

## DEMONS 641

### Chapter 641 - 641 Kress' Confrontation

The entry hall for the cottage was remarkably small when you compared it to the last time she'd been to a house owned by one of the group. It was basically just an area to separate the rest of the house from the doorway and allow people inside. There was a set of boxes stacked up against the wall with a few shoes in them. Only a few, most of the boxes were empty at this point in time. Kat vanished her own shoes while the rest of the group put away theirs. Lily felt unreasonable smug about the fact she had no shoes for reasons she could not articulate.

Through the next door was a large combination dining and sitting room. Against the right wall was a large table to sit twenty four people easily. On the left there was a few bean bags, two large couches and access to the fire place that was currently empty. "The kitchen is that way," said Green as she pointed over the table, "and if you really need food you can find a snack there. We don't have any servants at the moment but Nix can cook so that's fine,"

Nixilei just gave the barest twitch of her lip at Green's statement volunteering her for the work, Green completely ignored it and pointed the other way, "Over there is the door to the staircase. We've got four rooms at the moment, so you'll have to be fine sharing with Lily, Kat. Gareth and I have the master on one side with the three other rooms on the opposite side. Kress is in the one closest to the staircase, and Nix claimed the one next to it, so you'll have the one at the far end."

Green looked around as if checking for something important. The fact she nodded afterwards seemed to indicate she'd found the thing in question. Once that was done she darted over to the bean bags and collapsed like a puppet with her strings cut, instantly falling into a deep slumber. Kat could feel Lily's disbelief at the action through their bond, but after last time Kat wasn't all that surprised.

Gareth gave a glance at the other three before shrugging and making his way over to join Green. He had to pull over another bean bag because he was a rather broad shouldered man and they weren't overly large. If Green had waited they probably could have squeezed on one together but with her spread out over the one there was no chance of that.

Nixilei sighed at the actions of her two party members and glanced at Kat. "I'll likely get started on cooking in a moment. Do you wish for me to accompany you both to your room?"

"It should be easy enough to find, I think we'll be fine," answered Kat with a slightly dismissive wave.

Nixilei's mouth thinned for a moment before she said, "That is likely true and I have no doubt in your capabilities to navigate a through the building. I simply believe it likely Kress will make himself known once you climb the stairs. Perhaps if I am with you the confrontation can be... limited in scope."

\*What do you think Lily? It's a reasonable concern I suppose...\*

[Is he much of a threat?]

\*No not at all, remember I beat him handily back when I was Rank 1 and I imagine I can do so again. The issue would be throwing him through a wall or damaging something if he attacks me. Mai taught be a lot about force control especially in regards to my fans... but that was in an open field with nothing to

damage other than her. Kress, as weak as he is, isn't baseline human so trying to take him out quickly and without destroying anything... might be beyond me.\*

[Hmm... I guess we might as well accept? It's not like Nixilei has to go too far out of her way.]

"Sure, that would be nice," said Kat. "I'm not sure it'll be enough to avoid fighting completely but I do think it will help."

Nixilei nodded and headed for the door with the staircase behind it. Kat followed along with Lily still sitting on her head. The door revealed about what was expected, a staircase made from a nice brown wood with a storage space off to the side and under the stairs that loop around halfway. Currently there was cleaning supplies in the area. Nixilei took the steps two at a time, something Kat noted and copied.

Nixilei glanced back as she rounded the corner and noted that Kat had copied her but no words past between them and they reached the top landing in silence. Nixilei looked around. The corridor was wide enough for three people, or one Kat with wings extended, to walk down it comfortably. There was actually two doors on the right, one right near the stairs and another about halfway down the hall.

On the left there were three evenly spaced doors, and Nixilei was glaring heatedly at the nearest one as if it was about to attack her. As the group walked past though, nobody came out and Nixilei visibly relaxed. Kat perked her ears up to try and hear anything but she couldn't. In fact, she couldn't hear anything except for their footsteps through the hallway. Which didn't seem right...

\*I think the walls are enchanted for silence. I should be able to hear more than this...\* Lily didn't comment, but the observation was likely proved accurate during the oncoming confrontation...

When they reached the second door to the master bedroom, it flung itself open and Kress strolled into the hallway like he owned the place. He still had noticeably wet hair but he was wearing a basic shirt and pants combo now. "Well look what the Kat dragged in," sneered Kress before glancing at Kat properly and noticed the 'cat' on her head and did a double take. "Really? Two of them this time? Was one not enough?"

