Chapter 10 Building Trust

I got dressed early and stood in front of the mirror. I worked on my aging, adjusting it slightly. If I could make slight changes over the next few months I was pretty sure no one would be the wiser. My ultimate goal was to get my actual age to show. Currently, I had to roll back my age a few years so I looked mostly the same before my contract with Andromeda.

Happy with my appearance I headed down for breakfast.  As a demon, food was not as necessary.  It was more like water to me…I needed it but could go long periods without it.  I lived off of life essence now.  The amount of life essence I could create myself barely feed me according to my handbook.  So in order to grow as a demon I needed to harvest life essence from living creatures. It actually was reassuring to me. If I choose to I could in fact live without consuming others' life force.

Dad was in the kitchen. “Caleb, morning. You got back late last night. Everything ok?”

“Yeah, I had to do some school things with a girl,” I said reactively. His eyebrows shot up. Of course, I had just erred. I never did ‘school things’. I barely did my homework.

Dad paused for a moment, “Well be careful,” he said. “And if things progress…make sure and use protection.” He gave me a manly nod before returning to his Ipad to read the news. Dad thought I was having sex? Well, I guess that was better than him thinking I was a demon sucking the life essence from people.

I microwaved a breakfast Hot Pocket and sat down to eat. I had forgotten the damn things were hot out of the microwave but found the heat didn’t affect me. It was just mild warmth in my mouth. I guess if I could take a fireball to the chest a Hot Pocket shouldn’t be a challenge.

“Still planning to try out for the hockey team?” Dad asked as I had been quiet for a while.

“Yeah the tryouts are Saturday starting at 7:00 am,” I said as I went and filled a cup with OJ. He seemed to think for a bit before responding.

“I will take your skates to Moriarty’s and get you a pair of new sticks. You look a little taller so your old sticks are probably slightly too short,” he said.

Damn, my feet were slightly bigger so my skates would be uncomfortable, “No need to get my skates cleaned and sharpened. I plan to get new ones after school today.” His eyebrows went up. “Yeah they are a bit tight,” I added. He nodded.

“Guess they are over a year old now.” He reached into his pants and grabbed his wallet and slid his debit card toward me. “You can get the sticks yourself then. Put everything on the card and just put the receipt in my office.” I was a little shocked. New skates would run $500 or so and the sticks would be another $200-$300 each. Well I guess I shouldn’t be too surprised. Whenever Paige asked dad for something related to her sports he dropped the cash without hesitation.

It was another spell of silence before dad spoke again, “Paige is bringing some friends home for Thanksgiving. She thinks it will be three but maybe more. They are coming Wednesday night and staying through Sunday.” He looked up at me, “Just wanted to give you a heads up.” I nodded but my mind was already having impure thoughts. Hopefully, it was Ashley, and if… A horn beeped outside.

We both looked and a large white pickup in the road with Iris in the driver’s seat. Dad’s eyes widened a bit and I said, “Yeah we have to go over the presentation before class. Like I said I was working on a school project.” I chugged my second glass of OJ and went out the door.

I climbed up into the passenger seat in the truck and closed the door and fastened my seat belt. I noticed Iris didn’t have hers on. She started to drive away and I smelled something and inhaled deeply trying to identify the smell. She looked at me as my sniffing was obvious. It was…the smell of women’s sex. “What is it Caleb?” She asked nicely.

“I have enhanced senses including smell and just thought I smelled something. It was nothing,” I said trying to drop the subject.

“The truck is clean,” she said defensively, “and I showered last night…” her words trailed off and she turned bright red. It was an awkward pause before she spoke. “So we need to make plans. Before we go looking for the portals we need some better equipment. My parent's equipment is locked behind wards. But I do know the location of a magical bazaar just outside of DC. We can go Saturday.”

“I can’t go on Saturday. I am trying out for the hockey team.” Her grip tightened on the steering wheel.

“Why do you non-humans think it is fun to play sports against humans? Where is the fucking challenge?” She said with some spite.

“I like playing hockey,” I said defensively. “And isn’t the captain of the hockey team a cat man?”

“Yes, and he already has a full-ride scholarship lined up for college! Can we not talk about this? When do tryouts finish? We can go after.” She had regained herself.

She obviously had beef with non-humans so I asked, “So why do you hate the non-humans or demihumans as you called them yesterday?”

She took a while before responding, “I don’t hate them. It's just that humans are on the bottom of the food chain. Not literally of course although there are some humanoids that feast on humans,” she jerked her chin toward me.

“Humans are mostly tier 0 creatures. That means they have just enough of an aether core for sapience. When a being achieves a tier 1 aether core they can control the aether and manipulate it.” She said with a slightly condescending lecturing tone.

“So you have a tier 1 core. That is awesome that you can do magic!” I said. “Can you teach me magic?” Her grip once again tried to strangle the steering column.

“No my core is not a tier 1 core. The magic I can do is just some lesser tier 1 spells and it took months to learn them. If I had a mind space then I could learn more complex and more powerful spells,” she said, no longer with an air of superiority, more like defeat.

“Cool what spells do you have, any magic is cool,” I was trying to get Iris to open up a bit.

She pulled into a parking space at the school and looked at me. “I will tell you and then you will tell me yours.”

“Great show and tell,” I said trying to keep the mood light and a small smirk briefly hit her face.

