Chapter 76

Mary had a look of concern as we went into the bathroom.  She started, “I talked to Rose a few times about…” she waved her hands in the air.  “I was sure she would be excited, but she talked to her parents.  She called me a few hours ago crying.  Her father yelled at her, and then he gathered the entire family.  They are flying to Turkey.  She said her uncle lived there, and her dad had screamed at her when she said she didn’t want to go.  Apparently, their family has ties to an organization called the Purists.  Rose didn’t really understand what her father was screaming about, but the Purists are anti-magic and anti-demi.  Her father was seeking to get into their protection or something,” Mary had some tears.  “While we were talking, her father came and took her cell phone and smashed it.”  Mary caught her breath with a sob, “I don’t think she is coming back.”

I took out my Apollyon phone and searched for the Purists.  I quickly found they were an organization that sought out and killed demis and human mages.  They operated almost exclusively in the Middle East region.  They were heavily tied to the governments in the region.  It looked like a lot of the wars in the region were due to this organization, and they covered their purges of demis and mages.  They had ties to many oppressive governments and militias in the region.  I wondered if I could help Rose.

I called Dexter and asked him if he knew Rose Melanson’s flight had left.  It took him twenty minutes before Dexter told me they had booked a private plane to Portugal.  Their plane was leaving from a private airfield outside of Richmond in less than an hour.  I thanked Dexter, and Mary looked at me anxiously.  I shook my head no.  We couldn’t get there in time.  We left the bathroom to find Vida and Eilina talking to my sister in their natural forms in the living room.

Paige was slack-jawed while Bedelia and Abigail watched the interaction thoroughly entertained.  I sat as Paige started asking questions of the young orc and young elf.  After a few minutes, I tuned them out as I noticed Kiri coming up from the basement.  I moved to intercept her in the kitchen.

“Kiri, I wanted to head and see your mother and brothers soon.  I am headed to Amsterdam with my parents in two days.  So I was thinking of going tomorrow night,” I said quietly.  I didn’t want Paige to overhear.

Kiri frowned, “I will not be going with you.  I can not leave Eilina.”  She looked into the other room at the assortment of women. “Your best bet is Jade or Bedelia to help you.”

I sighed, Jade was also too busy.  And I would prefer not to bring Bedelia.  Maybe I could go on my own.  With all my physical enhancements, I wasn’t worried about the crabs or any lizards in the cave.  I walked into the other room, and Paige was asking questions of Bedelia.

Paige asked studiously, “So why are there lower tier and upper tier?  Why not just have everything in a linear numeric progression?”

Bedelia patiently explained, “It has to do with relative strength progression.  Lower tier 1 to upper tier 1 is a relative power increase of a factor of 2.  While going from upper tier 1 to lower tier 2 has a factor of 3.  So if….”

Paige interrupted, “So a lower tier 2 being is six times as strong as a lower tier one being?”

Bedelia smiled, “Relatively.  The factors are a rough multiplication of available power, and there is a range within each tier.  If we are talking from a purely magical potential regarding a person’s aether core, their is hard delineation occurring at each whole number.  When a person’s core reaches the 1.0 level it has a qualitative change in the magics it can process.”  Paige looked confused.

Bedelia sighed, “How about this analogy?  Anyone with an aether core under 0.5 is playing with static electricity.  Maybe they can build charge and shock you, but it doesn’t really pack a wallop.  Those that cross over the 0.5 are suddenly wielding the power of a taser, a substantial increase in power.  When they reach the 1.0 aether core and higher…that is the power of a lightning bolt.”

Paige processed the information and asked, “How strong are all of you?  Caleb said I was too weak to wield magic with my aether core of 0.24.  So how do I increase it?”

Bedelia laughed, “You don’t ask someone their core strength.  It is impolite.  There are devices to read cores, but even using them is impolite without asking. You cant increase your aether core. It grows very slowly over centuries.”