Nixilei sighed, "Kress, why were you even in that room?"

Kress gave a shrug, "Much better bathroom obviously, and you ignored my question."

Nixilei glanced back at Kat and signalled this was her question to answer. She wasn't going to explain who Lily was to Kress of all people. She was clearly leaving it up to Kat. Kat however... had no great ideas. It was fine telling the others who she was, and had Kress been there with them, she'd probably still have revealed exactly who she was. Now though...

\*Thoughts?\*

[Not really? I mean... we might as well just tell him. It'll come out at meal times or if he checks up on any lie we give him. Wait... you can't lie. I guess you just tell him and deal with the consequences.]

"That's Lily, she's just as cat at the moment," answered Kat.

Kress narrowed his eyes, "What, couldn't keep innocents from getting hurt around yourself?"

Kat gave him a strange look. "No... she's my girlfriend and I had minimal involvement in the cat thing. Technically she's a Memphis and it's partially for her safety for the time being as well."

Kress clicked his tongue. "Oh yes, I'm sure that was completely consensual considering you're a Succubus. How many other girlfriends did you pick up since we last saw you?"

[Oh my god he's an idiot, isn't he? I mean... who says that? Let's not even get into the fact you're stronger than him... just... who says that to someone they're about to enter a tournament with?]

\*Kress apparently.\*

"I have just the one, thank you very much. I don't have plans for more either. On top of that, I was rather surprised when she asked me out, but I've been quite happy with it," said Kat trying to keep her voice level. Not wanting to start a fight still held true at the moment.

"Bah, it's not like you didn't tempt her I'm sure. I didn't take you for a lesbian but that doesn't mean I'll be letting my guard down around you either," growled Kress.

\*I really hope he's not implying what I think he's implying.\* Kat glared at him and Lily hissed from her perch atop Kat's head. Nixilei, realising what he'd implied slammed the base of her hand into the back of his head. Kress wasn't expecting it and didn't even notice in time to try and dodge. "Too far Kress. Too far. Kat's handling this much better than you and yet you make such an insinuation? Keep your damned fantasies to yourself."

Nixilei paused for a moment before walking forward and signalling Kat to follow behind her. Nixilei hoped to end this confrontation before Kress recovered and was walking as fast as she could without just breaking into a run. Kat slid after her as Kress rubbed the back of his head. He had just recovered when Nixilei flung the door open and started leading them all into Kat's temporary room. Kress noticed this and snarled but Nixilei slammed the door before he even got moving. "Sorry about that.. I'd hoped he'd be better... but it's not a surprise."

## **Chapter 642 - 642 This Got A Lot More Complicated**

The silence in the room was nice for the two with significantly better hearing. It felt quite calm and was a notable change. Nixilei though, took this as an awkward silence, with neither of them willing to address the elephant in the room. What Nixilei didn't realise was that Lily and Kat shared similar opinions on Kress. He was an ass yes, butt an issue not really. He was weak compared to the Kat and his words were so comically general that it had no bite to it. After years of watching three bitches try and fail to bully Kat with much more targeted insults and active information gathering, Kress trying to make insults about demons as a race was laughable.

"Sorry again..." said Nixilei not really sure how else to get the conversation moving. It worked, snapping the pair out of their reverie to realise that Nixilei had remained in the room with them.

"It's honestly kind of sad," said Kat with a sigh, "I hold nothing but pity for him really. I've heard plenty worse, and he just... he's so wrong that you can't even take it personally. I almost feel like I need to look around for someone else he's trying to insult. I'd smack him around a bit more but considering I did that once and it hasn't improved his attitude... not really sure what else to do with him."

Nixilei sighed, "Yeah... he... he hasn't been the best since you left. In all honesty I think even Gareth is starting to look at him a bit strangely. He's never liked me, but he used to be ok with Green before... now he's starting to spread his dislike to her as well... and while he'd never say anything around Gareth or Green herself because she'd tell him... I'm pretty sure they know..."

"Ok... but why aren't you saying anything? You seem to be avoiding mentioning it to them as well. Plus, why does he complain to you anyway?" asked 'Lily'

"Well Lily," said Nixilei with a deep breath, "a few reasons I suppose. The first is that I'm still a trained spy. I believe I mentioned that the first time you were there? I report to Green's parents and for now they've advised me not to really do anything. He also doesn't tell me these sorts of things so much as I overhear him screaming at the wall or grumbling under his breath and he hasn't hidden his dislike of me personally at all in recent times. Normally it was just light snipping but... he's been digging in a bit.

