

## DEMONS 481

### Chapter 481: Am I any Better?

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Humming. That was the answer, or at least, it was the decision Kamiko reached. She didn't exactly have much practice with music, and it never really interested her, but she wasn't completely incapable of holding a tune. The humming made it easier, helped smooth out the rough edges and allowed for her to make some vaguely pleasing noises as she hummed. What Kamiko didn't realise that the vibrations this caused were quite soothing to Aslena who started to calm down somewhat, her body no longer heaving under the weight of her emotions. The tears still flowed but Aslena was able to keep herself still.

Kamiko just kept things going, the humming alongside her fingers running through Aslena's hair and hoped it help. Eventually, it helped enough for Aslena to get her first truly coherent sentence out, even if she still sniffled a bit before and after. "Why did you come after me? I-I mean you didn't have to... but you did"

Kamiko bit her lip. \*Should I be honest with this one? Yes Kamiko you should be. Dammit, but... no I'm trying to make things better and misleading Aslena probably wouldn't help me at all.\* "I probably wouldn't have a week ago you know. I... I know you see me as a better person than you... and maybe you're right but... I'm not sure I'm that much better.

"See... before this week, I... I had a lot problems you know? More than you might think. I had problems with you, with Dad, with Mum, with Elmony a little but not too much... I didn't have any friends... I was a bit of a wreck you know?"

"Getting suckered at Envy helped a lot as well. I mean, I sorta knew what they were doing but... I really needed to vent you know?" said Kamiko in soft tones

"Um... not really? I mean... no... no I don't understand" said Aslena still pressed against Kamiko's chest, her horns digging in somewhat due to their size, but Kamiko didn't notice, it wasn't even close to the emotional turmoil she was still experiencing.

Hearing Aslena's response though, Kamiko let out a long breath that ruffled the top of Aslena's hair.

"Hooo boy. Where do I start? The big one I suppose was that I was trying to internalise a lot of my problems. I just... didn't tell anyone what was wrong... like ever."

"I'm sorry" said Aslena before Kamiko could really get going.

"For what?" asked Kamiko confused.

"For everything. For being part of your problems. I... I'm sorry" said Aslena

Kamiko lightly kissed the top of Aslena's hair, "W-what are you doing?" said Aslena but Kamiko promptly ignored her and hummed for a bit longer.

Once that was done she started talking again, "This one really isn't your fault. I mean, sure, I had problems with you as well, but you aren't responsible at all for me not talking about them" Aslena could already feel some retorts bubbling in her mind, but she wasn't so blind as to think her sister would

accept them and so just hugged her a little tighter "one of the big ones with the triplets was that they act like each of them are interchangeable, especially when it comes to hanging out with me. That was my big issue with them..."

Aslena hid her wince in Kamiko's outfit, knowing that she hadn't even noticed the triplets were doing that. They did act similar, and Aslena treated them like a set regularly. The clothes she made for them always came in sets of threes and fit a theme. Only when she was doing something special for an event or a special request did they ever differ. The worst part, Aslena felt, was that for their birthdays, for as long as Aslena could remember, she'd always got them a new matching outfit set she'd made for that years fashion. She couldn't help but feel the weight of her disregard for Kamiko threaten to bring her down again. Kamiko was worried about a problem she hadn't even realised existed...

Oblivious to Aslena's new found inner turmoil, she continue speaking "... I really let them have it the other day actually. They were surprisingly nice about it, and I found out that... not all of them were equally at fault, which... that was a bit hard to hear. My problem was them acting like their the same, and then I assigned them all the same blame for it. Sure, it makes sense from a distance but... so does them being similar people.

"Then there's Elmony. I kinda hate when she gets all mopey about Meridithna, and tries to hide the fact she doesn't think she deserves to be our sister after causing one to leave. You cans see it in her eyes when it happens, and I just want to slap her and then give her a hug..."

Aslena felt another spike through her heat. Another thing she hadn't noticed about their siblings. Aslena was starting to wonder if she really saw the world at all? Was she really so caught up in her designs that she didn't notice the problems of the people closest to her? The whispering sounds of the word 'yes' echoed through her mind, and it hurt, for she knew it was the truth.

"...For Mum... well, she actually does pretty well I think. I wish she was around more but I know why she isn't. I wish she didn't make fun of me so much, but it helped me grow a thicker skin and she doesn't normally take it too far. She should give out more hugs of course, but that's a minor complaint..."

Aslena felt her heart soar at that news. Finally, she thought, something she hadn't missed. Aslena new Nira was harder on her then Kamiko, but her recent realisations meant it made a lot of sense when she looked back. Though, now she was wondering if she should think about airing her own grievances? Kamiko seems to think it's a good idea for herself.

"...Dad though, on the other hand. That's a whole nother can of worms. I wish he'd... I wish he'd stand up for himself or... or something! I mean, he let you get away..." Kamiko's hands twitched for a second, "sorry, I don't want to make you feel bad about this. Really, I lay a lot of this on Dad's feet not yours. Um..., yeah Dad. He just let you get away with so many things, and I'm sure he'd do the same for me but... that doesn't make me happy?

"I mean... I just wish he'd actually stand for something. He's so... wishy washy around family. He's willing to let us do whatever and while I know he loves us and I appreciate that love... he takes it too far. I think I'd like it if he acted like... like a real person around me sometimes you know?"

Aslena did know and she was sort of wishing she didn't. Kamiko had said it wasn't about her, and just saying that did help blunt the daggers of emotion a bit, because the fact she'd said it so clearly meant it

was true, but the words still dredged up the memories of the numerous issues she'd caused Kamiko when she was younger. Some she wondered if any but her remembered, forgetting of course her parents had much better memories, same with her older sisters.

"Oh, and finally Meridithna!" Kamiko continued, and Aslena raised an eyebrow at the mention. As far as she knew, Kamiko had never met her. "I'm certain something funky is going on there. I don't think she'd just abandon us. I feel it in my heart. Something else weird is going on with her, and I wish I knew. Nobody talks about it, and I think it's weird. We all 'know' what happened but I can't help but wonder. If someone is hiding something about that..."

Aslena didn't even want to start unpacking that one. She'd just tried to forget about her, arguably, eldest sister. She wasn't around, thus she wasn't important. Aslena could see that probably wasn't the case now, with Elmony's issues spelled out and Kamiko suspicions. "...but yeah. Those are my problems, and I guess you're the first in the family to hear them all... and I'm honestly kinda really happy about that"

Aslena turned her twinkling eyes to Kamiko and saw the genuine smile on Kamiko's face. A smile she couldn't remember receiving herself in some time. She felt the tears starting to renew themselves in her eyes and Aslena let them flow, gripping tighter onto Kamiko as with most of her might, feeling as if she let go now Kamiko would disappear, she'd stop being real, and things would turn back to how they were before. The fake smiles, the glares, the disappointed looks from her adorable younger sister. She didn't want them to go. She didn't know what would happen to her if they did. Aslena had seen something precious, and while it made her sick to think of what she'd sacrificed, she knew she couldn't lose it again.

## **Chapter 482: In the Garden**

We now returned to your favourite protagonist, Kat

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Kat sat in the dining room now feeling slightly awkward. Kamiko had been cheered up, and she wished her all the best... but Kat didn't exactly know where to go now. To pass the time for a bit she started poking around her tail. It was always a strange feeling because it didn't quite line up with anything she knew from being human. Squishing the tip of her tail was a lot more like pressing down on a soft mattress than any biological equivalent. Despite how strong it was, it felt nothing like firm muscle, nor was it hard like bone. It was squishy but had more give than fat. Despite this, Kat's mind simply couldn't find it unnatural. It felt like it should, which made only a slight amount of sense in her mind. It was still fun to squish though.

\*Well. What the heck am I supposed to do now? I'm not really sure where I'm allowed to go. I don't know if they have like a TV or some equivalent or where I'd even find it. All the books are probably in Erra's room or something so that's a no go. This isn't like Lily's house where I knew what I couldn't do, this is a new place.

