**CHAPTER 38 A Kick to the Balls**

I was largely disappointed the next day when Callem didn’t mention the mithril at breakfast. After stretching I went down to the larder and found the mithril gone, so he must know. I prepped some pizza crusts and sauces for dinner. Callem liked a buffalo chicken pizza and everyone else liked the more mundane toppings with tomato sauce. The morning practice was to be wrestling and I couldn’t read Callem’s face. Did he not realize I had made mithril?

My first match for wrestling was Aelyn. She was getting really good and even though I had some strength over her she almost always won due to her agility. That made me upset as I had thought myself a good wrestler in my past life and getting beaten by a girl was irksome. She slipped behind me and locked hands around my waist and leveraged me to the ground. She managed to keep my back to the ground and straddle my chest. I was about to bridge and rotate to get out of it when she put her face three inches from mine and whispered, “I imprinted the spell”. She was up and off me and walking away smugly as I lay there in shock. I had lost the match and the race to imprint the dimensional spell. I pacified myself with the thought that hers was just a tier 1 and mine was tier 3.

Aelyn had been getting more playful recently and I recalled she had said she would replicate Leda’s actions when she learned the pocket space spell. I watched her hips sway as she walked away. Something stirred in me at her preening about. I quickly focused on my aether core burn to subdue the sexual arousal. It was like focusing on getting nauseous in order to tame my arousal.

After two more matches in which Gareth dominated over Leda and then Aelyn I was matched against Cilia. As we met in the center of the ring Cilia said, “Aelyn rode you like a broken-down nag. I am going to do the same!”

Well, smack talk was a new thing for our group over the last few weeks. It was introduced by Pascal and it had quickly turned on him as he had rarely won any contests unless Callem stacked the odds in his favor. The smack talk was all done in jest and to add some levity to the situation but for some reason, today Cilia’s words irked me. I had not ramped up my intensity and focus for months. Cilia came at me and I easily grabbed her right wrist with my right hand pulling her slightly sideways and stepping behind her hips. I wrapped my left arm around her upper torso and pulled her off balance to spin her to the ground. The movement was so insanely smooth I was in awe of myself. I even caught a surprised visage on Gareth as I was bringing Cilia to the ground.

I didn’t let Cilia recover. In fact, I kept giving her false hope as she got back to knees I kept my hips pressed behind her and countered everything she did. It was energy-draining on both our parts but I just wanted her to wear herself out and concede the match without me getting an arm bar or leg lock on her. But she would not surrender and only tried harder. This went on for a good five minutes and I actually smiled at her fruitless resistance. Unfortunately, I started to get aroused and Cilia’s grunts and efforts to push her hips back to create space for attempting escapes didn’t help. I tried to focus on my aether core but it didn’t help with her constantly pushing her hips into mine. I decided to break the engagement but Cilia made a quick roll underneath me when I let up for just a breath, she saw my semi-hard arousal. She got a look of disgust on her face which turned to anger. She kneed me hard enough in the groin to get me a few inches airborne. Then using both legs drove both her heels into my scrotum. Without any aid from me, I was thrown back 10 feet by the powerful double kick. As I flew I could see the look of horror on her face at what she had just done.

I landed and rolled myself into a ball immediately. I couldn’t focus through the pain. I felt wetness on my hands as I covered my groin. I heard Callem yell for Aelyn to get a healing potion in the house in case it was needed. He was yelling for Gareth to restrain me and for Leda to use her healing on me. Through blurred vision, I realized I was screaming and saw Callem quickly pin my waist with one arm while Gareth restrained my arms. Callem pulled my pants down with his free arm.

I heard Leda express some fear, “It’s so bloody and swollen!” Aelyn was whispering something I couldn’t make out.

Gareth spoke, “It is not swollen, that is how big it always is.” His voice was laced with concern, not humor.

Callem spoke next, “The scrotum is torn and ruptured. I will get everything back in place and you can heal him Leda. LEDA! You need to heal him enough so he can regain his senses. He will finish the job but you need to start!” Nothing Callem said made me feel better.

Leda’s voice quavered a bit, “Are you sure it's not swollen?”

“LEDA! Heal him, it is not swollen, and the force was directed lower. And Gareth said that is his normal…size.” I passed out as I felt Callem putting everything back in place.

I awoke in Callem’s guest room with Wynna by the bedside. “Storme it is going to be ok. Callem said if you are up for it you should try to heal yourself. Leda did some minor healing to close things up and stop the internal bleeding.” Wynna was holding my hand, “Try to heal yourself,” she repeated. I focused and used my self-diagnostic spell on myself. It was still damaged and needed a lot of work. I channeled the aether to the spell to heal myself. It was discomforting as the healing took place and the spell moved everything to its correct place. After a few chain castings, I was completely healed.