"Frankly, I don't know if it's the right choice to try and keep it on the quiet side. The tournament is a big draw though... we couldn't compete with one person down and I'm not entirely sure we'd be allowed to bring someone else in if we kicked him out. It's different with you because you're a demon and not from one of the main races in this dimension. It would become a major political shitshow and the rewards for winning the entire thing a worth putting up with it.

"Well, maybe not for you... though you only need to deal with him in small doses. A lot of the rewards are in apprenticeships or techniques. Essentially, we get access to the better teachers for our chosen combat leanings as well as more monetary benefits but because we are a team with noble backing, sort of, they aren't all that good. I mean they are NICE certainly but none of us... except Kress kind of... need the money."

"Why would it become such a political issue?" asked 'Lily' speaking through Kat once again. Kat was more interested in how they only 'sort of' had noble backing but yielded the field to her girlfriend.

"Well... after your showing in the first round we've become one of the favourite teams. On top of that we have an even split between two races which is rare as well. Oh, they'll be banning demons from entering next time around I think, but that's not what I meant to bring up. Sorry it just popped into my head and thought you might want to know...

"Anyway, we've become a rather high profile team because well... it's a combination of two sizeable noble families, a joining of the races, and all that tosh. If we kicked Kress out, even if we got another human, which... well I'd feel really racist looking just for humans... but anyway, even if we did get another human, the story would still probably be that the Fae were responsible for kicking him out or 'unduly influencing a noble scion'. Which would be ignoring the fact Green is also a noble even if she never acts like it, but that would be the story they'd go with,

"Then we'd have a problem, people would likely put pressure on Green and Gareth's marriage and nobody wants that. It's a big step forward for Human-Fae relations and even if we don't win the tournament they'd be in the spotlight for it. The fact that they are both smitten with each other means they'd be crushed if politics got in the way all of a sudden and tried to force them to end it...

"To be frank... I don't know what the outcome of that would be. Green and Gareth really do like each other... but they are decently filial as well. I'm not sure where the chips would fall, but I'd give it about a

60% chance of them both simply running away together and heading for on of the frontiers to prevent being found out. Green's parents would likely even approve of the move which is why I give it such high odds."

Kat swallowed. \*Shit this really is a bit more complicated than Kress just being an ass. He's become a liability already for everyone involved and Nixilei has been doing damage control since we left. I really do NOT want to be the source of a political shitstorm in this realm but frankly I have no idea what to do with this information. Lily? Ideas?\*

[Politics was never my strong suit Kat... combine that with the fact that I don't really know the political landscape at all... it's rather difficult to predict how accurate Nixilei is in her guess. The only thing I can even remotely compare this tournament to is the Olympics but it seems both more and less prestigious. The requirements to enter... which aren't super clear to me... seem a lot lower but also the whole thing is a massive deal based on what we know. So... yeah... I have no idea.]

"Why would Green's parents ever agree to something like that?" asked Kat not really knowing what else to do. She was mostly just trying to process the fact that Kress being a mildly shitty person is grounds for political madness.

Nixilei grinned, "Well, firstly, we live longer than average compared to humans so they wouldn't really mind Green running away for a hundred years or so. Either she comes back eventually with Gareth still around having gained enough power to extend his lifespan, and thus they're happy she has a strong and powerful husband she loves, or... he passes away of old age and she's on the market once again because Gareth would likely be disinherited for running away. They wouldn't even mind if they had children in the time... and please don't tell Green this... but her parents are waiting on grandbabies to spoil. They talk about it constantly when they know Green can't hear but I CAN. It's a little annoying to be honest."

Kat groaned at the news but put it aside. It wasn't all that crazy really and she already knew she was going to outlive a bunch of people at this point. "So do you have any advice for dealing with Kress now? Things are... larger than I thought," said Kat.

Nixilei tapped the frame of her glasses a few times with her finger as she thought over the question. "Hmm... nothing major comes to mind. I mean, it's not like he's all that reasonable in disliking you for what happened to his village. He was just a toddler and I doubt he even remembers the event. Plus, as tragic as it is... he's basically just lashing out at the world at this point...

"The other thing is... I think he's willing to stick it out in the tournament. Even if by the end of it he wants to go his own way... that training he could get is worth so much. Plus, getting his name out there he'd be rather famous and could go on to do tonnes of things. Maybe he'll try and start his own noble house or go off on an edgy revenge quest, I dunno. The Tournament provides OPPORTUNITY and I know Kress wanted to enter it as much as the rest of us... I just don't know exactly what he's hoping for.

