Chapter 81 Bloodsuckers

I slept next to Artica and woke to a text beep from my parents telling me they were leaving for breakfast in 20 minutes. Since I was already naked, I jumped into Artica’s shower, planning for a quick clean, and then changed clothes in my room. As I lathered up, the petite muscled Artica joined me in the shower with a sassy smile. I disappointed her, “Sorry, Artica, I have to meet my parents for breakfast.”

“I can be quick,” she teased, grabbing my resting penis.

“Yeah, I can’t. I only have about 15 minutes to meet them in the lobby,” I said mournfully. I then remembered, “Also, you shouldn’t use any of your adept powers for a few weeks. Your core is very—sensitive right now.”

Her heart-shaped face took on a confused look. “What? I feel fine. Actually, I haven’t felt this good in a while,” she said while still stroking my cock, trying to get it aroused. I let it come to attention just to let her know I enjoyed the sight of her body and her efforts.

“I don’t have time to explain. Just promise me you won’t use any abilities that draw on your aether core. It could be extremely dangerous, even fatal,” I said with seriousness.

She seemed to consider and, looking up into my eyes, finally gave a curt nod. I bent over and kissed her forehead. “Great, I will reward you tonight.”

“Tonight?” A purr erupted from her.

“Yeah, tonight. Maybe you can show me your catkin form? But after breakfast, do you want to do the tourist thing with me? I got gifts for everyone at the Bazaar, but I can get them regular souvenirs as well,” I said, stepping out of the shower and pulling my shaft from her grip.

I grabbed the robe from her room and my clothes, went to my room, and changed. My parents smiled on seeing me, and we went to breakfast. As we waited to be seated, I checked my life essence. I added 31 from last night, for a total of 43. I was disappointed because I had raised her aether core two levels and was expecting more. At breakfast, my parents helped me plan out my day alone. They suggested going to Rijksmuseum and the Van Gogh Museum to see the art. Dad gave me some local currency for tickets. As I was leaving the café, I saw Artica waiting across the street and went to join her.

“Are you ready to get some culture?” I asked as I approached her. I was already entering the first museum into my phone’s GPS.

Artica asked, “Can we stop by Puccini Chocolate?” She blushed, “Chocolate is my favorite food group, and they have some of the best in the world,” she admitted.

There was a Puccini close by, and we stopped there first. Artica no longer seemed like the alert, stern bodyguard. I had broken her in one evening. She quickly collected three 20 bonbon assortments for herself at $75 each and ate thirty more while we were there. With her core and *strength enhancement*, she probably felt caloric deficiency—or she just liked chocolate that much. I added twenty-one boxes to be shipped to Iris’ house. That cost me $2,000 for everything, but damn, those bonbons were good, and seeing the elated Artica made it worth it.

We dropped off her chocolates in her room and then went to both museums. Even though Artica was 25 years old, she acted like a high school girl on a date. I asked her if she had ever been on a date before, and her response surprised me. She said no and explained she had been training to be a bodyguard since she was 12. Since she was lower tier 1 on her aether core, she could only activate one adept power at a time.

I asked how many adept powers an upper tier 1 could activate at once, and she answered three. I pressed and asked about lower tier 2 adepts, and she said nine, but usually not for long as it drew a lot of aether to maintain so many enhancements at once. My final question was how many adept powers did she have access to. Artica grinned and said she had learned eleven. Her sister, Frost, had only mastered nine. Most adepts only focused on six or seven of the physical enhancements, but Frost and Artica needed to work harder to be exceptional since they had weak cores.

Artica seemed more and more impressive to me. We walked the two museums and were planning on dinner when Artica excused herself to use the restroom. She said she would be a few minutes, so I took the opportunity to call Jade. I admit I was calling Jade just in case that is what Artica was doing in order to report in. Jade picked up after just two rings, “Caleb! How is Amsterdam? Is Artica treating you well?”

