Chapter 105 It is Getting Crowded in Here

When we got back to the cabin, I found the package on the table.  It was a small wooden crate.  Artica was already in the shower, and I took the box and dropped it on the bed on the way to the master bedroom walk-in shower.  We were both in our human forms as we washed each other and went for a more conventional round two.  Now that Artica could give me life essence without jeopardizing her core, I might be spending more time with her.

As we were drying off from the shower that never ended because we both got dirty repeatedly, Artica asked with deviant eyes, “So when do I get to play with your tail again?”

I did not like my tail.  Well, I liked it but did not like losing control.  I might have to invest in increasing my command of the appendage if I plan to use my incubus form more often.  “You will have to earn that reward,”  I teased my bodyguard.

I sat on the bed naked, and Artica sat next to me, “I will,” she rubbed my thigh, and when I did not respond to her attentions, she asked, “So what is in the box?”

“Feathers.”  Her dubious look had me explain further, “Special feathers.  They are going to help me make a construct in my mind space.  It is, as Lezerath explained to the group.  After you establish your mind space, you establish defenses.  The construct I make from these feathers is a shortcut to making a powerful defense construct.”

“Why do you get all the shortcuts?” She playfully said.

“What?  I think you have been well served with the shortcuts I bestowed on you!”  I admonished the catkin with a light shove.  She seemed to think for a moment before nodding in agreement.  “This will only take a moment.”  I opened the box, and inside were three feathers encased in hard plastic sleeves, one sea foam green, one a deep blood red, and one off-white.  I quickly assimilated all three into my mind space and then entered my mind space as well.

The three feathers were on the pedestal in the central chamber.  I collected them and went to the park.  Pandora and Lilith were not here, but that was fine.  With the three feathers in hand, I focused on creating the feathered serpent.  I went with the pictures I had seen of a full-grown couatl.

The serpent formed and was eighteen feet in length with a body as thick as my torso.  It looked like a massive python with deep sea-green feathers and off-white feathers on its underside.  The head looked more draconic than snake-like.  Its eyes were a solid white, and its forked tongue hung limply out a good fifteen inches.  With no pupils, it was hard to get a read on it.   Spiny blood-red feathers were down its spine, and the two wings were currently folded back.  The tail ended in bright orange plumage.

Maybe I should not have gone with the full-grown version.  The feathers had been consumed, though, so I couldn’t recreate it.  The last step was infusing life essence into the creature, but I hesitated.  Even now, I could feel the pressure of the creature’s mind.  Did that mean it was linked to another creature out there?  Dexter had assured me it was from a skeleton.

I wavered for moments, and Pandora and Lilith entered the park with Casper plodding after them.  Pandora rushed forward, “He is so beautiful,”  She said while hugging the length of the serpent.

Lilith chuckled, “It is a female, Pandora.”

“What?  How do you know?”  She backed up, inspecting the serpent.

“You should have read the text more carefully from the new library.  The thick feathers along the spine denote the sex.  Females are red and orange.  Males are blue and violet,” said pedantically.

“Oh!” Pandora sounded slightly upset.  “Well, she will still be fun in her humanoid form.”

Lilith looked at me and asked, “So are you going to infuse her with life essence?”

I reached out and put my hand on its draconic head.  Should I give it an aspect of my own subconscious, or should I let it keep its natural instincts?  Lilith interrupted, “I know what you are thinking.  In order to get the most benefit from its natural mind defenses, you should let the creature keep its nature.”

I took a moment, focused on pulling the life essence to the creature, and felt it come alive.  The white eyes suddenly turned milky and then cleared to a shimmering pearl texture, and the creature moved fast and encircled me.  Casper growled as the creature wrapped me, but not restraining me.  Its head was in front of mine, and its white eyes stared into my eyes.

A voice was clear in my head, “Where am I?”

Something was wrong.  Seriously wrong.  This creature felt independent, not part of my mind space.  Crap, did that mean the creature had not been dead.

