s ears were twitching at the new gossip and I could see in the rearview she was having trouble focusing on her notes.

Classes flew by and at lunch, Mandy stopped me after I dropped off my tray. “Caleb do you have a minute?” I dropped the food and went to an alcove in the hallway to talk privately with an apparently concerned Mandy.

She got close and spoke, “You took Jade into the transit! I know you did! She didn’t say as much but she took her combat armor when I helped her sneak out. She also had bruises and was walking funny in the bathroom Sunday night. Either that or you went to fight club.”

My mind stopped and I said, “There is a fight club?” Mandy looked peeved.

“So did you take her to a transit? Don’t lie to me.” She forcefully put her hand on my chest, “She said she was sneaking out to meet you and came back higher than a cat on catnip happy. The only thing that would make her that way was if she got into a transit.” My first thought getting the first and best fucking of her life made her happy. My second thought was if catnip worked on the catkin. Mandy looked a little angry that I was stalling.

We were drawing stares from the hallway. I couldn’t foresee what I should do…deny or tell the truth. “Jade, Iris and I did hang out this weekend. It is up to Jade to tell you what we did.” I moved to get out of the alcove and Mandy tried to hold me back but my strength was too much for her and I walked away. There was something about Mandy’s need to control other women that had me slightly irritated still.

I didn’t see her the rest of the day and I only caught a glimpse of Iris at school. She hadn’t been in lunch and I probably should have looked for her in the library. I was thinking of offering to go with her to the city tonight to exchange the aether crystals for cash.

In English class, Molly reminded me that we were studying on Tuesday after school together. She needed a lot of help as she was a C student. Since we had the same math class I promised to help her there as well. We got our papers back and I got an A+. It was the first time I had ever gotten such a high grade on a research paper and it felt pretty good. To Molly’s shock, she got an A. This just reinforced her need to get my help on a more regular basis. I didn’t mind tutoring her. She was a nice and genuine tiny redhead.

After school, I didn’t find Iris’s car in the parking lot. I went to study hall because I had to drive Rob and his sister home. Sophia was much chattier now that she didn’t have to study. She had a lot of gossip for me about girls at the school. My recent growth spurt and my body filling out had me as one of the top five desirable guys at school.

After I dropped them off at home I went to the phone store to replace my phone. I woman in her 20s met me and as I selected the newest maxed-out version of the iphone she tried to use her youthful body to get me to upgrade my plan. She must have touched my shoulder or thigh 20 times. She was one of two people in the store and the young man at the other end was just shaking his head. I used my charm eyes to get her to speak the truth.

She revealed she got bonuses for people who upgraded and she sometimes did take guys to her apartment down the street to fuck them after they got an expensive plan upgrade. My parents paid for my phone plan so they would see the upgrade on their bill. I told her to get me the best deal she could.

She took my old phone as a trade-in, even with the cracked screen and the new phone cost me $600 and I didn’t have to upgrade my plan. I paid $700 and said the rest was a tip for her. I figured since she wasn’t getting a bonus from me I would just tip her. They didn’t take cash so she used her credit card to pay for my phone and pocketed the cash. I was hoping to get the phone girl to her apartment but she couldn’t leave today as she was the only salesperson. The other guy was a tech who worked in the back. She asked for a raincheck and I got her number. If I needed some quick life essence I was slowly building a Rolodex.

I continued my shopping trip at the thrift store. I needed more clothes for my adult form and adventuring in the transit. I got a few things but didn’t find what I wanted. Then I remembered there was an army surplus store a town over.

The guy who ran the store was old and looked tough. My abyssal sight showed him as a human. “Sir can you help me. I need some basic combat clothes and gear.” He walked to me and looked me up and down.

“Are you looking for a combat kit kid?” I came up with a good tale to spin in response.

“Yeah, we are going to Texas for this paintball war game. I got invited and my friend has the paintball guns but I need to get the gear. It is a four-day, camp in the woods, cook your own food and shit in the woods type deal,” I explained.

He looked disappointed but nodded, “Guess you youngins need to start somewhere. Follow me and I will get you outfitted.” I followed the old man and he got me a backpack, full field kit, and a set of camo clothes. Everything was used but in good condition. I added two more sets of camo clothes and then paid $1500 for everything, a decent discount according to the old man. At least the old man was happy now. He even offered to sell me some guns as well. When I told him I wasn’t 18, the legal age to purchase, he hinted that he could find a workaround. Since I had been told gunpowder was unreliable in the transit I decided to pass.

I stopped at a Subway for a drink and some food. I was really just thirsty but got a sandwich anyway because I recognized the teens behind the counter. I went to public school with them until 8th grade. I tipped them a twenty. As I was leaving the Subway I saw Jake and two of his teammates leaning on my car. Adam was not here.