She began, “Well there is my *fireball* which you are intimately familiar with. I have a *recall* spell that basically gives me photographic memory. I had a basic *light* spell and finally, I have an *aether sense* spell. All my spells are lesser tier 1 spells,” she paused. “There are seven tiers of spells and each tier has a lesser and greater aspect. So in effect, there are actually 14 levels of spells. Your turn,” She said studying me intently with her blue eyes.

“Well I think you know most of mine and I don’t know if they are spells since only one uses aether. That one is the aphodiasic saliva I mentioned.” She blushed and I ignored it and continued. “I have abyssal eyes, strength, speed, endurance, smell and taste.”

Before I can continue she asked, “Do you know at what tier?”

“All at tier 1 but I can improve them with life essence,” I told her honestly. Her eyes widened a bit but she slowly nodded. “Next I have my aging ability. I figured out it keeps my mass the same, just changes my apparent age. It is also tier 1. Then there are my two demon forms, incubus and succubus.” When I said that her nipples got hard under her tee shirt. Her breasts were small but she should have worn a bra at least. Maybe she forgot today. I stared for a second and could smell her arousal mixing with her recent masturbation. I continued before I became aroused myself.

“I have something for my incubus wings and tail…” Thinking of my tail got me a little excited so I rushed on. “I also have my melodic voice which I guess lets me, charm women.”

She interrupted, “Sex and species do not matter for that ability. You can use it on males, females or animals. I read up on it last night.”

“Well yeah, I have my voice thing and I guess that means I don’t have to worry about angry dogs attacking me. Also, I have a gaze that works kind of the same way but requires eye contact with the target,” I continued.

She interrupted again, “That is a common charm spell. It is an upper tier 1 spell and your eyes work the same way according to my books. It takes days to ware off after you use it so be aware. Also, it won't work on me as I have protections against it,” The last was said smugly. I didn’t voice the fact that she had no protection against my vastly superior physical prowess.

“Yeah, well I have a mask aether core ability as well at tier 2.” Since it was my only tier 2 ability I said it was some haughtiness. It didn’t impress Iris though.

“I am guessing it is a higher tier 2. That means only lesser tier 3 spells could penetrate it. Or if you went around using your abyssal eyes without restraint.” Ouch, woman!

“Hey, I am new at this! I just need some time to learn.” I said defensively. Since she was like this I decided not to let her know I could contact Andromeda, my last ability.

Other cars were arriving at school and we were getting looks from other students as they passed. Iris didn’t seem to care that she was probably ruining her reputation as the unassailable nerd ice queen. What was the name of that girl from the Disney movie? Elsa. Yeah, that would be a good nickname to call her. Just needed the right moment.

Iris wrestled with something and then spoke, “We will need something to barter with at the bazaar. Something valuable enough to exchange…” She was waiting for me to fill in the blanks.

“So you want my saliva? I think I have enough aether for five creations.” I said checking my aether.

“You have a numeric value associated with your aether core stores?” She asked excitedly.

“Yeah and my life essence too. My aether is 58 of 1000 and my life essence is 9 of 110.” I said casually but it caused Iris’ heart to beat faster. I could hear it with my enhanced senses, “Is that good?” I asked.

“Maybe your scale is different from humans,” she breathed heavily. “A tier 1 human core is usually around 100 aether. Each tier is three times the size of the prior. That means your aether core is slightly larger than the average tier 3 human.” She finished and her eyes were unfocused as she was thinking furiously.

I interrupted her, “How big is your core?” I asked.

She looked at me deciding whether or not to reveal herself, “Two, well 1.7 or so if you want to be exact.” She looked a little defeated revealing this.

“That’s good, I only get back 1 aether every 24 hours or so. So at least you can recharge your core in less than two days. Mine takes years…well it does fill slightly faster during…” I stopped talking as Iris was gawking at me.

“The numerical conversion is the same then. My core takes about 40 hours to completely refill,” She muttered. “You really do have a massive aether core. Caleb there are only 100 or so tier 3 mages on Earth. And I can count the number of tier 4 mages on one hand!” She was getting excited for me so I smiled in response. “If everything checks then you are probably an *infant* tier 4 demon.” She said stressing the word infant.

Not liking her calling me infant and with school was starting soon so I made to get out of the truck and she grabbed my arm. “Caleb it takes around 100 aether to force open a portal to a transit. We can find my parents!” I nodded.

“I will help as promised Iris.” I said and went to school.

Classes before lunch were boring but so much easier than before. I was now certain my dyslexia was gone and my mind was sharper. I began to think I no longer needed to do my homework before Ms Cunningham reminded the class term papers were due next Friday. Well, guess I needed to do some homework. My class rank at the end of freshman year had been 293 out of 497 students. Maybe if I put in some effort I could improve upon that. I never had the motivation before because the dyslexia made everything so hard.

I sat with Rob and his sister at lunch as was my usual. Sofia and the freshman girls were discussing some boys in their class when Iris sat down across from me. My little group went silent. Iris just started eating and took a French fry off my plate. Eyes were darting everywhere at my table, from me to Iris and back. It was Sofia who asked, “Why are you sitting here?”

Iris took a large bite out of a sandwich and while chewing said, “Caleb and I are a couple.” It was a totally unsexy admission. Rob’s expression was by far the funniest at the table. I knew his younger sister would spread this gossip across the school in no time. Iris had effectively connected me to her socially in one simple action. Her eyebrows arched at me and smiled. No, she was attaching herself to a powerful demon ally.