I'd probably be allowed to go to Kamiko's room. I doubt she'd have a problem with that... but I don't know where anything in it is and I don't know what she'd be fine with me touching. It was very neat so any toys, or just entertainment things would be hidden away somewhere and I don't feel like going through her closets like some burglar. So... what can I do?\*

Kat looked over at the teacup that was still here before looking over at the teapot that was on the bench. \*Hmm, I could clean that maybe? Unless... do they drink cold tea? I don't really know much about tea but I know that some people drink hot and cold tea so maybe just throwing it out would be wrong. I could wash the cup I guess?\*

Kat bit her lip as she glanced over into the teacup to see how full it was. When Kat saw that it was clearly full, she realised something was going on. \*Hmm, that doesn't make any sense. I saw Aslena drink from that, pretty sure I even saw her swallow at least once so there shouldn't be so much tea in there. Hmmm... probably some enchanting stuff on it. I guess that means I shouldn't wash the cup either.\*

Kat sighed looking around the room. It was rather bare but Kat knew that was because of the kitchen cupboard with room layouts in it. Letting out another sigh as she tried folding her tail over and found it was happy to be squished and rolled without any pain or discomfort. \*Yeah no idea how that's supposed to work. Then again, I have tiny arms and I could probably bench press a truck at this point. Hmm... I have that power that lets me pick up things without the weight of them causing them to fold over. Would that work with like... traincars or trucks with whatever their trailer attachments are called?

Like... do they count as one object? They're connected together sure but I'm not totally sold on them being 'one thing' by my power's standards. Then again... on the other hand, they can deal with people wearing clothing, right? Then again... it was kinda hard to judge exactly how well it works with clothing considering how I used it, and nobody had proper plate except for those Wrath guys but I didn't use the trick there anyway.

Maybe that's something to test then. I'd guess that it would be fine but they'd wobble as I moved it, like they would be loose and somewhat free to move... though if that's the case, they might still be able to break? I wonder if that would be taken into account? It's not exactly much energy I don't notice it leaving so it has to be practically nothing. It's not really a defence it's just to stop things breaking and spread the force out... hmmm.\*

Kat looked around once more for things to do and when she glanced out the window, realised she was an idiot. \*Of course, the GARDEN! Why am I staring at the wall when I could be out in the masterpiece that is Nira's garden.\* Kat quickly got to her feet and headed out to the back and just breathed in the nature. She couldn't see the end of the garden because there was rose hedge that blocked her sight line. She could see a bit through the opening that proved it wasn't a hedge mage but that's about it.

Kat smiled at that though. \*I'm glad she designed the garden in such a way you can't just see all of it at once with better eyes. You have to actually take the time to look around.\* Kat glanced at everything. The first section was mostly made up of colourful roses. They managed to get through the whole rainbow with a few different bulb shapes. The standard bulb of course, another one that looked a lot sharper with all the edges looking like spikes in their own right. A couple that looked more like a tulip crossed with a rose and one yellow rose that was very spread out, leaving plenty of gaps between the leaves. Only the fact that everything else was clearly a rose prompted Kat to believe the same of it as well.

Walking forward past the hedge wall and around the corner Kat found herself in the next section. It wasn't dedicated to just one type of flower like the last one. This seemed to be their practice area

instead. The centre was densely packed sand and it was lined by smooth grey stones to mark the edge of the combat area. That whole thing was surrounded by a moat with a number of water lilies growing inside of it. The edges of the arena had the rose hedges instead of a fence, the difference was, these hedges were at least twice the height of the fence, perhaps more.

Kat continued onwards, letting the sand crunch under her shoes. It didn't shift at all under her weight, used to much greater impacts but she could hear the grains shifting slightly as she walked. Another rose hedge corner and Kat found herself in what looked like a winter garden. All the trees looked like Christmas trees had taken plant form. They were separated into clusters and all had GLOWING flowers that gave off a soft light of the corresponding colour. They were all grouped by colour, except for the one in the centre of the group, which had a mix of two for the most part, with one group having a centre tree with three of them.

\*This... this is very strange. Roses, I get those but what the heck are these? Living Christmas trees? Do these guys even celebrate Christmas? They wouldn't have had Christ though right? Unless he was an angel... shit. Makes me wonder once again if God is real. I mean, I know magic is real now but that doesn't mean we had a God. Doesn't mean we didn't either. Hmmm... that's a tricky one really.\*

"Hi!" Kat whirled around when she heard the voice, mind slowing and fire already finding its way to her hands. When she completed the turn though, it was Nira that was standing there instead of any trespasser or random demon.

Kat instantly let her fire drop and breathed out a sigh of relief. \*Thank God if you exist. I am so glad it's Nira. I don't know what I'd do if it was someone random. I have no idea if I'd be able to fight them. If other Rank 5's like Nira live around here I'd be done before I could even blink.\*

"Um... hi?" said Kat awkwardly.

Nira giggled at Kat's obvious confusion, having taken joy on sneaking up on her. "What's wrong? Are you doing something you shouldn't?" said Nira in the most innocent way possible that also made it clear she was messing with Kat.

"No...?" asked Kat, not sure why she'd made that into a question. \*I know she's messing with me why can't I just say NO?\*

"That's good. As Kamiko's first friend I'd hate for you to do anything naughty" said Nira with a smile on her face. As she said the word 'naughty' her tongue flicked out of her mouth for less than a second, so fast Kat couldn't be sure if it actually happened. "Are you enjoying me garden?"

"Yeah, it's lovely..." said Kat. She meant it to, but she was still surprised Nira was here.

"Did you not think I would be here or something? I mean, this is MY garden after all. I tend the whole thing and I do own the house" said Nira smirking, easily able to guess Kat's thoughts.

### **Chapter 483: Nira Garden**

"Err... I mean... yes I knew that" said Kat slightly uncomfortable with the fact Nira picked out so easily that she'd thought nobody else was around. "So what are you doing here?"

Nira raised an eyebrow that asked 'did you really just say that' and when Kat cringed before giving a slight nod, Nira decided to answer, "I'm just taking care of my plants of course. While you can get hardy varieties in the demon world, not all plants are so robust. The ones I've picked out for my garden are all based on looks so not all of them can survive without a bit of personal care"

"That's cool actually. Um... how long would you say you spend on the garden in a week?" asked Kat

Nira tapped her finger on her cheek as she calculated the time it would take her "Well, I suppose it depends on the season really, and what you count as spending on my garden. I use practically all of me free time on it, but that's overkill really. I don't have to keep things so thoroughly pruned or watered in such specific amounts but I do chose to most of the time.

"I let my family decide in some ways. If they aren't interesting in spending time with me I'll go do some work in the garden because it helps me relax. Sometimes I do some gardening instead of sleeping because when you get to my Rank sleep is more of a cool thing you do occasionally rather than a necessity.

"Still, if I had to give you an answer, I'd say it's something close to forty hours? Really depends on how much sleep I give up. Sleep might not be that interesting but 'enjoying' the night with my husband is a quite fun. Not a frequent activity, but it's nice when we get around it"

Kat looked away somewhat awkwardly and scratched her cheek. \*I didn't really need to know that right? That's gotta be weird right? I certainly don't ask Lily about what her parents are doing and I didn't want to know this. Why would anyone just say that?\* Kat of course, was oblivious to the enjoyment radiating from Nira's eyes because she was pointedly not looking at them.

"Aren't you a precious child. Not quite as flustered as I'd have expected but at least you're somewhat embarrassed. Too many of my friends just nod at me or offer congratulations... or one up me..." said Nira with a pout on her lips. That did wonders for how old she looks. Her facial structure was reminiscent of Kamiko's and because she was a demon and didn't really age, the change in look took way too many years off in Kat's opinion.

"Right... um... it just doesn't feel like my place to know? I mean I grew up being told that was sort of a private thing... so... yeah? It's like handing out your passwords to friends. You trust them not abuse it of course, but that's private information, you just don't hand it out to people..." said Kat

"Password?" said Nira tasting the word on her tongue. "Huh, that's an interesting concept. Most things here are tied to either some biological feature or just our demonic energy signature. It's basically impossible to fake those. Much easier to just... break the lock? Would be how you'd say that I believe." When she spoke about the lock, Kat could hear the words distorting, as if Nira was saying something else. Kat got the feeling though, that what she wanted heard got across instead.

"Right well... um... yeah? I guess that makes sense. I know Lily did a bunch of research about physical locking mechanisms and worked out that most of them aren't actually worth anything. Anyone with lockpicking skill can open them and anyone desperate otherwise can punch through the window. It's more about letting people know someone was there who wasn't supposed to be," said Kat

"Fascinating," said Nira, because it was. Physical locks were something she didn't really pay attention to because the Hub didn't have them and they were never a real consideration on Contracts. "Ah, where are my manners. I've completely forgotten to say, but thank you so much Kat."

"You're welcome? For what though?" asked Kat confused

"Oh, for helping my daughters finally reconcile." Said Nira happily

"How did you know that?" asked Kat confused

Nira grinned "Kat, I'm tier five. I can hear everything. I can hear them crying in each other's arms right now. Oh it makes me so happy to know they've finally solved everything. I've been wondering what to do about that whole thing for years!" said Nira cheerfully.