“I can read your thoughts, demon.  Was I slain?  Did you capture me to place me in this mind space?”  The creature sent its thoughts into my mind.

“No…I…Ah, shit.”  I scrambled.  Could I dissipate the couatl?  Was it too late?  I should have followed my instincts.

The serpent started to constrict me but failed. It instantly released me and settled.  “I have read your mind, demon.  I see what you have done.  You should have done better research.  We, the couatl, pass our memories through our genetic code.  Even though my body has become a corpse, I still have access to millennia of my ancestor’s memories.  Now you have trapped me here, in your mind space.”

The couatl unwound and morphed into a human body, except her body was covered in short, off-white feathers, and her head had fine blood-red feathers that simulated hair.  Casper stopped growling and cocked his head to the side, confused.  “I have memories of my ancestors, demon.  I do not know what to do in my current incarnation—there is no memory of one of my kind forebearers experiencing something like this.”

Lilith stepped forward, “I can hear the echoes of your communications.  I think Caleb brought you here to help us defend his mind from enemies.”

The feathered woman considered, and I inspected her body.  She was not wearing clothes, and her sizable chest was covered in short feathers with no visible areola or nipples.  The same went for between her legs.  She looked barren of all genitalia but had a definite female form with curvaceous hips and chest.  Her pearl-like eyes were a little spooky, but she was attractive in an alien way.

The female couatl considered me for a moment.  “I am trapped here and only live as long as you do.  Being caged by a demon conflicts with my ancestral memories of defending the innocents and serving good.  You are neither, demon.”

I was offended.  Was I being told I was evil?  “I do not understand.  You can read my thoughts?  Why do you think I am not good?”

The couatl seemed unsure and finally said, “I can only read your current surface thoughts.  So it is true I do not know you for who you are.  However, my ancestral memories of demons show that no demon has ever been out for anyone other than themselves.”

I was competing against memories.  Being compared to something I had no knowledge of.  I tried to convince the couatl, “I still have my humanity.  I was once a human.  Help me to help others.” I tried to keep my surface thoughts pure.

The couatl woman stood and looked over my other constructs.  Casper was in lying down, resting his head on his extended paws but focused on the woman with his crystalline blue eyes.  Pandora and Lilith seemed to be spectators waiting for an outcome.  She finally spoke, “My kind have a mind space from birth.  In this incarnation, I lack that.  I am aware of some things, though.  If you become strong enough, you can briefly project your mind space constructs into the real world.  It is the opposite of assimilating objects to store in your mind space.  You are not strong enough to do it yet, but I desire it when you can.  In the interim, I will help guard your mind space.”

I felt like I had some victory.  She continued, “I want access to your conscious feed.  If I find you are not acting in a manner that I find fitting, I will stop defending your mind space.  I would rather die than support wickedness.”

I could feel what this being could bring to secure my mind space. Even though I could sense everything in my mind space, I felt like this being was a bastion against any storm. I reached out and felt I could dissipate her at any time as well. She sensed my intention and stiffened slightly at my thought. I finally said, “As long as you do not harm my mind space, I agree to your terms.  What do I call you?”  I asked.

She transformed into her serpent form and communicated with telepathy, “I can only do what you allow me in here.  I can not harm you even if I wish.  You can call me—Nashira.”

 “Nashira,” I tested the name on my tongue.  “Well, Nashira, welcome to Caleb’s happy place.”  She did not laugh at my joke.  Maybe humor could not be passed on genetically.

Pandora moved closer to me, “I think I want a different pet.  This one does not seem like it will be open to my proclivities.  How about that male centaur?”  The dead-eye look I gave Pandora had her hold up her hands in the universal sign of surrender, and she stepped back.

“Nashira, this is Pandora.  This is Lilith, and this Casper,” I introduced the other inhabitants in my mind space.  “Pandora will give you the tour.  I am going to leave for now.”