"So I guess... as long as you don't kill him it's not really a problem.. He'll curse you out and maybe try to get you to leave but at the end of the day he can't do anything to you and we can heal broken legs..." grumbled Nixilei.

## **Chapter 643 - 643 Thinking On The Future And The Past**

With that, Nixilei gave a short bow to the pair before opening the door and checking for Kress. When the hallway had shown itself to be clear Nixilei didn't even glance back, and just left the room. Kat stared at the door after it had closed for a few moments before saying. "Did... did she just give us permission to maim someone?"

[Possibly? I think it's a much lesser deal when you consider the fact that they have healing magic. I mean, a broken bone back home is weeks or months of recovery time. Here it's just a matter of mana. Still... it does seem a little extreme. She mentioned that she works for Green's parents... do you think they've given her the ok to try and... well I don't even know. Was that encouragement? Nixilei is probably strong enough to beat Kress in a fight so... I really don't know]

\*I don't know either Lily. It also puts us in an awkward place. I can ignore insults towards me, I've done that for a long time and they've never bothered me much at all... but if he takes too many shots at you I'll be tempted to fire back... in very direct and painful ways. Especially when I know he can take it.\*

[Why is that? You never beat up the bitches back at school. I know even before becoming a demon you certainly COULD have. They didn't have much muscle on them at all, and if memory serves one of them basically starved herself for a couple months so she could have been beaten down. Why the rush to violence now? Not that I disagree.]

Kat considered that question, asking herself if she was no more prone to violence. The answer was... unclear. \*I... I don't think I'm more prone to it... but I also think it's more often the answer. When I'm out on a Contract the rules are different. There is magic around. People are tougher, fighting is a bigger part of life and recovery is considered a minor inconvenience for everything short of death... and even then D.E.M.O.N.S has implied a few times that resurrection isn't uncommon. Like... right now. I don't see anything wrong with giving Kress a good punch in the face, especially if he wasn't on a team with us.\*

\*Maybe I'd go far enough to knock him out on top of that. But... Nixilei could have him completely healed before the day is up. The definition of 'permanent harm' is completely different and... and my pain tolerance has kind of become ridiculous. I don't know when it happened exactly but I stopped seeing pain the same way. Oh, I was always good at dealing with pain, but that's nothing compared to now. I've had some really painful stuff happen and hardly reacted. Maybe I think others are the same automatically? Hmm... something to think on...

Anyway the issue with the three girls was escalation. If I beat them up, they'd call in friends, and if I beat up those friends as well, and I wasn't particularly injured, they'd just get more people. At the end of it I'd always be overwhelmed and it's not like I'd have been able to move schools if I got expelled. Getting them in trouble might have been possible, but with three against two if they never got caught repeatedly... I doubt anything too bad would have happened.

So I mostly just kept things where we were. I didn't see a way to get them to stop permanently and getting called fat or ugly was practically a joke. Water was nothing to be concerned about and the few times they attempted food I dodged that and turned it around, sort of... putting an upper limit on what I'd let them do to me. I don't even know if it was really bullying at that point. Is it still bullying if it doesn't bother me or hurt me in anyway?\*

[Well, I don't care. I will NEVER forget the fact you took their harassment so they didn't come for me... I feel kinda bad about that fact sometimes, but I also know I was NOT in a place to deal with their shit

when I first moved. By the time I managed to pull myself together properly I knew you well enough to know it really didn't bother you and you weren't just saying it to make me feel better. It... it also when I decided you were the only one for me. It really helped me get over Stella destroying my heart.]

[Like... I could have taken rejection. A simple 'I'm not gay' or 'you're like a sister to me, sorry' I could have lived with but... dammit what she did to me... No. Not going there. Just... I really do wonder if you hadn't come along if I'd ever be able to trust anyone ever again really. You... you just defended me. ME of all people for basically nothing. We didn't even start as friends! And... and that will always mean everything to me.]

[In fact, I don't think it matters if you're more violent now or not. I trust your judgement Kat. I wouldn't have bound myself to your forever if I thought you were anything less than perfect so please don't worry so much about it. If push comes to shove, we can just beat Kress up and carry him around in box or something. Get him out of the way during the tournament.]