Kat nodded for a second with a slight smile on her face before pausing. \*Wait... what did she say?\* Kat replayed the words and Nira could see the instant Kat's whole demeanour shifted. It had started out as somewhat pleased but reluctant acceptance. As Kat thought on the words though, it quickly morphed into anger with her aura spiking hard, pushing against Nira who simply allowed it for a few moments, before Kat's posture shifted again. Her eyes narrowed and her hands unclenched but they were now completely straight. "If you knew about that why didn't you do anything?" asked Kat, the question heavy in the air.

Nira tapped her cheek some more, clearly thinking about something. She let herself spin in place for a second, hair spreading out as she did. After a few rotations Nira hit the floor with enough force to stop in place and sighed. "Honestly Kat that's complicated. I'm going to share a bit with you that I want you to promise me you'll keep a secret from my daughters if I explain ok?"

Kat bit her lip. \*Hmmm... I want to know. No, I think I NEED to know. I... I kinda liked Nira but to hear she just... just let this go on. And for years! The way she said it even sort of implies she's known the whole time. I really don't like that... I hope she has a good reason. Dammit I'm going to have to promise not to tell Kamiko... at least it's all the sisters. I guess it doesn't just affect Kamiko?\*

"Fine" said Kat letting the word spill lazily from her tongue. She wasn't happy to voice it, but knew there wasn't really a choice. She wasn't resentful, but she was slightly displeased.

"Properly please" said Nira sadly. She didn't really want to force this, but it was necessary in her mind.

Kat sighed. \*Fine.\* "I, Kat, accept your condition to not inform any of your daughters of what you are about to tell me intentionally, in any way, unless it is a direct danger to their health"

Nira actually had the audacity to cackle at the end of Kat's promise. "Oh that's rich. I... hehehe... Kat you don't understand... oh this is so funny. Ok... ok... um..." Nira bent over with the laughter chuckling to herself finding the wording Kat used hilarious.

"Ok, so, Kat, the big secret is that one of my abilities let me scry people I've healed. It's specialised and lets me monitor their general condition. Later on it evolved and allowed me to look in on them and see how they were doing. Of course, I've healed my daughters before and scanned them. They are considered my patients. I constantly get updates about there wellbeing every hour, of every day."

Kat's eyes widened and her jaw dropped. "Um... what? I... I mean... ok... holy... everything? I... I mean... damn. Ok... why let things go on so long then?" asked Kat

Nira sighed. "WeeeeeeeIII... I have a good friend now, who used to be my mentor. They had a similar ability to me. It's kinda rare but if you have a bunch of healing stuff you tend to get it. So, rare in general, but based on what skills I had at the time I was likely to get it ya know? Anyway, my mentor, lovely guy at the time, used that skill to watch their kids and... it didn't go so well.

"Their kids felt horrible. Trapped, like they were being watched twenty four seven. The fact that they actually were made it even worse. They felt like they could never do anything their parents would disapprove of because their mother would come down on them like a sack of bricks when he found out."

Kat noticed the odd pronoun usage there. "Wait... mother and he? Are they are male or female demon?" asked Kat jumping in

Nira waved Kat off "They are a shapeshifter so they've been both. Their husband can't shapeshift so my mentor, who likes to be called Copper, stayed in a female body they were fond of for the duration. They've been fond of their male one for the most part when I've known them, so I still refer to them as a 'he'.

"Anyway, off topic. Copper would make sure to always devote part of his mind to watching the kids. No matter where they were. They got so paranoid, eventually two of them just snapped and attacked him. Screaming and shouting. Oh it was horrible. I mean, they had no chance, only Rank 1's at the time, but Copper wasn't going to fight back against them. Mentally it was very painful though.

"So... I learnt from that example to not exactly advertise the fact I'm always keeping tabs on them, and try to let them get away with things. It's a little more complicated then that but that's why I let it go on so long" said Nira

#### **Chapter 484: Nira Christmas Tree**

\*That does make things a bit more complicated. I suppose it's different when you can make sure it never gets taken to far... even if I'd make the argument that story of the pageant was too far... having such a good example of what not to do... hmm.\*

"That does make things harder I suppose... was it really that bad?" asked Kat

Nira shook her head. "Well, that's the thing, and what made my own response so... hands off I suppose. Copper really didn't abuse that power, he just didn't hide it at all. So if a problem came up they'd be there to sort it out all the time, and when the kids asked what was going on, he answered and explained it. They didn't mind that year, or the year after that. Took nearly a decade before it was a problem.

"And he only used it to break up fights or to help out those kids. It's honestly about what I could see myself doing. I'd have made sure my kids didn't fight. Saved them when they were in danger if I could, or if it was while on Contract I'd heal them when they got home... but it was the knowledge of it you know?" explained Nira with a soft sigh.

"I mean... not really?" said Kat "I don't really think I can imagine something like that. I mean, I've read some books where it gets close but... that really is never ending surveillance. At least in some novels



there was the small chance they weren't being watched but here there really isn't. I also don't exactly have experience with family figures in the first place so I'm a bit too removed to even imagine how that would feel properly"

Nira winced at the casual mention of Kat's missing parents. It hurt somewhat to know Kat really cared so little about it. As a mother herself, she really didn't know what to think. Sure it was great that Kat wasn't hung up on it, but the casual dismissal as if she was saying she'd run out of cereal hurt. "I suppose so. Still, with how it all went down I couldn't exactly do the same with my kids."

Kat nodded. "So, you just aren't going to tell them?" asked Kat

Nira sighed. "Well, that's difficult to say. I do want to tell them. I don't exactly feel like I have the right to keep them out of the know about something so heavily involving their lives once they pass their fifth decade" Kat's eyes widened at that, pretty sure that demons matured at the same rate "Elmony especially likely deserves to know... but I can't just tell one and not the others. Elmony would certainly tell the triplets at least, and perhaps Kamiko, and I guess after today Aslena as well. My husband doesn't even realise the full implications of what I know, though I don't monitor him like my kids, just a warning if he's about to die, and he knows about that one.

"To further complicate things... I also still might want more kids? I mean... not right now, and I'll probably give it a few hundred years for all my daughters to move out properly, or at least everyone except the youngest two. I think it'd be nice to have a son but I doubt that'll ever happen."

\*Ok I don't know what I want to ask about more. Should it be the son thing or why she's waiting? Let's go with waiting first.\* "Why wait? I mean, if you are waiting that long is it really an issue?" asked Kat confused

Nira bit her lip before explaining. "A little? As I said, I'm waiting for my little two to get older certainly. I also know that Kamiko would tell any other kids I have the second they turned their puppy dog eyes on her. As good as her own pair is, she has a hard time resisting her older sisters. I think she'd be nearly as bad as my husband with any younger siblings"

\*I hate how right she is... but she's right. I can see why Elmony would mention it. She probably thinks they are old enough, and Nira doesn't necessarily disagree intellectually just emotionally. If she has more kids she worries that they'd find out real quickly and she would experience what Copper did.\*

"Ok, I guess I can understand. I'm still not sure I can agree, but I understand at least. Why don't you think you'll have a son though?" asked Kat

Nira, to Kat's surprise, actually brightened at this question. "Oh that one is actually very interesting. So, first off, Incubi are just male Succubi, or they are male and female names for the original Lust faction species. Now, Succubi are predisposed to have girls, and Incubi are predisposed to have guys. This isn't something we figured out till later though.

"Anyway, this meant that, growing up, I'd always sort of accepted I'd probably have daughter's until I met my husband. I was excited because well, there are a lot of other demons, and even if Succubi are some of the most... prolific, it still didn't seem likely I'd have an Incubus husband, or not one with strong Incubi blood like I know my own is.

"So low and behold, Trigrath comes along, I got rather excited at the prospect of having a son. Then I had adopted a daughter, she was adorable, had one of my own, still adorable, then I had three more, still very adorable then two more... and while they were definitely adorable, I was asking questions.

"Being in Medical, and a researcher meant that I could do a quick project that involved checking my husbands... material... and I found out that he actually inherited the predisposition towards daughters. I don't think this has happened before, or if it has, it's not been recorded. This means that we have double the predisposition towards daughters and that the chances of us having a son is probably less than one in a million."

"Why do you seem so happy with that?" asked Kat with a raised eyebrow

Nira shrugged still grinning, "Well, I don't really care that I'll have daughters. I was happy having daughters before, and while a son would be nice, I'm not going to be upset with more daughters." Nira's grin then stretched wide reaching her ears nearly and showing off all her teeth "But, it's a great excuse. 'I'll stop when I have son'. I can give that as my answer when people try to but in on my business and ask how many kids I want."

