Chapter 82 The L Word

Artica drew a hot bath and added some complimentary bath oils to it, creating a steamy and fragrant tub.  She stripped provocatively, and I watched her body slide into the steamy water with a smile on both our faces.  I quickly undressed and moved behind her in the tub.  I could tell she was still upset by the events today.  I took a soap bar, lathered a luffa, and scrubbed her back first.  Her body pressed into my groin, and she used her feet to press back into me, teasing me.  We had gotten quite comfortable in this relationship in just a few days.

She purred softly and finally said, “Thank you, Caleb, and I’m sorry.”

“Sorry for what?  It wasn’t your fault the vamps got you today,” I said while gently moving my luffa to her front to rub her breasts to her abs.  I did her inner thighs, and she eagerly gave me access.

It was a minute before she continued, “No, not for that.  I used my allure ability on you.  I told you I had mastered 11 forms of enhancement.  Well, one of them is an allure skill that makes me sexually attractive to males.”  I paused in scrubbing her, considering. I didn’t think her ability would work on me anyway, with my aether core being so strong.

“You didn’t need to use it on me.  I would have jumped you either way.  And you can’t be using it now as you can not draw aether,” I said, unconcerned, while playing with her nipples with one hand and tracing down from her knee to her inner thigh with the luffa.

She turned in the tub and pushed with her legs on the other end to push hard into me so her lips could reach mine.  The kissing session was forceful as her smaller mouth and tongue tried to dominate mine.  I didn’t use saliva as our tub make-out session turned into awkward grinding on each other in the watery confinement.  I was pretty sure I was Artica’s first romance, and I was going to let her enjoy it.  After half an hour of cycling in hot water to the tub, we dried off and moved to the bedroom. I asked, “Can I see your catkin form?”

I could already see it with my abyssal eyes, but I wanted her to be comfortable in her natural body with me.  She had two magical studs in her ears.  One was a morphing charm that also had a translating enchantment for her to understand all languages.  Morphing was similar to shapeshifting and was part of her bodyguard outfit.  Her other stud was just an illusion charm.  It had some variance control, and Artica liked to give her hair blue highlights.

She seemed reluctant but finally released her morphing charm. Her body changed into a slightly more muscled form that grew a gray coat with dark spots and stripes. Her jaw slightly lengthened, and her eyes grew in size. Two soft-looking triangle ears sprung up on her head. Her entire body was quickly covered in fur, her genitalia becoming less obvious.

I could see why the idea of cat women turned men on. I had never delved into anime but developed a healthy appreciation for soft fur after Jade. Artica looked nervous as I took in her catkin form in all its glory. I dropped my towel and moved toward her, letting my body show its excitement. I hugged her close, trapping my shaft in her furry belly. It felt silky smooth, and stimulating. I kissed her, and she relaxed, feeling accepted.

Surprisingly I noticed she had a tail whipping behind her. I reached down and grabbed it, and she jumped in surprise. “Sorry, I don’t remember Jade having a tail.”

Artica pushed away, “Some catkin have them removed, and some are not born with a tail. It depends on how dominant their genes are.” Her face twisted to mischief, “So you have seen Jade naked in her natural tigerkin form?”

I ignored her question and moved close and stroked her chest, feeling out her hardening nipples, and she started purring. Her hands grabbed my shaft, rubbing the head along her furry abs. My glans was in utter bliss at the sensation. Seeing my pleasure, Artica dropped to her knees, but a sudden loud knock at her door caused her to jump to her feet and go on guard.

The knock had been loud and deliberate and came again. We looked at each other and quickly dressed while keeping our senses peeled. Artica morphed into her human form. In seconds we moved to the door cautiously, and Artica opened it. A familiar vamp was at the door from this afternoon, and Artica let a growl escape her throat, but I could smell blood, and the vamp woman fell limply into the room.

We both had avoided her collapse and let her fall hard. We closed the door, and under her jacket, I found the wound. It looked like a puncture. Artica said, “Bullet wound. Probably silver. It will poison and kill her if it is not removed.”

I knew a little bit about vamps from Iris’ books. The required blood to survive, any blood. They had high rates of regeneration, and you needed to behead them to ensure you killed one. I considered my course of action. I didn’t want to have to dispose of a body. I stuck my finger into the wound, searching for the bullet. I had no inhibitions or revulsion in the act that I might have had three months ago. This was my life now. While searching, I asked, “I thought werewolves were the ones that couldn’t handle silver.”

Artica looked at me and explained, “Most demis have an allergy to silver. Enough of it can kill you. Even humans can die from a silver bullet.” She stepped back as I found the bullet about two inches in the muscle and started to work it free. Artica went and looked out the window, “We shouldn’t get involved with whatever is going on. Get the bullet out and kick the vamp to the curb.”

I thought and said, “Agreed.” A minute later, I had the bullet out. I had probably done some damage, but vamps did regenerate. A vamp didn’t bleed like a human. It was more of a slow ooze, and Artica grabbed some tissues to clean the floor and flush them. I asked, “How long till she wakes?”