[At the end of the day, we're doing this as a Contract. We, don't have to put up with Kress' nonsense if we don't want to. We didn't even agree to anything this time. We can literally do whatever we want if that struck our fancy. Though... I do admit to wanting to see Thyme. They sound really cool]

\*Yeah Thyme is awesome.\* Kat finally took the time to look around the room. She'd been a bit lost in the conversation with Lily, and Nixilei before that. It was a simple room with two bedside tables with a lamp on each, and a bed in the very centre of the room. There was a cupboard set on top of a set of drawers on the left side of the bed and on the right there was a door.

Kat walked over to it as she continued the thought. \*I wonder though... is he the announcer for the whole tournament? Or just the round we were in. Actually... how many rounds are there? How many entrants are there? If I knew how many times I'll have to put up with Kress, going through with this whole thing might be easier.\*

Kat opened the door to reveal a small bathroom with a shower in it. It felt a bit like what you'd find in a hotel, though it was a bit of a surprise none the less. [Nope. I refuse to consider the idea that anyone other than Thyme will be the announcer. I want to see the person that made the cute little doll of you! Maybe I can get another one...]

\*Oh? Well I'll have to get one of you as well. Have a nice little Memphis plushie to snuggle to with in bed when you aren't around.\*

Lily felt a sense of distaste at the idea she wouldn't be around or that Kat would opt to use a plush version of her instead. She knew it was a joke, but it still annoyed her for some indescribable reason. [Nope. I will not be leaving you. You're stuck with me now, and you are very comfy.]

Kat let out a laugh that set Lily purring slightly just from the sound of Kat's happiness and the feelings across their link. \*Spoken like a true cat. What about when you can turn back into a human though?\*

Lily growled at the idea she'd have to move back to her own room once she had a proper body again. [Nope. I refuse. I don't know if it's part of the bond but I refuse.]

\*Wait... just like that?\*

[Yup. I don't know if I'll stay in humanoid form while sleeping with you for a while... but at the very least I'll stick around in Memphis form. The idea of going back to my own bed is deeply irritating and the idea of being away from you for a night more so. Which... I think has at least something to do with the bond. I mean... I had it BAD before but things sort of stabilised a bit once we started dating. I wasn't worried you'd reject me obviously and sleeping together that time was nice but also a bit much... I... I think human Lily wouldn't have minded sleeping by herself for a bit as I got used to dating you and slowly worked up to that... but... the Lily I am right now really doesn't like that idea.]

\*Well, I said we'd go at your pace. If your pace has changed with your race I don't mind.. Well, I mind that your mind seems to be changing at least somewhat along with your body, but I suppose that's to be expected. I... don't think it's a problem but maybe keep an eye on that?\*

#### **Chapter 644 - 644 Dinner And A Show**

Kat and Lily's pondering took them all the way to dinner time. The knock on the door signalled as such... but they were hesitant to simply go down. As Kat was walking to the door she asked internally. \*Do we really want to do this? I mean... I'm not hungry, I don't really think you are either... but if they've made food for us it would be impolite to avoid them...\*

[I don't think we have a choice. Kress is going to be an ass no matter what. We can count this as practice. If we can't even go a dinner without beating him into the floor what hope do we have once we're together in the tournament when tensions are running high?]

\*Ok. I think you're right.\*

With that decided the pair walked outside to find the corridor empty. Kat took another glance around but couldn't see anyone at all. What she didn't know was that the doors were enchanted. Knocking on a particular piece of wood in the kitchen sent the same knock to all of the bedrooms in the house. It was a more refined version of the dinner bell, so nobody had actually come upstairs at all. Kress had bolted straight downstairs to get a seat at the table first.

The pair shrugged off the 'missing' person, assuming it was Green and she'd used her speed to knock before dashing back down. When they entered the dining it was to see Kress glaring at an empty seat that had to be for Kat and Lily. The reason for this staring wasn't quite obvious until Kat looked closer.

Next to a seat at the end of the table, the opposite end to Kress and next to Nixilei was a thin pillow with an extra plate next to it clearly for Lily. Kat smiled at the thoughtfulness though Lily kept her eyes firmly planted on Kress. When they reached the table, there was a round of nods. Kat and Kress had nobody across from them, while Green sat next to Nixilei and across from Gareth who sat next to Kress. Kat was next to Nixilei with the pillow for Lily to her left.

Kat sat down gracefully, doing what she could to fit herself properly on the chairs as they didn't really make allowances for her wings. With the full arm rests Kat needed to open her wings and drape them over the sides. Still wasn't the most comfortable position, but Kat could ignore it easily. In front of them was a nice slice of meat with a bowl of salad to the side. The meat was blue in colour but that wasn't anything strange to Kat at this point.