This is where Nira's brows furrowed and she actually looked slightly angry, "I get enough people bringing that up you know? Demons don't normally have many kids. This is because of a number of factors but a lot of them don't bother because it's difficult and the ones that enjoy the act, like myself, don't normally want kids around in that sort of environment. I like to think I'm a bit tamer than them but... eh, it's mostly just that I have soundproofing on our room."

Kat coughed awkwardly. "I thought we already went over the fact I feel that's rather personal information..."

Nira grinned again, reverting perfectly to her previous posture as if she'd never been angry at all. "You asked for it rather literally my dear. How could I not take the chance to gauge your reaction, especially when it's so interesting. Aw well, I guess you don't want to hear about what this old lady does in bed..."

Kat rolled her eyes. "Yeah, maybe you're older than any person on my home dimension but when people call themselves old it's because they look it. You could pretend to be Aslena's sister easily with the right look. Your eyes give you away a little when you're not trying"

"Not Kamiko?" asked Nira pouting

Kat grinned without really feeling it, "The hair makes it harder to notice how similar your faces are, so it seemed more fitting to name your other daughter"

Nira nodded pout removed to be replaced with a fake look of profound understanding. "Yes, yes indeed. I'm rather glad Trigrath's hair colour seems to be a dominant trait, I think it's much nicer than my own."

"Not sure you have the sample size for that. The way things work with triplets I don't really know how to count for that sort of thing" responded Kat

"More than you might think Kat" said Nira "Unlike humans, which I assume you're using as the basis for that, demons born at the same time are more likely to look the same even if they are fraternal. It's a weird quirk I might bother studying properly one day. We do know they almost always look the same but not much more research was done there. It wasn't important or anyone's pet project"

"I see. Still, you've avoiding the subject a lot now. You've given your reasons as to why, at least somewhat, for your actions, but not specifically why you never did anything for Kamiko and Aslena."

#### **Chapter 485: Answer the Question**

"Did you know that I've not been criticised on my parenting technique in nearly a century?" said Nira, clearly not expecting the question to be answered. Kat narrowed her eyes though at the blatant attempt to move the conversation somewhere else. "That's because, while my kids have some problems, it be so much worse you know. Plenty of demon families have run themselves into the ground trying to get back at each other for long forgotten slights..."

"Nira" said Kat seeing that the older demon was intent on avoiding the question. "I'm sure that's interesting, and I'm not criticising you. I'm asking, WHY." \*I'm glad I was able to say I wasn't criticising. That's true, I can't critique. I am judging you though.\*

"Well, I did what I could Kat, I really pushed the envelope with Aslena's punishments when I could. She always thought I was being too harsh when I caught her, but they were never for that, but for that, plus all the things she thought she was never caught for. I made sure they were short punishments, but ultimately humiliating or otherwise memorable. I didn't want to build too much resentment with me, or have it misplaced on Kamiko." Explained Nira

\*That still doesn't answer the question though Nira. You explained to me what you DID do. I'm asking WHY! Should I keep pressing though? She clearly doesn't want to know... but... I think I'm willing to push. She won't kill me I don't think. She couldn't do anything too bad lest Kamiko find out tomorrow when I get called to punishment.\*

Kat steeled her eyes, and asked, "Nira, while I'm happy to know that you think Aslena was suitably punished. Why did you let it go on so long?"

Nira's eyes narrowed at this, before responding with. "You almost make it sound like I did nothing"

Kat's eyes started to glow slightly seeing this. She was easily keeping her anger down, but it was rising. "I didn't say that at all Nira. As I've never had a mother, I can't imagine all the things you have done and continue to do for your family. I wouldn't be surprised if you've spent more hours making sure that the triplets are alright then I have making up my entire life.

"I do not say this to doubt your commitment Nira. While your husband is a fool when it comes to his family you are not. You've admitted to me a big secret, and I just want to know why you let things continue like this. Not why you didn't try to fix things, but why you didn't try to force the issue, or try harder with the soft sell. I'm not saying your other options were even better.

"I'm asking, why you didn't take them. Perhaps, it's because at the orphanage, it was my job to deal with these issues. To make sure that none of the kids were picking on the others, to make sure that nothing festered. Many a time I had to lock two kids in a room and just tell them to talk it out. Thing is though, I'm not their mother. I never was, and I didn't do it for long term health, I did it so that everyone at the orphanage had UNDERSTANDING and acceptance.

"I could not let things spiral, because it is hard to get a child with a history of causing issues adopted. I worked to make sure they could be adopted. That was my goal over any other." \*Except Sylvie.\* A

traitorous part of her mind raised, for it may have been true that she was harsher on the punishments involving the little girl. \*Luckily, I was no longer in charge at the end there. I could play those favourites.\*

Nira bit her lip and glared at Kat, but there wasn't any real heat in it. The dismissal of Kat's motherly role seemed to strike another cord in her. She realised that while Kat might not care for her own parents, she knew the importance of them... all while downplaying the likely importance of her own role at the orphanage. Nira sucked in a deep breath of air she didn't really need, mostly just to keep herself from speaking for a few seconds longer.

"Maybe I wish I knew as well Kat..." said Nira, with a sad note to her voice. "... I'm not trying to avoid things this time. I think I actually don't know. Perhaps... hmm... perhaps it was to stop a second Meridthna happening. Was I afraid of that if I pushed either of them too hard? Or perhaps another fracturing?"

"See, I have no doubt that if things came to a head, my daughters would all pick sides, Kamiko's to be precise. Not to say the others don't love Aslena but... Kamiko knows them all much better. She spent so much of her time with them. She's such a loveable figure and such a large part of their lives since she's been born...

"Aslena... well... I'm sure you know what she's like... but... the main sin she committed was just... not spending as much time with them all. She was standoffish to the others, thinking they wouldn't help her at first, and then later when she was distant from us ALL around the time she was Rank 1...

"Maybe I didn't want to force the issue Kat" Nira had slight tears in her eyes now, and her smile was wavering, "maybe I feared the consequences... I had one child leave me already, and I'm not sure how I'd handle another.

"I kept myself together the first time for Elmony and the triplets. They wouldn't have been able to handle seeing me freak out on top having a sister leave their lives forever. I think that's the last truly big fight this family had. Oh sure, some words have been thrown around, but that is NOTHING compared to that fight.

"Did you ever fail Kat?" Nira's eyes locked on Kat's own, and held them in place, "Did you ever fail a child in your care?"

Kat swallowed, "Yes" the answer came before she processed it. Her eyes widened as she realised what she'd admitted, but, in for a penny in for a pound. "A pair of boys. One named Lucas, another named Joel. I could not help them. I... I did not know the depth of the issues when I tried to get them to talk it out."

Kat wanted to look away from Nira's gaze, but knew she couldn't. It was not an acceptable outcome. Something important would be lost. "See, they both came in separately and I didn't know they had a history. Lucas had been a bully of Joel's back at their old school, and he used to make fun of Joel for not having a father.

"I didn't know. Talking about parents was obviously... something done carefully. So, while Joel had been at the orphanage for a while, and had recovered somewhat... Lucas came into the picture and he... I guess he saw his chance for revenge.

"He asked him how it felt now. How Lucas felt having neither. Joel... he... he used to say 'you might be missing both just like me, but you've only been without them a week' or a month or two, whatever it was at that time. He hammered in the guilt Lucas already felt and... well, one day Lucas blew up at him.

"So... I put them in a room, and said they wouldn't leave till they talked it out. Well... it was two bloody and bruised boys that left that room Nira. Not a word was spoken between the two, and I don't think there ever was again"

Nira almost wanted to grin. To point out to Kat this had been her exact fear... but hearing it from someone so much younger than herself, one who still denied that she'd filled a mothering role... all she could say was "Oh"

Seconds past, and they turned into minutes. Nira was actually the one to break eye contact first, but Kat didn't really notice. The silence was pervasive, and neither knew what to say. Kat believed she didn't have the right to criticise, having failed as Nira feared she would. Nira didn't know what to say because she felt Kat could never understand the complications with forcing the two to confront their issues... only to see Kat actually did.

Ten minutes past in silence, and neither was really happy about that. The silence was hard to break though. Eventually though, Nira decided, that she should speak. Kat was still a child in her eyes, albeit a mature one, and she should say, "I'm sorry"

"What?" mumbled Kat before her head wrapped around how rude her response was.

"I'm sorry Kat. I thought" Nira bit her lip but continued on in saying "Well, I guess I thought you were trying to scold me because you felt you should as Kamiko's friend. Not... not as someone who knows the issue with allowing grudging to fester. Not as someone who knows the risk of forcing a confrontation... and I'm sorry for that"

#### **Chapter 486: B-b-breakdown**

"With that said" Nira kicked out at the dirt slightly and turned her body slightly to the side, "I suppose I can answer more in full, and not to you as just someone who's Kamiko's friend. Obviously, my desire to not mention the monitoring, the fear that it could end up like Meridithna and the other things I mentioned were all still true.