I exited my mind space and was lying on the bed.  Artica hovered over me, “Done already.  How did it go?”  She smiled, and I just groaned.

“Not good.  The construct had a genetic memory and was independent.  But I don’t think it can harm me,”  I whined slightly.

Artica thought for a moment. “You should call Lezerath.  She will know what to do,” Artica said.

I really did not want to admit to her that I had screwed up.  I could always dissipate the couatl construct.  I took the phone...checked her flight plan.  She was not landing for another five hours.  I put the phone down and went to the library.  I continued with my effort to scan all the books into my mind space.  I did so for seven hours, finishing an entire section.  I figured she would have landed and be available by now, so I called Lezerath.

It was only a few rings before Rincewind answered, “Yes, Apollyon.  How can I help?  We have not yet met with the Archbishop.”

“Thank you for answering, Rincewind.  I actually wanted to talk with Lezerath.  Is she close?”  I asked quietly.

“One moment,”  he said.  I think they were in a restaurant or out in a crowd as I heard numerous voices in the background.

“Caleb, how can I help you,” Lezerath came on the phone with her ever-patient tone.

I explained what I had done in excruciating detail and my interaction so far with Nashira.  I wanted to make sure she had all the information to give me as informed a response as possible.  She asked a few questions and then gave me her verdict.

“It is not unusual what you have done.  The fact you already came to an agreement with the entity is good.  And what she told is true.  She can not damage your mind space unless you let her. You control your mind space.  As long as she has no real-world anchor to leverage against you, you are certain the feathers came from a corpse.  If you had consulted me, I would have told you creatures with genetic memory should be created from your mind, not from an assimilated material.  We could have spent a few weeks studying the couatl and its abilities and then made your mental construct,” She sighed like an exasperated teacher.

“Although using a trace of a creature does make it much stronger in your mind space.”  She paused and seemed to be talking with Rincewind, who was obviously listening in.

She resumed, “A couatl’s word is trustworthy, Caleb.  And if you have an accord with it, you will not have fear the aboleth.  Couatls have perfect mind defense against aetheric and psionic magics.  Rincewind is actually quite jealous right now.  He called you brilliant but has not heard your earlier explanation,”  she giggled.  “Rincewind has also said he knew a few couatls in his time.  They are honorable creatures and very job oriented.  He suggested you give your mind space guest a clear task-oriented goal.  I also advise you not to do it again.  One freelancer in a mind space can be an asset, but two are usually a headache.”

Lezerath made me feel better and discard my plans to dissipate the couatl.  “What about what she said about projecting constructs from my mind space?  Should I be doing that?  Can I actually do that?”

Lezerarh spoke in her lecture tone, “There are a few ways to do as the creature said.  For aether magic, it is called summoning magic.  Instead of summoning a demon,” she chuckled at her joke, “or another bound create from the universe, you just summon your constructs from your mind space.  The more complex the creature, the more aether is required.  It also generally has a very short shelf life—usually less than an hour.  The other way is a psychic projection.  You need to have extreme control and power of mind for that.  You are decades away from this method, and only if you apply yourself.  Even after centuries, I can not project from my mind space.  The third method I am aware of is golem creation.  This is where you insert the construct into a prepared automaton.”

“What happens when the construct form is destroyed in the real world?”  I asked, but my mind was already spinning with the new knowledge and future possibilities.

Lezerath had answers, “The golem route binds the construct to the prepared host.  So if the host body is destroyed, the construct will also be destroyed.  The constructs maintain anchors in your mind space for the other two methods.  So when the projection or summoning is destroyed or expires, they return to your mind space.  It is all extremely complex magic.”

I thanked Lezerath and hung up.  It was a lot to think about.  The couatl was a good addition as long as she could be relied on.  She might also be a good source of advice if she had genetic memory.  Maybe I should ask her what she knows of aboleths next time I talk with her.

