Chapter 133

Artica’s room at the hospital was secluded, and Iris and Abigail were there when I arrived.  Artica had her arm in a sling on the bed and a large bruise around her eye.  Artica smiled on seeing me, “It is not as bad as it looks.  My shoulder was dislocated, and I got my head slammed into the steering wheel when the Cadillac rolled over.  I am sorry, Caleb.  Your new car is wrecked. We barely even drove it.” She had a face that showed she was mourning the loss of the SUV.

“I don’t care about the car.  It is replaceable. You are not.”  I paced, looking for something to vent my anger on, but thought better of destroying the hospital room.

Iris addressed me and tried to calm me down, “Jade is on her way with Monsoon.  He will heal her injuries.  I think she is looking into the matter with her father.”

Abigail looked angry, “I wish I had started learning the more complex healing magics already.  Caleb, are you going to find whoever did this?”

Artica looked at everyone around the room, “I am certain that one of the assailants worked for Agatha in the past.”

“I am going to handle this.  When Jade gets here, I will talk to her before hunting down Agatha.”  I let the anger in my voice be clearly known.

Jade arrived twenty minutes later, and Monsoon began working on Artica while Iris and Abigail watched.  I went into an adjacent empty room to talk with Jade. Jade did not look pleased. “I am almost certain it was my mother. I talked with my father, and Agatha sent seven of the family compound guards to the States.”

I growled, “What was her purpose? Did she think I was in the vehicle? Artica was just out shopping. It was obvious I was not with her.”

Jade looked remorseful. “I do not know. I have some pull with the Catkin Council after representing them in the aboleth attack. I am trying to find out.”

“It is not your fault. Why do you think Agatha targeted Artica?” I asked Jade.

Jade gave it some thought, “Maybe to prove to someone that her core had been increased? That way, she could get allies against you. I knew she had been fuming against Dakkon for dropping their shard investment portfolio.”

“It always comes back to money,” I mussed. “How much did she lose?” I had leveraged my relationship with the billionaire to remove an ally of Agatha’s, so maybe this was a reprisal.

Jade flinched a little, “I do not know for sure. But more than thirty million.”

I whistled. I briefly thought about replaying Agatha, but then my senses kicked in. I had more money than I knew what to do with, but I was not going to pay off a manipulative old catkin. “Where is she?” I asked testily.

Jade flinched again. But she relented, “Georgia, she owns an old plantation she vacations at. Caleb, please do not kill her.” She looked hopefully at me and added, “My older brothers may be with her.” The implication was clear that she did not want me to harm her family. She did not like them, but they were still family. She reluctantly gave me the address, “Are you going? Do you want me to come with you?”

“At this point, no. I will only respond with force if necessary. But Agatha’s interference ends today,” I walked out of the hospital not talking with anyone. I called Kiri.

“Kiri, where are you and Eilina?” I asked, getting into my car.

“We are at the cabin, Caleb. Bedelia is keeping an eye out with her scrying ability for the elves. How is Artica?” Kiri sounded tired.

“Has she seen anything?” I asked while driving and thinking. If the elves were coming for Eilina, where could I send her that was safe?

“There are two vans. One is parked two miles south of the cabin, and the other is three miles north. There should also be a black SUV that we saw, but Bedelia has not found it,” Kiri explained. “Bedelia has some low-tier anti-magical tracking devices. We are going to go to Canada.”

“Don’t be too hasty. Send me the coordinates of the van that is parked south of the cabin,” I requested. My phone beeped with a GPS pin, “Got it. I will look into it. I need your help Kiri, though. I am going to Georgia to visit Jade’s mother, Agatha, who put Artica in the hospital. I need backup and Bedelia to come as well to scout.”

Kiri was silent for a moment, “Okay. Eilina will have to come with us.”

“Agreed. I will be there in a little while,” I activated my GPS and parked a mile from the elf van.

I was in a secluded area, pitch black, with the sky thick clouds covering the stars and moon. I changed into my combat gear and thought I needed to work on the trick of equipping clothing and gear directly from my mind space. I went to my mind space to ask.

Nashima had the answer, “Caleb, you just need to have a construct wear the clothes in your mind space. You move the construct to your orientation in the real world and then pull the clothes out around your body. You need to focus as you can not pull objects into dense space. The retrieval fails to work at all if you do.”

“So, who wants to play dress up?” I asked everyone.

“No,” Nashima rolled her eyes. “You need a construct to match your exact form in the real world. I suggest an adult, Caleb, as most times you would be in that form, no?”

Lilith interrupted, “You could make the construct a doppelganger. It might have more utility in the future.”

Nashima shook her head no, “He would need a sample from a doppelganger to create the construct.”