Artica considered and then kicked her softly, “She is already awake and listening.” The vamp woman opened her eyes slowly. We both looked down at her. She didn’t look good with her veins clearly evident under her pale skin but she forced herself up to a sitting position and against the beige wall by the doorway.

“Thank you. I didn’t know where to go and remembered the room number of the catkin,” she winced, but I wasn’t sure if it was an act. “The silver should be out of my system in a an hour or two. If I could wait….”

Artica said, “No, you should leave now. You can walk.”

The vamp tried for sympathy, “They killed my blood sister, and I am pretty sure they are the ones who killed our sire. We followed the clues you gave us about the wolfkin in the canals.”

Artica asked, suddenly interested, “The wolfkin are moving into Amsterdam?”

The vamp woman shook her head no, “No, they are outside muscle. Lord Van Holthe is expanding his territory. He is eliminating the offspring of Lord De Roy and Lord De Beaufort. My sire was one of Lord De Roy. Lord De Roy is in hibernation, and Lord De Beaufort is in the jungles of the Amazon, looking for something.”

Artica quipped, “You are awfully well informed for a lesser progeny.”

The woman winced as she stood, “My sire used to talk a lot. Thanks again for your help. I will try to reach a nest with my sire’s blood sister in London.” She moved to the door and opened it. Of course, on the other side were two wolfkin. The vamp woman backed up, clearly afraid.

They looked slightly surprised to find more than one person here and sniffed the air. I guessed they tracked the vamp and were confused by the Artica’s catkin smell. The vamp woman was considering her options. I stepped forward and, using my charm ability, tried to capture both wolfkin at once, “Hi, friends, you are both here for the vamp?”

Using my abyssal sight, their cores looked to be upper tier 1, and they visibly relaxed as my lower tier 2 charm took hold. I had practiced this ability enough now to know when I had successfully captured the target in the beguiling gaze. The one on the left spoke, “Yes, we are here for the vamp.” I nodded and directed the two to come in and sit down.

Artica and the vamp were in shock that I had tamed the wolfkin. I asked the two, “Are you going to kill her?”

The wolfkin responded with a grin, “Can’t kill what is already dead mate. But we will make sure she no longer prowls the city.” I wasn’t sure why I was feeling pity for the vamp woman, but I was. She was obviously cornered and wasn’t going to escape the city.

“Why are you killing the vamps? Tell me everything,” I ordered.

He was happy to oblige, “Our pack leader has received a vast sum to thin the vamps in the city. We were given sixty-one names to remove from the city.” He produced a folded piece of paper from his pocket and freely offered it to me as he continued, “We have completed over half the list.”

“How many wolfkin are in your team? Do they know you are searching this hotel?” I looked at the names. Addresses and names with about half crossed off. One of the wolkfin phones buzzed and he showed me another name to cross off.

“We have seven wolfkin, including our pack leader. We also have two humans. We know the vamp works in this hotel and found her fresh scent in the lobby with the blood,” he offered helpfully. I handed the list to the vamp, and she read through it.

Before I could ask another question, the vamp woman screeched in agony and looked ready to launch herself at the wolfkin. I held my hand in warning and ordered the wolfkin, “You will escort this woman safely to the airport and forget that you were here and talked to me.”

The vamp woman’s anger didn’t subside. “Take this as your get-out-of-jail-free card,” I advised the woman. I had already gotten more involved than I wanted to. The wolfkin escorted the reluctant woman out. Artica watched them leave and looked at me like I was a monster.

“Did you just dominate their minds?” She asked in awe.

I shook my head, “No, I just hypnotized them. It will wear off eventually, but the vamp should be able to get to the airport.” After our adrenaline settled we went for dinner in the city. We were in the middle of eating in a small pizza café when people started to get messages on their phones. We moved to a table and found out there was a shootout at the airport.

We followed it on our phones and found the two wolfkin and the vamp had been killed at the airport along with three other suspects. The news was calling it a terrorist attempt to bomb the airport, successfully thwarted by detectives. As the detail came in, I realized what had happened and was shocked. The two wolfkin I had charmed had turned on their companions. Once again, my charm had been stronger than I thought. I told the wolfkin to safely escort the vamp to the airport, and that meant not letting their comrades kill her.

Artica whispered, “Remind me never to get on your bad side.”

“I am just glad no bystanders were killed. It looks like five of the nine mercenaries were killed. Do you think the vamp will live?” I asked.

Artica considered, “Depends on who controls the morgue. If there is a vamp trying to thin the other clans, then I doubt she will survive long enough to regenerate. Are you going to try and save her?”

“No, I did more than I should of. Thankfully all three of them were killed at the airport, so I don’t think the surviving member of the wolfkin squad will be looking for us,” I said, but I was not entirely convinced myself. I was definitely being more observant as we headed back to the hotel. We passed a cellular store, “I want to stop at a cellular store to get my phone working.”

My Apollyon phone worked fine, but my Caleb phone was only getting local text messages, and I couldn’t call out. It took an hour to get my SIM card to be recognized on the local cell towers. When it was corrected I got a deluge of text messages. We sat in a café across the street and I paged through them, and it didn’t look like anything bad had happened.