I sat up but phantom pain erupted. The memory was too fresh. As I got out of bed Wynna supported me and I walked a little bow-legged for a moment before regaining composure. In the common room I got to the couch and sat down across from Callem who had been waiting for me apparently. He was accessing my mental and physical state with his golden eyes. “I’m good Callem. Or at least I will be in a little bit.”

“Storme no one should go through something like that as young as you are. This is the third time I have found you in grievous injury.” Callem adjusted his position, “We have two options Storme. We can do nothing and continue as we have done or…” he took a deep breath. “Normally I wouldn’t suggest anything this extreme…especially for someone so young. We could train you to function through the pain. If we do so then you should be able to access your spells no matter how much pain you are in. It is not an easy path and I am not sure if it is the right one for you.”

Callem waited for my response, “So you would what, injure me and I would try to cast spells?” This did not sound good to me.

“It would be a gradual thing. There are exercises, focus exercises, I will teach you in order to focus at first and endure other stimuli. Then yes, we would gradually increase your pain tolerance…” Callem's golden eyes never looked so torn.

“Is this something you have done before?” I asked.

“Yes, and I have done it many times in my past to others. The elite marines, not the Wolfguard mind you, the elite marines. We used to take the top twenty men and women every year from the sixth year of the naval academy who were slated to be marines. Usually, seven or eight passed from the group each year and they became the elite marines, the pride of the Skyholme navy, the shock troopers. The program was discontinued in favor of expanding the Wolfguard and assigning them to skyships in times of need. Well,” Callem sighed a pained breath, “the entire remainder of these elite marines I personally trained, 137 strong, was sent on a mission to seize the Sadian town of Forestdeep. It was a suicide mission but they succeeded. When they sent a communication to bring in reinforcements…no reinforcements came. They held out for eight days…” Callem was lost in bad memories and I think his eyes watered.

“Ok, Callem I am in.” I didn’t want to become some badass spec ops guy. But I did want to increase my chances of survival. I was certain Gareth would want in as well. Hell, he would probably think it was all fun. “When do we start?” I asked tentatively.

Callem sighed, “We will start with meditation and focusing exercises.” He got up and grabbed a thick book on the counter. “In the first chapters of this book are two important meditation exercises. One teaches you to focus on one thing, ignoring other things. The second set of meditation exercises starts you down a path of becoming aware of your pain senses and turning them off. You will need to practice and grasp them well before we go any further.”

“Thanks, Callem,” I said and walked out shortly after. Cilia was outside the door waiting for me. She approached me and stood in front of me. I had some phantom pain seeing her, reliving the experience.

Cilia spoke was sadness in her voice, “I am sorry.” She breathed deeply. “When you…when I saw…I remembered…I panicked…I saw his face, not yours…” I put up my hands to stop her.

I thought briefly before speaking, “You did the right thing Cilia. This is why you are here. I do not hold anything against you. If you are ever in that situation again do exactly the same, don’t hesitate.” I paused. “I am sorry that I…”

Cilia stopped me, “No don’t apologize.” She waved me off. “Let’s just drop it.” She tried to make levity of the mess with her next statement, “Leda was very impressed with your manhood.” I rolled my eyes.

I showed her the book Callem had given me, “Callem gave me some homework. I should get to it.”

As I was walking away Cilia said, “Callem gave me the punishment to make dinner tomorrow. So you have it off.”

I stopped and turned, “Why is Callem punishing everyone?” I grinned at her. “I better help you prepare it.”

I managed to make it to my loft after getting checked in by everyone. Aelyn climbed up just as I was opening the book Callem had given me. “So Storme are you going to move back to the other loft?” Aelyn asked.

“If Gareth asks I will,” I replied. I started reading. The best part of the book is it had some aether magic in it which helped guide the reader. I multi-tasked while talking.

“Good he won't ask. I just talked to him and told him you sleep better away from his loud breathing at night.” She was smiling. “Do you want to see my spell?” I nodded and gave her my full attention. She cast the spell and a small portal appeared in front of her. I looked inside and it had a bunch of Aelyn’s clothes.

“You know if you put all your clothes in there I won't be able to clean them,” I said jokingly. I had been cleaning her bedding and clothes since I had moved back to the loft. “The spell is impressive. Callem has some weapons I made for you. You should store them in your space in case you need them.” The conversation petered out and I started in on the meditation techniques Callem had given me with the aid of the book.

The next few weeks I found my plate ridiculously full. I was spending every waking hour training or studying. The meditation techniques were not difficult to learn but mastering them was taking time even with a magical book guiding me and Callem answering questions for me.

The great news is the focus meditation was helping me advance in my imprinting of the dimensional spell. It took me just over two weeks to learn both meditation techniques to Callem’s satisfaction. I was far from being a master but had enough of the basics for him to proceed. The next phase was meditation while under duress. Noise, while running the obstacle course, in sword practice, while cooking, and whatever else Callem could think of. I was a little shocked when I was meditating while working on my spell and it imprinted! It had taken almost two months and finally, I had it. The new year was coming soon, just a few days away so the timing was perfect.