I analyzed her voice. It didn’t sound accusing or suggestive, so I guessed Artica had not told her about our sexual encounter yet. “Yeah, Artica took me to the Bazaar yesterday, and we are seeing art museums today. I am having a great time. I wanted to ask about Artica’s contract. Can anyone buy contracts from the place where they are trained in Naples?”

There was a period of silence on the phone, and I thought I might have erred. Jade finally said, “She told you about the academies?”

It wasn’t a stern question, just a question. I thought to protect Artica, “Yeah, she said you told her to answer any questions I might have as long as it was general knowledge.”

Another pause, and then Jade said, “Ok. Yes, it is known the catkin train in Naples. And I did say for her to gain your trust by answering any questions.”

Was Jade jealous? Was she trying to put a barrier up by saying Artica was just acting friendly? I tried again, “So, can anyone buy a contract?”

Jade replied, “No. But once an alpha pride leader purchases a contract, it can be transferred.” I heard a clicking on Jade’s end that I guessed was teeth chattering in thought. “Do you want Artica’s contract?” She finally asked.

Was this some type of trap by Jade? Or was she trying to put a spy close to me? “Maybe. It is nice to have someone constantly watching my back. And she looks so unassuming.”

Jade replied shortly, “Well, you did give me a gem in Anya. I think her sister, Frost, might object, though. I also would need to replace Artica….” Jade said, thinking out loud and with a purpose. I waited for her to get to what she wanted in return. “Maybe if you could pay me $500,000 for her contract and raise Frost’s aether core. I assume you plan to raise Artica’s core, which is why you are interested in her.”

I cautiously asked, “I do not know what the contracts entail. Artica just said she entered service for a better life for her sisters.”

Typing sounds came across the connection. Jade talked while she typed, “Yes. Preferred mating with magical genetic funneling for their species of catkin. Hmmm. First pregnancy was a failure two years ago, produced a lower tier child.” Jade was still typing, adding, “Many catkin have twins, but their eldest sister just had one child from the first contracted mating. She will have one more opportunity, and the other sister will also have two attempts. I don’t see any partners lined up, though. Both parties must agree, you see, and snow leopard catkin are not desirable.”

This was exactly what Artica had told me. I was starting to figure looks played a smaller role in demi attraction for a mate. It was more focused on the strength of their aether core and and their political connections. I asked, “What if her sisters can’t find a mate? Do their contracts become void?”

Jade replied, “No. They are offered a mate to sire their children every year. They have just declined, hoping that net cycle the pairing is better.” I nodded to myself as at least Artica’s sister had a choice. Of course, the catkin controlled the upper tier two prospective partners offered, so it wasn’t the greatest system. Jade finished typing, “I sent you a copy of her contract. My terms were as stated. $500,000 so I can purchase another contracted bodyguard from the council, and you raise Frost’s aether core.”

“I will look over the contract and let you know, Jade.” I hung up, but it felt a little slimy to me, like I was dealing with some type of indentured slavery.

Maybe Jade would talk to Artica now, so I expected her bathroom break would take longer. After ten more minutes, I started to get concerned. I walked in the direction of the bathroom and asked a young male clerk if they had seen a short white-haired girl with a pixie cut. Artica was wearing tight jeans and a white silk blouse. She was hard to miss, and the young man said she came out of the bathroom with friends. They went through the doors to the archive section of the museum.

Panic welled up in me. A quick call to Jade confirmed that Artica was here alone and she knew nothing about other catkin in Amsterdam. The largest population of demis in Amsterdam were the vamps. I went to the doors, and they were heavy steel doors. I found a curator in an exhibit, charmed him, and had him open the door for me and give me his key card and code. I ran down the ramp with two switchbacks and started listening as I entered a warehouse with metal racks. I was angry it must have been close to half an hour since she had left me. If they had taken her somewhere out of the building, I might not find her.

I moved to another warehouse room and another, then descended. I was following what I thought my incubus sense of smell was telling me was the correct direction. Finally, we moved into an area with rooms for restoring artifacts and studying them. Some offices at the end of the hallway had talking going on. I aged myself to my Apollyon body as I approached the conversation. Although, if they took Artica, then they probably already had documented my Caleb body with her.