I spent most of my day on Sunday adding books to my mind space.  Starting on Monday, I planned to bring twelve to school with me to add.  If I finished those, there were always books in the library.  Mary and Abigail showed up, seeking some instruction from Bedelia in the absence of Lezerath.  Vida and Eilina were still studying for the AP exams, albeit just four now.  Abigail told me Kiri planned to stop by to thank me for helping Eilina.  Eilina was on waking around happier than ever, and Vida was jealous.  Abigail admitted it was causing some tension in the house between the two.

Abigail thought that Vida needed a vent for her pent-up energy.  She agreed it was too soon for sex, even with her mature body.  Vida was joining the outdoor track team in the spring, but maybe she should join the indoor team like Abigail. It would allow Abigail to keep an eye on her.  The thing was, Vida was resistant to the idea, so she wanted me to talk to her about it.

Abigail coyly said she had pent-up energy too, and dragged me into the bedroom.  I think it was the first time me and Abigail had used an actual bed.  The sex was closer to slow-motion wrestling with aggressive pinning and slow, long thrusts.  Abigail let me know her favorite position was when she was face down with her legs together, and I kissed her neck and shoulders while I slowly pumped her with long strokes.  My length tickled her G-spot in this position, and she had a free hand to tickle her clit.

After we finished, we needed to change the sheets.  I found Artica had ordered a whole closet full of Sateen sheets.  Two dozen unopened packages of new sheets were in the linen closet, along with dozens of sets of bamboo towels.  I really should stop letting her have cart blanche with my credit card.  She needed to be put on a budget.

That made me check my phone to see if the estate had sold in Amsterdam.  Offers were coming in, but the realtor facilitating the sale had not accepted any yet.  The company had an incentive.  Their rate was a flat one million dollars and a bonus of 1% of any amount over a 100 million dollar sale.  The highest offer was 104 million, but offers were still accepted until March 1st.  Then they would close the sale with the highest bid.

As Abigail was leaving, Mary entered the bedroom, “Caleb, can we talk for a moment?” Her serious tone made me slightly worried. She came in and sat on the newly made bed—made all the sheets were not a bad idea, Artica.

Abigail seemed indecisive, and I waited for whatever she needed to say. “Caleb, I have been talking with Bedelia.” Oh great. What thoughts was Bedelia putting in her head? “I want to get stronger too.” Only good thoughts—Thank you, Bedelia! “She just offered—well, she said I had to ask you first. She offered for me to join you for her core enhancement sessions. I mean, I asked when she said you two were not having sex. I still think I want to save—well, is it ok? Bedelia already lives here, and I can come here after rowing practice to do my homework, do the mind defense training,” she paused, “and join Bedelia’s session.”

It was cute how the blonde bombshell was asking. She seemed worried I would say no. Mary had one of the strongest cores among humans I had seen, and our few sessions had already raised it to 0.55. According to Jade and Bedelia, she seemed to be better at learning adapt magic than spellcasting. Her core was also still fluid and capable of further enhancement. I admired her sticking to her ideals of not wanting to have sex with anyone other than her future husband. I wondered if her strong ties to the church would disrupt our relationship if she knew I was a demon.

She was waiting for an answer, “Yes. I would be happy to help you improve your magic. I can enhance two cores simultaneously as well.” Her eyes went bright, and she tackled me to the bed and kissed me. After a brief make-out session, she left, and I decided to go and check on my new mind space resident.

I appeared in the central pedestal room and searched mentally—all four were in the bedroom. I immediately got impure thoughts as I walked down the corridor lined with famous paintings. All three were on the edge of the bed, watching the TV I had placed there. Casper was on the floor watching as well. The sounds from the TV made me groan. Lilith pointed at Pandora to indicate this was all her fault. This would not help endear me to Nashira that I was a good person.

I walked in and looked at the expected image of me taking Jade for the first time. Ah, fuck.