“Okay, I will look into it. Thank you both for the help and advice.” I gave Casper a pet and returned to focus on the elves.

I transformed into my incubus form and flew up and toward the van. I hovered over the van and listened as I slightly descended. I was completely silent as it was magic that guided my flight. I could see three aether cores in the van. All of them were upper tier 1. I could hear them speaking as I got close, but the discussion focused on what they wanted for breakfast, not their current actions.

I remained over the van for twenty minutes before they received a call. I only heard this side of the conversation as the elf in the passenger seat talked.

“We are still holding. No movement.”

“The blood alert is saying it is not an Alaire now. The elf girl may have put on an obfuscation device.”

“Are you sure?”

“Ok, we will wait.”

The elf hung up, and I did not have a lot of information. I knew Eilina’s father’s family was Alaires, so they were involved. It was time to take action and get answers.

I landed next to the passenger door, ripped it off its hinges, and threw the elf into the woods. His cell phone was on the dashboard. The driver was fast and already shooting a 9mm at me. I lunged in the van, taking multiple hits before grabbing and snapping his wrist and bowling him out the driver-side door. We rolled on the ground for a moment, and I did a fast spin kick, knocking him to the right ten feet.

The elf in the back was trying to get into the driver’s seat, and I pulled him out. He grappled with my arm, but I was too strong. He pulled a knife, and I grabbed his wrist, “Stop struggling, or you will not live through this.” My tone was aggressive, and I knew I looked monstrous in the near darkness.

I put him in front of the van and grabbed the other two after making sure they had no phones or weapons. They were petrified as they had now chosen to freeze in terror. The first elf was in rough shape with multiple broken bones. The one I had kicked had a few broken ribs I think. I realized I had let out my building anger from Artica on the elves even though they had nothing to do with it. Well, at least, that is what I was hoping to find out.

I stepped between the headlights, “Now answer my questions, and you will live to see tomorrow. What do you want with the elf child?” Calling Eilina a child was my attempt to sound like an older demon and add some innocence to her.

No one made to answer, so I encouraged them, “My patience is wearing thin elves. If you do not talk, then I will just eliminate you and question the other in the van north of here.”

The first elf, in the worst shape, spoke, “Demon, we are looking for lost children of the Alarie.” My truth detector said that was true.

I growled and nodded, “Do what end?”

He got slightly bolder and stood in some obvious pain, “To return them to their family so they can contribute.”

“How would the young girl help the powerful Alarie family? I was told you hunt them.” I asked pointedly. I already knew from Eilina’s mother that they harvested the bastard children to create powerful artifacts to expand their reach.

The elf judged me and my relationship with Eilina. “She would not be harmed,” he finally said.

Even though his face was impassive, his partners twitched slightly, and my truth sense buzzed that it was not truth as well. So what Danila had told me was true. They would hunt Eilina and bring her back for a reward. I sighed like I was relaxing, “Well, that is good to hear. She is under my protection, after all. How is she related to the Alaires?”

The lead elf gained some confidence, thinking he was probably going to live, “We do not know. Someone told us they sensed an Alaire’s blood at a hockey game. We have been investigating.”

Well, Kiri had been right about that. I had a puzzled look as I asked my next question, “How did they detect the Alaire blood?”

“A simple magic spell. It works at close range.” He got bolder, “Do you know of any other Alaries on this planet we can bring to safety?”

My face brightened, “Possibly. Is there a reward? How do I find the Alaires on this planet?”

Thinking he had fooled me, he smiled as well, blood trickling from a gash on his forehead. There is only one lesser member of the family on Earth. She lives in Bues Aires. I can put you in touch with her, or I can relay any information you have, and they will send you the reward.”

I walked to the van and took his phone, “Was she the one you were talking to? What is your password?”

He had a look of indecision. I showed impatience, and he gave me the code to unlock his phone. Constance Alairian was named on the number that had called him. I scrolled his other contacts and saw Agatha Corleonis. My heart raced a little, I spoke with a friendly smile, “I see you know my friend Agatha Coleonis. Is she involved with Constance Alairian?”

“Yes, they work together. When we are in Europe, Agatha’s people help us,” he offered boldly.

I nodded like that made sense. Maybe there was no connection between Agatha and the elves being here, and it was just a coincidence. I will be asking Agatha soon. “Besides the van north of here, there was an SUV? Where is that?”

“Resting at the hotel,” Offered the only elf not injured. I turned my gaze to him, and he recoiled.

“How many at the hotel? And which hotel?” I asked coldly.

The elf I had been talking to realized things were not as they appeared, and fear started to show in his eyes. The elf still answered, “Six. The Green Forest Lodge.”