Eilina pulled a book off the end table and handed it to Paige. She opened to a specific page. I walked and looked over her shoulder, and Bedelia did as well. Bedelia frowned and spoke, “This is the numerical progression the Magus Arcanium uses to define a mage’s power. Usually, a core needs to be at least 0.3 in order to learn spells. But if you work extremely hard, almost anyone can learn some magic. Once a person passes 0.5, a mage can finally use large amounts of aether at once without killing themselves.”

I looked at the chart.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Core Strength** | **Relative Power** |
| 0.25 | 0.7 |
| 0.5 | 10.5 |
| 0.75 | 35.3 |
| 0.99 | 81.2 |
| 1 | 251.1 |
| 1.25 | 490.5 |
| 1.5 | 1695.2 |
| 1.75 | 2691.9 |
| 2 | 12054.6 |

I knew Iris had jumped from 0.1 to 0.4 from my administration. A more in-depth chart on the other page showed the relative power for Iris had increased from 0.04 to 2.68—that was about a 64-fold increase in power. I could see why she had been so happy.

Bedelia continued, “Paige, your aether core is like a muscle. You need to use it in order to make it grow. Then you need to practice aether manipulation. Then you need to learn how to form the aether into specific spell forms. It takes a decade at least to start to realize actual magic.”

Iris walked into the room, clearly having finished wrapping the gifts. She had heard the conversation and said, “Not true. Lydia has only been at the academy for two months and is already demonstrating lower tier 1 spells.” I groaned because I knew where their conversation might head. I made eye contact with Iris and jerked my head at Paige and Bedelia. Bedelia swung around quickly to look at me like she had a sense I was conveying something to Iris.

“Who is Lydia?” Bedelia asked.

Lydia was my first attempt at using my power. She was the same age as Paige, and they had been friends. Lydia had fallen onto some hard luck and had become a prostitute. With no guidance on how to use my powers, I had almost killed her by rupturing her aether core. I had increased her core to 0.88. I didn’t know where she had started, but she now had the potential to be a solid upper-tier 1 mage.

I decided not to hide it from Paige, “Lydia Powell. You went to school with her. Iris and I found out she had a strong core and sent her to the Magus Arcanum to get training. Iris has been staying in touch.”

“Lydia?” Paige thought. She picked up her phone, and I panicked. Then she said, “Her number stopped working after we graduated. I thought she just got a new phone. I would like to talk with her. Do you have her number, Iris?”

Iris looked at me, and I nodded, “Sure, Paige. I will get you her number before you leave. She is in classes most of the day, so I am not sure when she can talk.”

Bedelia went back into lecture mode, and I got Iris in the hallway and asked her to talk to Lydia first. I didn’t want Paige to learn that I had paid to have sex with Lydia or I had increased Lydia’s core. The problem was Paige was smart and had an analytical mind. The more questions she asked, the more likely she was going to find out I was able to raise someone’s aether core through sex.

I walked back in and listened for a bit while checking my phone. A lot of text messages could just be responded to now since most were from the people in this room. I had a text from Lena Brooke yesterday. It said she wasn’t going back to Germany and planned to teach one more semester. She was alone for the holidays and wanted to know if I wanted to have dinner. A text three hours later apologized and said she was drunk and lonely. I texted her and asked if she wanted company for a few hours tonight.

She responded quickly with a yes. Well, I needed essence, and I didn’t want to blatantly go upstairs and have sex with someone here… “I am going to meet someone for a few hours.”

Mary jumped up and asked if she could come with me, which got everyone asking the same. I waved my phone, “No, just going to comfort someone who is alone for the holiday.” Ok, that definitely sounded like a booty call. I left to the disappointment of everyone.

As I was driving, I realized I just needed to harvest some aether, so I would place my vortex away from Lena’s core. I also should check on Lena’s core to see how strong it was. I hoped she hadn’t crossed the 0.50 threshold. When I pulled into the graduate housing at the university, there were a number of parties going on in the other units.

I walked and knocked on Lena’s door. She opened it, and her hair was still wet from a quick shower, and her tee shirt had wet spots on it. She had no bra on, and her nipples hardened immediately after seeing me. I looked her up and down, and she was bouncing on her bare feet in anticipation. She was wearing loose sweatpants with the university logo.