"There is one angle we haven't really gone over. See, the other thing... is I'm not sure what it would do to Aslena. You watched her flee did you not? It's all hit her at once, all the bad things she's done to Kamiko mostly, have basically slapped her in the face. She's... coping for now. The question is, could she have done this when she was younger?"

Kat opened her mouth to comment but Nira waved lightly in her direction and kept speaking, "I believe kids are adaptable, and I'm not saying she wouldn't have been able to handle it at all... but I think it would have changed her in a major way. By the time I decided that it truly was a problem in need of... I hate to use the word fixing when it comes to my children... perhaps mending would be better?"

"Anyway, once it was a problem that I admitted to myself was something that needed to be changed, she'd already given up a number of things. While she did bully Kamiko, that was one of the few childish

things she ever indulged in. Aslena didn't watch cartoons, she didn't have friends or run around outside. She didn't play with toys all that much, it she would always dedicate herself to her craft.

"Now, you might say we should have let her do other things, well, we didn't force her to do anything at all. Leave her in a room with toys and sewing equipment and she'd go for the sewing equipment," Nira threw her arms up into the air "heck, leave her with just toys and she'd probably find a way to turn them into sewing equipment.

"And the bad things she did were rarely directly malicious, or even close to that. Most of them were... inconvenient certainly, and perhaps slightly traumatising at worst, but none of them were TO cause issues for Kamiko if that makes sense. It's like... ah, take your demonic energy. It creates flames like all demons. You could argue that creating ice is an unintended side effect, or if you don't think that, at the very least, the fact it also chills the area around the ice as it melts IS a side effect. It's sort of like that.

"Most of the time, Aslena needed someone to try an outfit on for her, or be a model for one reason or another. Kamiko didn't enjoy it and we tried to teach Aslena that fact, but she never really seemed to let it sink in. She'd given up a lot to pursue clothing design, why wouldn't Kamiko be willing to do the same to a lesser extent..."

Nira let out a long huff of air, Kat noticing that it was only now she actually drew in breath. "The final thing is... while I do monitor them pretty much constantly, that's all it is, only pretty much. I can't scry them all the time, I'm not quite so skilled that I can split my mind like that. Sure, I could easily process a few thousand thoughts in a second, but they are all sequential. I never picked up the skill that lets you REALLY multitask.

"The scanning is more like... a background process. It's always running, and there is alerts, but I have to check it regularly to make sure I don't miss things. This means that... well... even I'm not sure the extent of things Aslena has or hasn't done. Oh, don't get me wrong, I probably know about 90% of the things she's done to cause Kamiko pain, but I didn't watch most of them, just know they happened, and it's the other ten percent I worry about you know?

"What if I'm overreacting? What if I'm misinterpreting the diagnosis? I can only guess based on the bodies responses that I get back. Like, when Kamiko is upset, her heartbeat might rise. It also rises when she's happy. Sure, there are a lot of extra details but I'm decent enough to guess almost all the time. Still, that's a risk and I'm not sure if it's fair of me to take it. There have been plenty of times where I was too busy to double check with a quick scry.

"Maybe I was in a medical procedure that couldn't be stopped, maybe I was locked in combat with a dragon. Whatever it was, it meant I couldn't check," Nira's tears had returned "and you know? I worry that I actually have no idea what's going on in my kids lives. Isn't that crazy? I've monitored them closely for their entire lives. I probably know them better then they know themselves...

"But do I? can I really know them like that? Clearly I didn't know enough about Meridithna to stop her from leaving. I'm forever worried that I'll mess up something important because I thought I knew something I really didn't and that terrifies me. I don't have a diagnostics ability for my family relationships Kat. I can see ATOMS when I concentrate Kat. But I still can't see into someone else's mind. You can, but only somewhat. I doubt that little glimpse would be enough for me..." Nira finished off with a sigh. Hands clutching onto her gardening clothes, breath coming in slightly ragged.

\*Well... um... holly shit ok then. That's... well that's a little more than I was expecting to hear if I'm being honest with myself here and I don't really know how to process that. I vastly underestimated how complicated this is. I honestly feel like kind of a bitch for pressing Nira so hard for an answer.

I mean, some people might argue she needs this. Heck, I might argue she needs this. Still... I really didn't want her to... break down like that. Oh sure, she still looks like she's holding up alright and is only a bit frazzled, but a demon at least a few centuries old's 'bit frazzled' is probably a normal humans 'the world is over and everyone's dying tomorrow' levels of panic.

I mean... what the hell do you even say to that? I can't even begin to comprehend the position she's in at this point. It's just... it's so far outside of what I'd think a human could understand. I mean, I'm not human anymore but... I don't really KNOW what a demon thinks like. I don't know how much my thought process still needs to change.

Just living for as long as Nira has must change a person. Humans, when they get older, start to become more set in there ways for the most part but... is it the same for demons? Do they have something built into them genetically to help stop that? I mean they must right? Humans already have an issue with stagnating at points and demon society would surely be the same if they had that issue.

Maybe I'm just not seeing it though? Nira is, for many intents and purposes, a scientist and has been for a long time. Perhaps she's more able to come to grips with new knowledge? It's really hard to know. Are human scientist like that? It's more a gut feeling then a real world knowledge thing... so perhaps I'm wrong?

I can't even compare her to any other demons. I've never seen anyone else even close to her age freak out like this and I don't even really know her age, and... even then, I'm not sure I've really seen a freak out like this before. She... she told me because she thinks I can understand and... I was happy to hear that until... until I realised I CANNOT understand. It's not even close. I have no idea.\*

"I'm sorry" said Kat

\*I don't know what else to say. It's all I can say. I came on to hard here.\*

"It's ok dear. I didn't mean to unload all that on you..." said Nira slowly

Kat shook her head and said, "No I'm not saying because of that... or well... I sort of am. It's because... well... as much as you where willing to open up to me because I'm someone who understands... I don't think I do? I mean... I don't really deserve that kind of faith. You've... you've spent so long thinking about this clearly and... I didn't really mean to make it all so painful..."

"It's fine Kat" said Nira smiling as she walked up and brought the younger demon into a hug. Kat stiffened for an instant before relaxing in Nira's grip. "I didn't expect you to understand everything, however, I know you do understand ENOUGH. That's why I shared. As much as I love my husband, he doesn't understand, he CAN'T. He is so weak to his family that this sort of thing would fly over his head. Oh sure he'd listen to me, and hear me out, and maybe give suggestions... but he can't understand even what you can Kat, so I really do thank you for this"

**Chapter 487: Four is not a Crowd**

Kat and Nira both had their tails wrapped around each other in a full hug. Nira had finished with the tears, but her face was still a little bit wet, Kat on the other hand had only a very slight moistening around her eyes that gave any indication of the severity of the emotions that had washed through them both.

After a while, Kat noticed the tail factor and made a note to ask about it but didn't break the hug. Nira started to hum a little at this point as well and shifted very slightly from side to side, taking Kat with her. Despite the gentle way she did it, Kat could feel the force behind it somehow and knew even at her strongest she'd fail to find off this caring touch. A few more minutes and Nira looked over her shoulder back towards the house and said, "It seems my daughters are cooling down. Perhaps we should grab them and hop in the bath together".

"Sounds good" said Kat breaking the hug, "Hey um... unrelated note, I noticed you hugged me with your tail there. I do that sort of automatically but I noticed Kamiko doesn't really use her tail for it when she's hugged me. What sort of... I guess... cultural context is around that? Like... what do you use it for?"

"Ah yes... that's actually something you should know" said Nira as she started to head towards the house. Kat kept pace with her and walked in step with the older demon. "So, it depends on the species. For some it's actually an erogenous zone, but not for most Succubi. Oh, quite a few of them will play it up, and some actually like their tail being tugged. They're normally the same demons that like getting their hair pulled, but on the whole, it's more like an arm or a leg than anything else. The only thing to note is that obviously the base of it is a little close to your butt, so... if that's a thing..." Nira shrugged "Not to my taste but I know all kinds really.

"Still, that wasn't what you asked. Um... so, Succubi and Incubi are fairly physical people. We like to hug and hold hands even if we aren't necessarily friends. Greeting co-workers you like with a hug is considered perfectly normal once you've known them for like a week or so. It's not a first meeting thing unless you really hit it off, but it's nothing serious if that makes sense.