“Excellent!” I said mockingly. I decided to gloat a little, “By the way, elf, I know when you are lying to me.” I lunged at the elves, beat them senseless, tied them up, and tossed them into the van.

I assimilated the phone to my mind space so it could not be tracked. I called Kiri and informed her where the van was and what I had learned. “So what do you want to do?” I asked her.

“Are you going to handle the others? If they are agents of the Alaire Family, then we should kill them,” she said without hesitation. I suddenly did not feel so well.

Beating the elves had been cathartic after Artica was attacked, but going as far as to kill someone? My rage was fading fast. I started to think of an alternative. “What if I charmed them and implanted a different scenario in their minds? They are working for one of the Alarie’s in Brazil. A Constance Alarian, it says on the call number.”

Kiri was silent. Then she slowly said, “That could be Constancia Alaire. Bastian’s older sister. Why would she be on Earth?” Kiri questioned herself. She explained, “Constancia and Bastian hate each other. I do not know much about the Alaires, but their feud has been public for some time. If she found out Eilina was Bastian’s child, then she would definitely kill her rather than allow him to get credit for delivering such a powerful core to the family.”

“Can we use her against Bastian? Maybe we need to find out why she is on Earth. Do you think she was exiled?” I guessed.

Kiri was clicking her tongue, trying to solve the mystery herself. “I think it would be best to collect Constacia’s men and put them on ice. If we kill them and she is a possible ally, it may sour her to us.”

I was kind of speechless. I had killed sapient beings before, but talking about it as whether it was an advantage or disadvantage struck me as morally wrong. I remembered how easily Kiri had killed the invading orcs months ago, and I had stepped in to save Vida. “I will go subdue the other van. Have Bedelia send me the coordinates.”

My phone beeped, but I paused to check myself for wounds. Bullets had struck me four times. None had penetrated, and the large yellow-blue welts were already fading. It looked like my armor and tough body had worked well together. I waited for Kiri to arrive before launching myself into the air. This van was also parked off the road, ready to respond to a call.

Instead of ripping off the door, I just opened it and dragged out the driver, tossing him a good twenty feet. The passenger exited and started firing his weapon. We were not far from houses, so the police would be coming. I rushed the gunman as two more men exited the van. All my practice with Lilith and Pandora was put on display. I was a mixture of Ali and Bruce Lee. Blindingly fast and powerful, I had all four men on the ground. Two were knocked out, and the other two were having trouble moving.

I found plastic zip handcuffs in the van and duct tape. I bound their wrists and feet and then wrapped their hands in duct tape so they could not use their fingers. I heard sirens, so I drove the van in the opposite direction.

I stopped the van and got one of the elves to fall into my charm. “Friend you look terrible. We are bringing you to your other friends in the van. I wanted to ask how many men did Constance Alairian send up here from Brazil.”

“Thirteen. Can you untie me?” He held up his hands, bewildered. That meant there were just six left in the hotel.

“In a moment. Could you get the others at the hotel to meet us somewhere? Say on the dirt road down from the cabin we are observing?” I asked.

“Rally Point Bravo?” He asked, connecting something I was not completely aware of.

“Sure. Where is that?” I asked, and he had me open his phone and show me. It was perfect. A quarter mile down a dirt road.

I called Kiri, “I got the other ones in the van secured. I caused a racket but didn’t have much of a problem. I am sending you coordinates where the last six are going to come to.”

“How did you manage that?”

“You know I have a charming personality,” I joked.

We met on the road and positioned the two vans, and then I had the charmed elf call his friends. We had the one elf stand in the open, and Kiri had her aether rifle in the woods.

I hid down the road and would jump them from behind. They came in one large black SUV twenty minutes later. All six did us the favor of getting out and approaching our elf in the dark, “Ghaldon, what is up? Your shift is till sunrise. Has the target been confirmed?”

“No, I just wanted you to meet my new friends,” He smiled happily. The confused elves did not have a chance, and neither did Kiri. I rushed between the elves, and was a whirlwind of fists and kicks. When did I become so badass?

Kiri helped me tie them all up and bound them. My new elf friend was smiling the entire time but asking stupid questions that I ignored. We had twelve males and one female. All elves. I think the female was a spell caster as she had the strongest aether core among them at the upper limit of tier one.

It was approaching dawn, and I was amazed at what I had done in a few hours. Kiri asked, “Who is going to watch them?”

The question hung between us as elves moaned and stared up at us. I transformed from my incubus body to my Apollyon body. I gave it some thought. “I guess I am going to have to call in a favor.” I picked up my phone and dialed one of my contacts, Rakkon Duskstalker.