I put on a lecherous grin which she returned. We were soon naked and in her bedroom. I did manage to check her core, and the reading was 0.38. So she could learn magic, but I hadn’t made her extremely strong.

Lena had me on my back and attacked my cock with her mouth. I added my vortex adjacent and enjoyed her licking and sucking. She kept looking up at my face for approval, and I gave it to her with moans of pleasure and short phrases. After some time, she crawled up my body and rubbed my slick member between her folds, adding her vaginal slickness to my cock.

I pulled Lena down for a kiss and gave her some tier-1 saliva to rev her up. It probably was not needed as her enthusiasm was so intense. She was using my cock like a slip n’ slide. She came and added fluids. I used my hands to caress across her soft body, which seemed to electrify her arousal.

After coming down from her orgasm, she used her hand to guide me into her and continued riding me. The heat along my head was intense, and I bucked my hips a little when she descended in order to get a little deeper. She twitched a little at the unexpected depth but didn’t seem to mind. She came again, and her vaginal walls tightened on my cock. She went a little slack, having reached a point of fatigue. I flipped her onto her back and continued to fuck her while kissing and biting her nipples and adding small touches of saliva to keep her aroused.

It worked, and she just lay there while my penetrations and oral administration brought her to orgasm after orgasm. My own pleasure was peaking, but I didn’t want to end this until I had accumulated enough aether to open a transit portal. It was her seventh orgasm when I finally had accumulated enough aether. Lena had been groaning, moaning, and spasming for over an hour, and she was spent. I had just enough extra aether to give her a gift. My seed carried the elixir of recall thought into her, as I finished inside her.

Lena’s eyes rolled back as she assimilated the elixir and passed out. I checked on her, and she was sleeping soundly. I went and showered quickly and dressed. I left Lena a note saying Merry Christmas. I had 166/1000 aether, so it had been worth the diversion. I had enough aether to open a portal and would only need a few hours in the transit to get enough aether to return. My contract with Andromeda was only for life essence and not aether, so I managed to gain over 70 essence from our dalliance. I drove back to Iris’ house, having been gone for just over two hours.

I was not surprised to find Paige, Bedelia, Iris, and Kiri still talking. Mark had gone home, and Eilina and Vida were upstairs, either watching shows on their new ipads or sleeping. They all looked at me as I entered the living room.

“Do you want to head home or spend the night here, Paige?” I asked. It was just past 11 pm.

Paige looked exhausted, and I knew there were not any free beds in the house. “Let’s head home, Caleb. Iris said I could come by any time and talk, and I got everyone’s phone numbers.” She stood, and I was slightly worried about Paige talking with Bedelia in a one-on-one setting. As we got into the car, Paige looked at me.

“So, Mr. Stud, is there anyone there you haven’t boned?” Paige said jokingly.

I looked at my sister with fake pain on my face, “That hurts Paige. I rescued Vida from certain death. I helped Abigail escape her sleazy stepdad. I brought Eilina there for her safety. I am working hard at finding Iris’ missing parents. I gave Mary….” I trailed off, not wanting to mention the enhancements I gave Mary.

Silence in the car, and I finally admitted, “Just Iris, Kiri, and Abigail. Those are the only three I have had sexual relations with.”

Paige was silent for a while, processing. “So, not Bedelia or Mary?”

“Correct,” I said.

Paige shifted in her seat, “Huh, from the way they were talking, I was sure you and Bedelia had gotten it on. Kiri seemed the most mature of the bunch, and if anyone had gone untouched, I thought it would have been her.” Paige shifted in her seat again, “Bedelia offered to teach me magic this summer. She said I probably wouldn’t make much progress, but I want to try.”

Great. Bedelia was trying to wiggle herself closer to me through my sister. I said, “There are a lot of things going on that you are not aware of, Paige. There are organizations out there of demis. There are higher beings. I told you the truth so you didn’t think I was hiding something from you because I have changed so much.”