"Hugging Succubi, tail included, is the next step up. It's done with family and close friends. Once again, not sexual unless you want to make it sexual. I didn't really mean to hug you like that, but it happens. It's an instinct thing. When you're sharing a major emotional moment with someone and you hug, normally that'll include your tail as well because... well, now that I think about it... that's not something I've ever heard of being researched... hmm... I wonder... I might need to check the archives and do some testing myself if they are empty.

"Never mind. What was I saying? Right, instinct and stepping up. It's very common amongst family members, similar to like... a kiss on the forehead, or the cheek. The next step up from that is obviously kissing people on the lips, and that's for potential romantic partners only. Thing is though, while kissing is the next step up, it's a big step. Hugging with tail, is like... the last bastion of platonic closeness if that makes sense. Sure kissing might not seem that more intimate, but it crosses the line.

"Now. With that being said... a couple other demons are not like that. If they hug you with their tail, that IS crossing the line. I know Lamia's can be weird about it. While they'll happily crush someone with their snake body, someone running their hand gently along the end of their tail is a BIG no unless, once again, you're in a relationship. There are others, but for quite a few of them it's more a community based thing than a whole race thing like Succubi. We're a surprisingly homogenous lot when it comes to weird things



like that. Wings for instance. They're perfectly safe as well. Batting someone on the wing is like humans hitting someone on the shoulder, though we do that as well. It's a little more intimate when you have small things like me, and Kamiko, but for demons with big wings like yourself it's not normally something they'll care about.

"Rule of them for that, the bigger the wings, the less sensitive and intimate it is UNLESS they have feathers. If they have feathers, it gets all wonky again. Sorry if I'm confusing you. I know you just asked about the tails but this is actually pretty important stuff you really should know. Wouldn't want to accidentally do something wildly inappropriate. Still, common sense deals with most of the issues. Hands and feet are always fine unless that person has a specific fetish for those things. Still normally isn't an issue because well... it'd be hard to function if it was."

"Thanks!" said Kat cheerily as she stepped inside. \*That's actually really useful information and I'm glad to hear that it's mostly common sense stuff. Boy I'd hate to have accidentally don't something really bad without meaning to. I mean, it seems like it's fine, and I haven't done anything weird, but who knows. Like... like say that Gluttony demon's chef hat. That was weird. Would that be something I should be careful about?\*

Nira headed downstairs first and Kat followed. The older demon was the one to knock on the door to Aslena's room. Kat noted that she couldn't hear anything at all, so they were probably soundproof. \*Now the question is. Can Nira's ears overcome the soundproofing or is it enchanted and she's keyed to hear past it. Or, did she just scry them to find out what was going on? These are all valid options and while I want to know the answer, it feels rude to ask.\*

While Kat was having those thoughts, Aslena made it to the door and opened it slightly. She had tears streak all the way down her face, and most of her neck as well. Kat was surprised to note, her nose wasn't running though. \*Must be a Succubus thing.\* Kamiko was standing behind, a fairly similar state but likely less tears overall, though not by much. "Oh... um... hi Mom..." said Aslena while trying to sound cheery.

"Come, we're all having a bath" said Nira happily as if it was a suggestion. The sisters knew better though, and quickly followed their mother as she headed for the bathroom area. They didn't talk on the walk or while they were removing their clothes. However, as soon as they'd all hit the water Aslena asked, "Mom... am I a bad person?"

Nira blew out a lot of air at that, enough to cause small waves to start up in the pool. "That's a hard question to answer Aslena. Know that you're my daughter and I love you no matter what. That being said...are you a bad person... well... I'd say it's complicated. It really depends on what you're measuring yourself against.

"I wouldn't say you're a good person. I'm sorry, but, I think you wanted and expected to hear that. I'm still sorry to say it, but... well... you've been a bit... callous with the unintended consequences of your actions more than a few times. Nothing that's caused me problems personally but others..." Nira finished what she was saying by darting her eyes really quickly over to Kamiko.

"I..." Aslena struggled with the words for a moment, letting herself lean against the edge of the water. "I suppose I d-did figure that out. Why... why didn't you ever tell me?"

Nira sighed. "Well, quite a few reasons though I'm not sure you'll like many of them. A big one is I'm not sure you'd have cared before. Maybe a week ago it might have worked, but certainly not much further back then that. On top of that... well... you knew what you wanted to do with your life, and that's what was causing a lot of your unintended issues.

"I didn't really know how to explain that what you were doing was a bad thing. I mean... I can tell it was... but... I never thought you were doing those things because you enjoyed causing pain or liked doing bad things. It was all just... unintended consequences and if you couldn't understand why those things were bad, or that you shouldn't be doing them, well... why would you ever stop?" asked Nira with a melancholy note to her voice.

"Why did it have to be like that?" asked Aslena. "Why couldn't I have just... just realised? I-I mean... how did I not? Sis and I have been talking a bit... and... I mean that helped but... how was I so blind?"

### **Chapter 488: The Purest Demon**

Nira floated over to Aslena and wrapped her in a big hug as she said, "Come here, it's alright now. You're doing so much better. You don't need to be sad... and I mean... I'm somewhat to blame as well..."

Aslena tried to burry her head in Nira's shoulder, but her large horns prevented that from working. As soon as Nira saw this, she winced and placed her hand on Aslena's cheek and concentrated. Kat felt her hair getting blown back as a wave of power rushed over her. Nira started to glow a light blue and it spread to Aslena, specifically concentrating around her horns.

Before Kat's eyes she watched Aslena's horns shrinking and Aslena immediately took advantage of the change to properly plant her face into the soft space between Nira's shoulder and breasts. Aslena's arms, legs, and tail wrapped themselves around Nira as much as possible and she started crying again.

"Hey, it's alright, I've got you..." murmured Nira

\*Woah... that was... that was so much power.\* "Why did you use so much power?" asked Kat

Nira smiled and nuzzled her cheek against the top of Aslena's hair and explained. "I couldn't really use much less Kat. It's hard to hide demonic features, and even harder to temporarily remove them, doubly so if it's somewhat else's even if you have the abilities for it. I can change people around quite a bit, but changing around demonic features is the worst. Still, it's worth it so I can hug my cute little daughter properly"

Aslena murmured something as a response, but it wasn't truly coherent so Kat wasn't able to guess what was supposed to have been said. Nira took a long breath and said, "You know, I feel like I might have messed up more than before. I mean... I didn't want you guys to fight, and I did want you to figure things out Aslena but... I didn't realise you'd take this so hard you know?"

"And... I know I said you wouldn't have understood until more recently but... maybe I'm just trying to make myself feel better? I mean... I could have tried you know? Really tried with some proper ideas I might have been able to mend bridges. Maybe be more forceful about the therapy ideas? Did you guys know I actually go to therapy once a year? It's not as much as maybe I should but I'm a lot older and I sort of know how to watch these things..."

Kat just sort of floated awkwardly nearby as Nira started rambling. \*She's really getting hit hard by this. I thought I felt bad dragging this all out of her, but she's just doing it herself this time. Hmm, does that mean she wanted to chat and I helped? Or I broke the dam and now the water is continuing to spill out. I'm not exactly thrilled with either options. The first means I can't tell when someone needs to talk, and the second is self evident...\*

"No it's ok" said Aslena pulling herself out of Nira's chest just to say it clearly. "I... I'm fine. Or well... I will be."

"I'm sorry dear." Said Nira "I... should I have tried? Would it have been better? I didn't want to risk your dreams amongst other things... and... well, you did get punished for it... what I felt was a reasonable amount..."

Aslena sighed and looked over at Kamiko who was taking this chance to just float around. She was on her back away from the rest of them floating around with a happy grin on her face. She wasn't really paying attention to the rest of them, and was mostly basking in the joy that came with having a Aslena as sister that cared about her for the first time since she could remember.

"Hey Kamiko?" Aslena said hesitantly. When Kamiko's eyes turned to her, Aslena swallowed the spit pooling in her mouth and frowned. "I'm... I'm sorry for this but... as much as I realise how bad I've been... and... and I wish I was nicer to you... if I had to pick as a trade... I... I don't necessarily regret it. I mean... d-don't get me wrong, if I went back in time or something I would do b-better but... if I could trade away my spot as a designer to stop this pain... I don't think I would"

Now, at this point Aslena was shaking in Nira's arms, but she really did think it needed to be said. She didn't want Kamiko to start having unrealistic ideas about her. She knew she wasn't a good person, and she wanted to change. However, she'd be blind for long enough and wasn't willing to just overlook things with her newfound self awareness. So, despite the tightness in her chest, she said the words. She explained to Kamiko the harsh truth that a large part of her wished the younger demon would never learn.