I got close enough to hear a female voice, “She is still woozy. Are you sure you didn’t fry her with your charm?”

Another female said, “No, it wouldn’t attach to her aether core. It just slid off, and she lunged at me and collapsed. She is almost conscious. Don’t charm her, just see if she will answer our questions.”

I waited fifteen minutes before Artica’s voice clearly said, “You fucking bloodsuckers! Let me the fuck go!” I almost broke down the door right there as Artica was clearly angry and afraid with her tone. I moved to the door, ready to enter.

“Calm down, kitty. We just wanted to ask you some questions,” one of the female voices said, which was followed by a vulgar spew from Artica.

“You fuckn’ vamps just think you can do whatever the hell you want. I work for a pride alpha, and she is going to come looking for me and take your undead heads from your stinking corpse.” I smiled at Articas tenacious fight.

One of the females said, “We should have just left her in the bathroom when she collapsed. She obviously is not part of it. She was walking around all day with that human.

So they had been following Artica today. I tried to see if anyone else was in the room besides the two vamps and Artica but I couldn’t feel anyone. My instincts told me Artica wasn’t in trouble unless she did something stupid. I decided to be funny. I knocked on the door and asked, “Artica, you are taking an awfully long time in the bathroom. Do you need any help?”

There was dead silence for about a minute, and finally, the door clicked and opened. The pale woman who opened it was obviously a vamp, and another woman stood behind Artica, who was bound to a swivel chair facing me. I raised my eyes in mock surprise, “This doesn’t look like a bathroom.”

The vamp standing behind Artica spoke, “Human, your girlfriend is fine with us here. You can go.” I felt something like my charming eyes attempting to latch onto me and was easily brushed aside. The vamp quickly realized her charming gaze had failed and looked uncertain about what to do.

Atrixa had a simple gag in her mouth, but I didn’t hear anything, even though it looked like she was talking. I motioned for the vamp to remove the gag, and she looked at her partner, who nodded. Artica swore immediately, “That tastes like ass!” She said, spitting.

I tried to remain cool as the two vamps, who appeared to be in their late 20s looked lost at how to proceed. I asked, “Can you untie my friend so we can leave?”

The vamp by the door asked, “No problem, but we ask if you can answer some questions for us.” I shrugged concomitantly.

The vamps were cautious as they untied Artica and remained behind the chair. Artica stood wobbly-legged next to me, and I examined her core, and it was intact. I guessed she might have tried to draw on it, and that caused her feint since it appeared the vamps hadn’t played a role. I aimed my bracer at the vamp on the right and then on the left. They seemed to know what the device was but didn’t object. 0.89 and 0.77. So both were upper tier 1 in power.

Artica wanted to leave, but I just waited for their questions. The stronger of the two spoke, “Our sire is missing. His manor was robbed, and there is no sign of him. We asked around, and a number of beastkin have been arriving in the city. None of the other clans have helped us, and our sister was killed two weeks ago.”

It was a plea for sympathy, but I didn’t know what to say, so I asked a question, “Why were you following Artica?”

The younger vamp answered, “I work at the Bazaar. Another employee said she was a catkin. I followed her to the hotel, and we have been waiting to get her alone to talk with her.” I would say my opinion of vampires being powerful beings of darkness was burst as these two women seemed more lost and scared than anything else.

“We are here on holiday and are involved. I am sorry, but we can not help you.” I thought of something, “We did see two suspicious wolfkin in the canal on…the second to last bridge before the Bazaar yesterday.” I don’t know if they qualified as suspicious, but they looked like they were up to no good.

Artica still seemed upset, but I put my hand on her shoulder and pulled her out of the room. The vamps eyed us but didn’t move. As we walked through the warehouse store rooms, Artica said, “You could have taken those two. They were recent turnings.” I just moved her along. Wanting to get back to the hotel. Artica added, “I hate vamps. They smell old men’s shoes.” I think she was venting, as I hadn’t smelled anything from the two vamps.