Rob and Yuki had sex, so that called for an immediate response. I congratulated my friend. Iris’ house was as active as ever. Apparently, Abigail was teaching Vida how to cook, and Vida was making her own pizza every day. Paige was at the house every day and diligently being tutored by Bedelia. Bedelia was actually teaching Carrie, Mary, Paige, Vida, and Eilina. I sensed Bedelia was doing all this to gain my favor—it was working. I had some texts from Chloe that I responded politely to. Seeing my simulacrum of Chloe, Pandora, in my mind space had lessened my attraction to her.

Artica interrupted me as I had been on my phone for over an hour, “So Caleb, anything interesting going on?”

I looked up, and she had her bodyguard demeanor on. She was constantly scanning out the window and looked patient, just curious. I started to tell her about my text messages and then asked, “I haven’t heard from Jade since I negotiated for your contract. Has she contacted you?”

Like a teenage girl, Artica giggled, “Yes, she is still trying to convince Frost and asked me to talk to my sister. I did talk to her, and Frost really doesn’t like you. She thinks you tricked Jade into giving you my contract. She also said, ‘I was acting like a lovesick kitten without an ounce of sense.’ ”

I frowned and put down my phone, “I didn’t charm you.”

“I know I am not under the influence of any abilities,” she said seriously. “I guess I am kind of love-struck. When Jade confirmed you had my contract, I was—happy. I don’t know if I have ever felt so content before. Maybe protected? Or cared for is a better way of saying it.”

“I am happy you feel that way,” I said slowly.

Artica stopped me, “I know you have others. Let me explain it this way, Caleb. I spent my entire life training to be used as a tool. When I was selected to guard Jade, I thought myself fortunate after I got to know Jade. I found myself in the employ of someone who actually cared about others, and she even offered me a leave of absence if I wanted a child.” She took a deep breath, “In your presence, I feel wanted—loved.” She looked at me, wanting me to say something.

Had we already progressed to the L word? I don’t think I had told any woman that I loved them. My hesitation in saying anything didn’t diminish Artica’s wanting smile. The truth was I liked Artica but still saw her as a tool. Another woman to help me grow my power through life essence. I could see why she was infatuated. I had given her something she had thought impossible, a power equal to the alpha pride leaders. Now she was telling me she was beholden to me.

I needed allies, loyal allies. What harm could it be to return the L word to Artica? She was definitely attractive, and now with a lower tier 2 core she was going to be powerful. So why couldn’t I bring myself to say it? She needed to hear something from me, “I adore you, Artica. Everything about your body, your personality, your skill, you are perfect to me.” I leaned in and kissed her. She returned the kiss passionately.

When the kiss broke, I thought I had avoided saying it, and she was ok with it, but she smirked, “That is good enough for now.” She got up and suggested, “We should go to the Bazaar and find out more information about what happened at the airport. They wouldn’t allow the truth on the news.”

That made sense, so I put away my phone and followed her. I also wanted to get some type ofmagical translator device like Artica had. We walked the street on alert and I had my abyssal eyes active. The feeling on the streets seemed subdued after the incident at the airport. The Bazaar was awash with activity, and we went straight to the vendors in order to get the gossip.

My minotaur arms and armor dealer friend was the most knowledgeable of the group. He knew the wolfkin had been knocking off vampires in the city in secret. But he thought the airport incident was a single vamp fleeing the city and that she had killed five wolfkin trying to stop her. The Magus Arcanum was currently hunting two human mages and two more wolkkin that had come into the country with the deceased wolfkin. The rewards were $12,000 dead or $25,000 captured for each.

A kill order was extremely rare for the Magus Arcanum. The minotaur inferred they were infuriated with the incident at the airport. No firearms were used, and the fight was extremely bloody. With the wolfkin I had charmed being killed, I was pretty certain they wouldn’t be able to tie anything to me. I didn’t have any guilt, either.

We moved to the shopping alcove with the enchanter so I could get a translation device. It was a middle-aged woman who was wearing all black and appeared disinterested. She was selling illusion, morphing, and translation enchantments. The morphing charms were all human guises, so I couldn’t buy one to look like a demi. The illusion charms were all lower tier 1, so they were not useful in hiding from anything other than normal humans.

The translation devices were also all stock items. I decided on a simple ring. It was a silver band with magic runes engraved by a precision laser. It drew a tiny amount of aether from the wearer in order to function.

After I had my device, I treated Artica to a shopping spree. Since she was now my bodyguard, I needed to supply her with gear. Well, it could have been worse. $128,600 for seven Shockweave Outfits for her to remain stylish on duty. $42,820 for a set of transit gear, including an aether pistol, aether rifle, and standard survival gear. I even got fitted for a Shokweave gray Armani suit. It was $15,000, but Artica convinced me I needed it. Everything was set to be shipped back to the states.

We got bad news when we were getting some aether-laced chocolate in the alcove. The vamp woman in the morgue was missing. And it wasn’t the Magus Arcanum who had extracted her. Her bounty was $50,000, and I had a bad feeling about this. She had seen how easy I had charmed the wolfkin, and she might get interrogated. Well, you try and do a good thing and just get bit in the ass.