So when Kamiko's already bright smile just burned brighter, Aslena couldn't keep the shock off her own face. Kat was a bit taken aback as well, but Nira just had a small, knowing smile. "That's fine sis!" said Kamiko

Aslena's eye started twitching as she looked at her mother, with the physical equivalent of 'Aslena.exe has stopped functioning please reset' Kat could only see the side of Aslena's face but even that was enough to practically feel the confusion radiating off of her. Nira gave Aslena a quick peck on the forehead to try and wake her up. It sort of worked. "Eh... um... ergh... amu... wha?" was just a few of the sounds Aslena managed to make.

"I said it's fine Aslena" said Kamiko cheerily. "Look, maybe it wasn't clear when I said it before, but I love you sis. Even if you were... and I guess maybe still are? You haven't had long in the changed position... um... right, even if you are my least favourite sister, you have always been my sister, and I still love you. I admire that you never gave up, even after some of Mom's harsher punishments, I admire how you had a goal from such a young age when I honestly still don't really know what to do."

"I love all your pretty outfits you've made for me and the others. I've never admitted that, but the truth is, I don't think you've made a single poor looking one in the last five years. I think you're adorable when you drink like a litre of tea because you're addicted to the stuff and you haven't realised someone is watching you or that everyone knows you only drink tea using the spatially linked teacup

"And yeah, I've been mad for a long time, or maybe just sad, about the fact you've never really been nice to me. But... you know... I guess... I also sort of starting taking that for granted. I treated it like the status quo, and that it wasn't ever going to change so... you know... I don't even really mind hearing that you wouldn't change it because... well... you wouldn't be YOU otherwise Aslena. I... I don't think you'd still be the same sister you know? It... it would be like you were denouncing all the things that you are if you suddenly decided to trade it all away even for me. So... I mean... thanks."

There was no clear signal, and it wasn't right away. It was a few moments after Kamiko had finished her speech, but all three other demons had paused and turned, waited, and then launched themselves at Kamiko.

Nira had taken off first, dragging Aslena along, but the other demon joined in the swimming before they reached Kamiko. Kat had pushed with most of her might off the wall and rocketed towards the group as well, knowing it was the right thing to do.

Nira arrived first of course, and pulled Aslena around so that Kamiko was squished in between the two. Aslena had untangled her legs from Nira just so that she could wrap them around Kamiko as well, forcing the younger demon to be squished slightly in between them. Kat came in last and wrapped her tail around all three of them, her arms only just barely not up to the task, with her wings fanning out somewhat as well.

"Sometimes I don't think I deserve daughters as good as you both" said Nira

Aslena scoffed, face in Kamiko's hair, "Daughters as good as Kamiko. She's too pure for this world"

Kat shook her head. \*No, Nira means what she said,\* and the demon in question did mirror those thoughts, putting them into words, "No don't be like that Aslena. I don't deserve you either, despite all the issues you've had with each other, neither of you really caused trouble for me, or much needless worry. I love you both, and I'm so glad you made up. I'm so happy to have you both."

### **Chapter 489: Overwhelmed and Rung Out**

The outpouring of emotion was reaching everyone's limit after Nira's speech and everyone managed to collectively decide they'd all had enough for the day. Even Nira's multiple centuries of existing wasn't enough to stop it all from being a bit much. They stayed hugging each other for a while longer before Kat floated away from the group first.

She felt that this was a moment more for the three of them, then her, no matter how much they had insisted she'd been a big help for them all to reach this point. Kat let herself float, allowing the water to wash around her ears and quieten everything a step further.

The other three held onto each other for quite a while after Kat started floating. None of them really wanted to let go, they were all greatly enjoying the newfound closeness despite the emotional high they

were trying to leave behind. Ultimately though, after an hour, it wasn't a conscious choice that stopped them from hugging, it was the return of Aslena's horns.

Her head glowed brightly for a moment before Aslena let out a big sigh and pushed herself away from the other two, still, that wasn't quite the end because Nira and Kamiko captured an arm each and kept Aslena from just running off from them. "I don't think I've ever wished I had horns like the rest of you more than right now" said Aslena

"I think your horns are beautiful dear," said Nira "Though, I'll agree the size of them can be inconvenient at times. Still, perhaps it is best we get out of the water. It's been a big day for everyone and the K's still have more Punishments tomorrow. We should let them get some sleep and perhaps we can continue this tomorrow after their work is done"

Kamiko wanted to argue against that idea, not really wanting to split up just yet but when she opened her mouth to retort a big yawn spilled out instead. This caused Nira to wiggle her eyebrows with a knowing smirk. "Fine" whined Kamiko after she finished with the yawn.

The girls exited the bath, and headed for their respective rooms. Kamiko gave the other two demons a quick hug before taking Kat back to her room so they could sleep for the night. They all knew there wasn't a point with doing up any food. Nobody really felt like it, and Aslena had consumed plenty of tea.

When the pair got back to Kamiko's room, Kat rolled her shoulders and yawned, also feeling the weight of the day. Kamiko though, just went forward and faceplanted straight onto the bed, without even summoning up her clothes like Kat had when they left the bath. "Kamiko put something on, you'll get cold" said Kat, realising after she said it that no, Kamiko wouldn't get cold.

Kamiko still groaned and put the clothes on though, recognising it as something she really should do. Kat sat down next to the shorter girl and said, "How are you feeling?"

Kamiko rubs her face further into the mattress and groans out. "A lot of things? But also... none of them? I... I feel so run out, like I've got no tears or emotions left in me. But... I also feel like this is a dream. I can hardly believe it's all actually happened you know? It's so much... Aslena's working on her issues, I know Mom wasn't just ignoring all this, and that she's just as... emotionally invested I suppose?

"I also know that Aslena's willing to... I guess be a better sister? Without giving up the things that make her, well her. I meant what I said when I went over why I was happy she wouldn't trade away the pain because well... those memories are important. I think... given time, if Aslena actually keeps working on things and we manage to do more things with each other... she could be just as precious as my other sisters or maybe even more so.

"I mean... Elmony had Meridithna, and the Triplets all have each other, it was supposed to be me and Aslena as the next set of sisters. I... I guess it never actually worked really? The Triplets don't have a pair, just themselves and well... Meridithna and Aslena you know how those things all worked out...

"But this... this is a big step forward I think. I think we can both come out stronger for this you know? If all those years of problems didn't cause me to hate Aslena, she'll know now that when I call her out on something it's not because I dislike her but because I think it's actually a problem... and... maybe she'll take me seriously in other things

"Now that she's realised... that I'm a person? Or... maybe that I'm not the same as her? Or... hmm, what's more accurate? Maybe... maybe that she's realised I wasn't trying to be her, or compete with her. A part of me wonders if Aslena was so hard on me because I wasn't ever as hard on myself as she was on herself so she was... overcorrecting you know?

"I didn't want to bring it up to Mom or Aslena because I don't want Aslena to think I'm giving her an excuse and I don't want Mom to think I believe I should have been like that or something. Anyway... it's... it's a lot really."

\*Well... I think you've forgotten Nira can probably hear you so that little titbit has probably gotten out already. I wonder if Nira will continue to pretend she doesn't know? Not talking about the scrying is very different to her being able to hear through the walls.\*

"Um... Kamiko... remember your mother's hearing is a lot better than ours is" said Kat, simply pointing out that maybe a Rank 5 might know something.

Kamiko groaned loudly into her pillow in response before saying, "Ugh, I completely ignored that. Mom doesn't really show off her advanced speed or senses a lot at home and I forgot. Damn. I know the room is sound proofed but I wouldn't count on it being enough to stop a Rank 5. Aw well. That's fine. It's just an idea anyway. What do you think Kat?"

\*I think you're probably too tired to be worrying about this.\* Kat grabbed Kamiko around the waste and threw her towards the pillows at the top of the bed. Kamiko barely let out a peep as this happened, just accepting the movement, before Kat pulled the blankets over her and hopped in bed as well. "I think, that it's time to go to sleep." Replied Kat

"mrhghg" grumbled Kamiko, "I really want an answer. I'll be thinking about it for ages if you don't give me one"

Now, Kat had seen this trick pulled a number of times. The issue was, sometimes the kid in question was right. They really would stay up all night thinking about the issue at hand. The deciding factor, was that Kamiko was, if not a grown demon, at least comparable in age.

"Right well... I think it really depends on how a young demon thinks. The sort of... extra reasoning you're adding here... while it might fit the circumstances, is pretty advanced for say... a five year old. Like... maybe if she was older I'd agree with it being a possibility, but I'm not quite sure that someone so young could have reached that conclusion you know?"