“Been looking for you for a while Silversmith. You need to leave Mary and all the other girls on the rowing team out of your orbit,” They were blocking access to my car. I mostly worried they might scratch the paint being malicious. I sipped on my drink and bit into my steak and cheese sub.

“So you three are here to do what? Beat me up?” I walked forward and stood before Jake. He didn’t seem to know what to do. His two wingmen were waiting for direction. Jake looked around…the place was pretty deserted. He then tried to throw a sucker punch into my stomach. I saw it coming and just hardened my abs. His strike had no effect. It was like he had punched a punching bag.

I took another bite of my sandwich and chewed slowly then spoke, “Jake you have two choices. Walk away and leave me the fuck alone. Or we can escalate this and it will not be pretty for you.” I took a sip from my drink and waited.

Jake looked uncertain. His punch had been solid and I guessed he had taken some type of combat class. That was why when his buddy pulled his arm he didn’t resist and walked away. That interaction made me feel so powerful. I was the titan and Jake was the inconsequential ant. I shook my head. I didn’t want to go down that road. What was the saying…power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. All the comics I read as a kid…maybe they could help me from toeing into the evil end of the pool.

I drove home and was there alone. I put my purchases in my room and organized everything. Then I swept the second floor again to make sure everything was clean and ready for Paige and her friends. I was looking forward to the challenge of trying to seduce one of them.

In my room, I played on my new phone for a bit. I got off a bunch of text messages and I had missed one from Mary who had wanted to meet at Highpoint park. I told her I had run a bunch of errands and got a new phone this afternoon. She asked if she could come over. I looked at the clock, dad would be home soon and mom was…I checked her schedule on my phone in DC for the day. I was tempted to say yes. But in the end I said no. I did say I was looking forward to going dress shopping next Wednesday which I hoped would keep her happy.

I spent my evening working on my online courses and had dinner with dad. I told him I was going to have a classmate over to study tomorrow night. He knew we didn’t have school Wednesday so he said no problem and gave me a wink. I wasn’t sure what I was going to try with Molly…or what Molly was going to try with me. I truly wanted to help her.

I finished my literature modules. I would need to schedule an on-campus exam. The problem was the course didn’t list a professor overseeing the course. I did have an email I could send questions so I did so.

When I was in my mind space practicing my aether manipulation I found I could edit the size on my mind space. So in effect, my mind space was bigger than this circular room. The only change I made was the wall panel that held my shelves was now a short corridor to another room that was 20 feet by twenty feet and twenty feet high. The upper room had a balcony running around it. So what this did was give me a lot of space for books. Over seven floor-to-ceiling shelving units that were twenty feet in length. I could summon any book to my hand with a thought and I added a nice comfortable reading chair and lamp.

I did realize this was just an imaginary space in my head that I could manipulate. I was just in essence organizing my thoughts with these changes. I made the ‘reading room’ with all wood paneling and gave it a pleasant book smell. I added a window by mistake. On the other side of the window, I put a mountain view…the place I had shared with Abigail a few days ago. The extra light made it a nice place to sit and study books I copied into my mind space. I was already adding a number of school textbooks that I preferred to stash out of the way for now. With my mind space upgrade complete I decided to get a little rest before practice.

I slept in the real world for six hours before going to hockey practice. It was our last practice before the game tomorrow. I kept every calm and focused. We didn’t do drills, just ran through our offense and defense responsibilities. The new coach, Jamie, was impressed with my skating and stick handling. She even said I had enough talent to get to the NHL. I just nodded. I wasn’t sure if I was going to take my love of hockey that far. I needed to see how profitable the transit exploring was going to be. I kind of liked the danger. Jade had even alluded to the fact that I could make money just by helping groups enter and leave transit portals.

After practice, I left to shower at home. James had wanted to talk but I told him I was too busy. I drove Rob and Sofia to school and Iris had texted me saying to meet her in her car. So after parking at school, I hoped into her truck.

“Caleb!” She smiled. “What a crazy day yesterday. The bazaar was buzzing. An orc warlock was causing havoc in Philadelphia and the Magus Arcanum was rushing people there to track him down. They said he was from another planet in our universe and not from the transit! I couldn’t believe it. The magic to teleport such a vast distance! It must have taken powerful ritual magic to get him here.” Iris was excited. “I never really followed the mystical world before…since I was so weak. Now I am an average wizard. Oh, I have your cut here from the dungeon delve.” She said dungeon with some disdain. She handed me an envelope. I opened it and it contained hundred dollar bills.

“$12,200. That is what I gave each of us. I have Jade’s here if you want to give it to her.” She sat there for a bit then said, “So when do you want to try again? Kiri has left for England and thinks she will be back in a month.” I looked at her pleading eyes.

“Maybe two months. I will have to see how my training goes with Jade. I need to feel confident that I can handle what's in the transit and protect you as well.” She was going to object but I held up my hand, “No I need to feel like there is minimal risk. I will let you know when I am ready.” I got out of the truck and went to class.