“And what if I want to be involved, Caleb? Once you pull back the curtain, you cant change your mind. Bedelia thinks I can learn one or two lower tier 1 spells in a few years,” Paige said with seriousness.

I nodded and figured this would be her decision. I revealed everything to her because I didn’t want to grow too far apart from her, and I knew she would want to go all in. “Ok, I will do everything I can to protect you. Just don’t go off with the first genasi you meet.”

“What is a genasi?” She asked curiously.

Knowing she would ask, I smirked, “Just beings that can travel to other inhabited planets in our universe.”

“What? Have you been to other planets in our universe?” She asked excitedly.

“No, not yet. But let me tell you about the orc invasion of Earth,” I replied smugly.

I went on to tell her about how I rescued Vida and how her home planet of Mercanious was facing the possibility of being cut off from the source, which was the likely location of Iris’ parents. When we got home, we were loud enough that our parents acknowledged us from their room. Paige was mentally exhausted, so she showered and went to sleep.

I went to my room, cut the litmus paper into squares, and put them in my glass Tupperware. My steady hands cut half-inch squares, giving me 3740 pieces divided evenly between the two containers. I had the mini plastic bags and tweezers as well. I would saturate the tabs and then use tweezers to put them in the bags. Once I got into the transit I would regen aether much more quickly and could manufacture the saliva and regen enough aether to return. I was also hoping for a life essence harvest session with Kiri and Eilina’s mother, Danila.

I packed the two containers in some towels and put them into a backpack. I took a short nap before packing my suitcase for Europe. We were leaving the day after Christmas at 6:30 pm for the airport. So I figured I could make a quick run tomorrow to drop off tabs and return.

Paige came and knocked on my door early, and we went down to make breakfast for everyone. Paige made scambled cheesy eggs while I made the toast. It was a Christmas miracle that nothing burned, and the food tasted good. We enjoyed the breakfast as a family and then did video calls with our grandparents in Florida.

Next was the presents. The parents liked the comforter Paige had selected, and Paige also got the sweatshirts from her school. Paige got me a sweatshirt and sweatpants. Mon and dad got me a lot of new tee shirts and pants and a $250 gift card to the Banana Republic to buy more clothes. I had been growing rapidly, so it was pragmatic. Paige got a trip to Hawaii. I am not kidding. My parents were getting her a surfing package for a trip to Hawaii. They trusted her to go alone, and it was one of the things that she always wanted to do, learn how to surf.

My grandparents sent me $250. After the ugly sweater incident three years ago, it was decided that cash was a fine substitute. It was also a placeholder for me to visit my grandparents during the summer in Florida. My mother’s parents tended to show up whenever they felt like visiting from Florida. The third floor had been renovated for them, but they hated the stairs, so they stayed in the guest bedroom on the first floor.

It was still before 9 am when I announced I was going to Iris’ house. Mom wanted Iris to come over instead, but I managed to wiggle out of that. I could see on Paige’s face that she wanted to come to but wasn’t going to disappoint our parents by ditching them on Christmas.

I drove over to Iris’ house, but instead of going inside, I went to the garage and packed my transit bag, and collected my tetsubus. I went inside and found everyone sleeping. Even Bedelia was passed out on the coach. I went to Iris’ room and woke her, “Hey, Iris. I am going to the transit for a bit to drop something off. I am leaving my phone with you in case my parents are looking for me.”

A weary Iris got her focus and asked, “Are you going by yourself? I can get dressed.”

“No, don’t worry about it. It will just be a few hours. I am dropping off the litmus paper for Kiri’s brothers. I want one of them to be able to get home to their family,” I said.

With her head clear, Iris called me out, “You are hoping to have sex with Danila.”

I tried to grin, “Guilty as charged. I will be quick. I promise.”

I was dressed in my delver spandex and army fatigues. My backpack was loaded with the goodies I had purchased at the Bazaar. I parked as close to the woodland clearing as I could and made my way on foot to the portal. With focus, I used my aether to open the tear and walked through.