"Huh, that makes a lot of sense." Said Kamiko softly, bringing Kat into a hug and already starting to drift off slightly. "Now that you've mentioned it, when Aslena started harassing me, I'm not sure she even knew how to harass someone or that she was. She hardly had eyes for anything else other than her sketchbook and needles. I'm not even sure she could guess my hair colour on a bad day..."

"That's ok though... I fo-" partway through that last attempt at forgiving Aslena, Kamiko simply passed out. The energy she'd used today was rather significant between the rat slaughter and the emotional turmoil.

Kat was feeling it as well. Not quite as much, mostly because she was only involved on the periphery but once she saw Kamiko's soft breathing and totally relaxed face, she found sleep calling to her much more strongly.

\*Still, trying to forgive Aslena I guess. Kamiko really is a sweet girl, and I'm glad I've become her friend. I wonder if that's why nobody wanted to befriend her earlier? They all picked on her, and she never fought back? Perhaps they saw Aslena picking on her and followed suit? I know nobody has mentioned that, but that would be my guess as to why she's so isolated.

I don't know that Kamiko would ever actually blame Aslena for it though, even if it was her fault. She seems the type to say 'they're responsible for their own actions, and it wasn't that bad' as if that really makes it alright. Still... maybe...\*

Kat didn't get to finish that thought though, because it was her time to fall asleep as well.

#### **Chapter 490: Breakfast Shenaniganry**

Kat was unprepared for the awkward tension she experienced shortly after waking up. Oh, things seemed fine when she got out of bed. Kamiko took a little bit of extra convincing, still tired from yesterday. \*And isn't that weird? I know she doesn't have regeneration like me but I didn't think she needed the same sleep as a human.\* Still, things were going fine until they got upstairs for breakfast.

Kat wasn't that hungry, but considering combat yesterday, and planned for today, food was welcome for her. A basic breakfast spread, cooked by Nira who was endeavouring to make things awkward by wearing an apron... and nothing else. Was not how Kat wanted to start things. Still, the wiggling eyebrows and suggestive poses, thankfully aimed mostly at her daughters was fine.

Until Aslena and Kamiko reached towards a bowl of jelly at the same time. They both just... stared at each other. It lasted for FIVE WHOLE minutes, and Nira was no longer having a fun time. She was sharing glances with Kat, asking 'should we do something' with Kat shooting back 'I have no idea' looks. The thing that was confusing the uninvolved parties was that... there was three other bowls of jelly on the table. The sisters hadn't grabbed the only bowl.

There wasn't anything special about it. All four bowls looked the same. There wasn't any more or less jelly in any of them, they weren't in a fancy mould. They weren't even different colours. They were the same red apple colouring, and presumably the same taste, though Kat certainly wasn't getting involved in that mess by verifying that herself.

In the end, they both let go of the bowl at the same time, pained expressions on their faces, before doing a matching double take as they realised their counterpart had done the same thing. ""You can have it,"" they said in tandem.

The silence returned for about five seconds before Nira decided she'd had enough of this madness. Grabbing two of the other jelly bowls, she placed them on her daughters' plates and stole the one they'd been 'fighting' over for herself. "There. I'm not watching you stare lovingly into each other's eyes for another five minutes" laughed Nira

""Ew/Gross,"" said the demon sisters at the same time. Nira just smiled more, and took a big bite of jelly.

"See, you're already getting along better" said Nira happily after she finished off the bowl.

Aslena and Kamiko shared a conspiratorial glance with each other, before Kamiko nodded, and Aslena voiced the thought, "I think we preferred it when we were fighting a cold war with each other at the dinner table. At least you didn't try to make comments like that..."

"I'm hurt" said Nira, hand over heart, "How could you say such things about your mother... and is fighting with each other really better?"

Aslena and Kamiko had to actually think about that one. "On the one hand... the borderline hate and worry is gone..." said Kamiko

"... but on the other hand we did NOT need those mental images you've gifted us with Mom. You wouldn't have done this before, and... we kind of miss that" finished Aslena

Nira placed her other hand over her heart, slapping it there as if she was shot before falling backwards, taking the chair with her. When she started to actually fall, Kat couldn't help but stand up to help, but Nira easily caught herself by latching her foot on the edge of the table and holding herself in place. "Oof, I felt that, right in my heart. My own daughters teaming up against me. Even taking a page out of the triplets book to sync up with each other... such a powerful strike" 'grumbled' Nira from her position looking up at the ceiling.

Kat slowly sat back down and grabbed a fruit that might as well be an apple and started nibbling at it quietly. \*I don't want anything to do with this mess. I'm honestly surprised Nira managed to get through yesterday without doing anything inappropriate, she's clearly making up for lost time\*

Kamiko and Aslena shared a commiserating sigh which made Kat smile around her apple. \*If you didn't know about them before today, you'd never be able to tell how bad their relationship was. Clearly they're very familiar with each other despite the fact they weren't on good terms.\*

Kat's plan of non-interference was thoroughly shattered with Nira's next words. "By the way Aslena, did you know that Kamiko's knew friend has been in her bed every day since Kamiko brought her home? I didn't think Kamiko would be so forward myself..."

Kat could hear the creaking as Aslena's eyes snapped onto her own. Kat projected her best 'I'm innocent' face, which was actually pretty good, but Aslena had decided that might not be good enough when Kamiko went bright red. Her next words did give Aslena pause though, "MOM! You can't say things like that. I'm not gay!"

"It's ok Kamiko, you can be whatever you want!" said Nira cheerily.

"Mom! You know what you're doing..." Kamiko growled and turned back to Aslena "Mom, already pulled this joke on me once, but I SWEAR it's not like that. I have a healthy appreciation for the male body, and while I haven't exactly found someone I'd want to actually date I am well aware that Kat IS NOT my type..." Kamiko turned awkwardly to Kat, "No offence? I think?"

"I dunno Kamiko, I'm pretty sure even if you're straight you can appreciate Kat's good looks" said Aslena matter of factly, though she was still glaring slightly at Kat.



\*Oh god why me? I don't look at them like that. Kamiko is my friend! I would never... I mean, I hardly know her, and I'm certainly not sexual attracted to her. Same with Aslena and Nira. Just... why? Is this what normal girls talk about? Lily always tried to avoid the topic in the past, and I never really cared.\*

"Your bisexual ass can't make that comment. Besides, we're a family of Succubi, we've been to the Lust area to visit Elmony before. It gets a little samey if I'm being honest" snarked Kamiko.

She can SNARK! While Kat was trying not to freak out over the entire idea that Kamiko even could be snarky, Aslena was firing right back, "Hey, just because we're Succubi doesn't mean I can't separate the wheat from the chafe. Kat isn't just a standard package, and I'd actually know. Remember I have to work with models on the regular. I've seen the difference. Besides, I'm sure Nira can agree with me,"

Nira looked up at them with an entire peach in her mouth with a 'who me' expression on her face. When Aslena held the glare firm, Nira got a surprisingly serious look on her face and said, "Once you've reached a certain age it's all about the eyes. Sure the window dressing is NICE sometimes, but if you can't see the weight of at least a century in the dark centre it's just not worth weighing the value."

\*You know. That actually explains a lot.\* "Is that common?" asked Kat, trying to defuse the tension filled atmosphere and ask a genuine question.

"Weeeell..." said Nira dragging it out, "It really depends. Age of consent is a bit of a contentious issue in our society and it has been for as long as my parents have been alive, and likely much longer. How old is old enough for sex at all? How much of a gap in age is too much and is considered toxic or manipulative..."

"It's a WHOLE big thing Kat. It's further complicated because some demons require um... sexual fluids... as part of their natural diet. It's not a Succubus thing, to the surprise of many but... anyway, not getting into that can of worms either... or should we? Anyway, the need for the... leftover juices... I suppose... means that the question of if they should be allowed to 'acquire it from the source' once they are capable is... one argument.

"For the moment, the answer is NO they can't, mostly because this was a problem developed after the first rules for it got put into place, but still, it's not even the weirdest dietary requirements a demon can have. On top of that, many demons that have lived past a couple centuries start treating everyone younger than two hundred like children. Which..."

"Well, it's sort of fair, because comparatively they're right... but... then they start to apply other things to them, where issues arise you know? They're full functioning demons, just without quite as much life perspective, and it's not that uncommon some demons to never reach the numbers some of the old monsters put forward... of course that might be desirable to them as well..."

"Anyway, it become a whole mess, because even if they're a little wrong, they are somewhat right. A demon with a millennia of experience seducing people can probably manage to get into the pants of someone who initially found them unattractive with an hours work tops..."

"So the idea of them in a full blown relationship is something that makes a lot of demons uncomfortable... anyway, it's an ongoing argument that you don't really need to worry about. I'd recommend following the adage of 'No more than double and no less than half' rule, excepting actual children of course."