The entire walk back, she kept venting, and I could understand her frustration, but if the vamps controlled the demi aspect of the city, I didn’t want to get involved on any level. When we got back to the hotel, we went directly to Artica’s room.  She was still steaming, “The absolute hubris of those vamps!  Kidnapping, interrogation, and being a general bitch!”

“Calm down.  You are safe”, I assured her.

Her irate demeanor didn’t wan as she focused on me, “What did you do to me?  I tried to enhance my speed when they corned me in the bathroom and passed out.”  I checked her aether core again.  It was still stable.

“I told you not to draw on your aether core,” I said patiently.  Her face soured, so I explained, “I expanded your aether core, and it needs time to heal to be able to accumulate aether again. All its energy is working on strengthening itself.”  She still looked skeptical, so I pointed my bracer at her.  She ripped the device off my arm when she saw the number.  She proceeded to use it on herself to confirm the number.

She sat on her bed, which thankfully had fresh sheets after last night.  I let her contemplate her new potential.

It was a good half hour before she spoke, “How long till I can use my abilities again?”

I thought for a minute as I really didn’t know. Abigail had a massive core increase, and I wasn’t sure she had tried to use magic yet. “I don’t know. I would give it at least a month. But you can just tell me to check it as my aether sight is quite good and I will be able to tell you. Do you have good aether manipulation? You might be able to feel for yourself when it is stable again?”

Artica fell back on the bed, “No. I can draw my aether to reinforce aspects of myself but never focused on aether manipulation as I have very little ability for spellwork.” She sighed. “Well, Jade is going to be happy, and I won a bet with my sister, at least.” I looked at her questioningly. “I thought your ability was real—just not this real,” she tossed me back my bracer.

I looked at my phone and sat beside her as I pulled up her contract and read it. It was sixteen pages, and the gist of it was she had a lifetime contract. Her employer must provide her with a reasonable level of comfort and reasonable expectations. If, for instance, she was sent on a suicide run, then she could appeal the contract, and the Catkin Council could terminate it.

I had been reading it for a long time, and Artica said, surprised, “Where did you get that?”

I looked at her, “Jade sent it to me. I was negotiating to get it transferred to me?”

Artica’s white eyebrows went up, “Jade wouldn’t do that. Her father paid for Frost and I, and transferring the contract of either one of us would anger him and Jade’s mother.”

“So you don’t want to be my personal bodyguard?” I asked with some fabricated sorrow in my voice.

Artica stood, “That is not how it works with catkin. My contract basically ties me to Jade’s family for life. I am…” She paused and looked at the bracer on my wrist, realizing she was no longer a the bottom of the food chain in the catkin clans.

“So, I need an answer. Jade or me? I can wire her the funds right now,” I said, committing to looking Artica up. This trip had been a mental vacation with only having to worry about a single woman in my life. I sweetened the deal, “If you sign on, part of the agreement is to raise your sister’s core as well.”

I could tell that had won her over, but she was still processing the consequences in her mind. “Fine. I will serve you.” I spent the next hour on my phone setting up and transferring the funds, and Jade called me personally to hand over the contract. When I asked her if there were going to be any problems with her father and mother, she just said she would handle it.

Twenty minutes later, I got a weird text in a language. Aritca read my phone, “Huh, they transferred my contract to you, and Jade’s mother even signed off on it.” That bit got a tingly feeling in my spine.

“Artica, you can’t tell anyone what your power core is. We will go to the Bazaar tomorrow and get you a masking device. And don’t tell them how I raised your core.” She just nodded as I said these things. “Also, I would prefer to have you not work under a life-binding contract like this,” I indicated my phone. “Can we just say you are my paid bodyguard with a salary?”

She patted my cheek, “That is not how prides work, Caleb. There needs to be an alpha controlling the others. I agree for you to be my alpha.” Then she smirked, “Well, you will still have to prove you are stronger than me. Once my core heals, I will have to test you again to make sure you are worthy.” She had a grin. “I am going to pull a bath. That tub is big enough for two,” She said, standing and swaying her hips provocatively as she left the bedroom for the bathroom.

I smirked and followed her.