Lily's plate was mostly the same though she didn't have any cutlery beside it, and her 'steak' seemed to be significantly less cooked, something Lily didn't mind at all. As soon as she sat down on the pillow



though... "Why is the cat at the table?" groused Kress, clearly having waited until Lily had sat down to make the complaint for some reason.

Before Kat could answer Nixilei snapped out, "Because she's smarter than you and just as deserving of a spot at the table."

"It's unsanitary to have an animal at the table," responded Kress haughtily as if he'd just won the argument.

Kat, once again wanted to speak up for Lily but Nixilei beat her to it, starting not even a breath after Kress. "Perhaps if she lacked proper manners or intelligence that would be true, but you know as well as I that she isn't an animal, she's a person that looks like one. Besides, if you really want to make the sanitation argument, it'd be unsanitary for her to eat on the floor."

"That's where a normal cat eats? Is she too good for that?" sneered Kress.

"Yes! She is! We already established she's smarter than you, and with all the spit you're throwing about she's probably a cleaner eater as well!" said Nixilei, and at this point Kat and Lily were just watching the fight. Clearly it wasn't necessary to step in. Green and Gareth were completely ignoring the pair and just enjoying the meal as if a shouting match wasn't going on next to their ears. It was worth noting, Green's salad was twice the size with a only half a steak. Gareth had an extra half piece of steak and a much smaller salad.

"You can at least admit it's gross to look at," said Kress, loosing a bit of steam but still glaring at the three of them.

"She's just sitting there," returned Nixilei, "she has taken not a single bite. You cannot say it's gross with any sort of sincerity before she even tries to eat. You're just being petty now."

Kress' mouth formed into a thin line. He wanted to keep arguing but he was just smart enough to know Nixilei had backed him into a corner because he didn't think out his reply well enough. Continuing the fight before Lily had even done anything would indeed make him seem petty and he didn't want to push things too far at the moment when it seemed like nobody was on his side. Of course, that was because of his attitude and not his poor arguing skills, but that's neither here nor there.

After a few more moments of silence Lily decided to just ignore Kress and start eating. Contrary to what Kress had implied, Lily was actually rather delicate when she ate in Memphis form. A combination of instincts and a human mind let her eat quite cleanly as long as she was careful. She was also getting used to her new tastebuds and didn't have to fight part of herself just to eat a few pieces of a salad. Though she did thank D.E.M.O.N.S she was a Memphis instead of just a cat.

Kress ate grumpily, always glancing over at Lily as if he could potentially catch her leaving a mess. It didn't work, but it did slow down his own meal greatly meaning by the time he finished his steak it was cold. Not an ideal situation. For Kat, she just ate normally pretending that everything was fine and Kress hadn't been yelling a bunch before the meal started.

Green finished quickly and then took to leaning against Nixilei who just raised an eyebrow before continuing her own meal. Gareth finished quite quickly as well, though he ate at what seemed to be a more normal pace. Once he finished up he just watched Green sleeping with a happy smile on his face.

When everyone was done though, Gareth spoke up. "Tomorrow is the start of the tournament. We'll be heading out early in the morning but the actual tournament doesn't start till later in the afternoon. We just need to make it to the transport circle before lunchtime. Is there any questions?"

"Do we need to bring any supplies? It was rather unclear this time I believe..." asked Nixilei.

"Actually I did get a confirmation on that. We'll be given supplies when we get to the Tournament grounds. We've been rather explicitly informed that only our weapons and armour or other combat aids should be brought. They'll have other supplies for us... though I'm not sure what we'll need to do with them. I do know this round of the Tournament is longer than the previous one," said Gareth.

"Light or heavy breakfast?" asked Kress. The fact he asked this in a normal way was actually a slight surprise to Lily. Kat though had seen him act professionally a few times on her first visit and while she was a little shocked, it faded quickly.

"Not sure it matters..." said Gareth thoughtfully, "We do need to travel a good while but we'll arrive with time to spare. Maybe an hour or so before the meeting time assuming the roads clear. It's not like we're running anyway. Green's family left behind the carriage artifact so we'll be using that."

"Is there enough space for everyone?" asked Kress making a pointed glance towards Kat's wings as they were still spread out.

Gareth nodded, "Should be plenty of space. That's not counting the conductor's seat which has more room, or the fact some people ride on top of these kinds of carriages. They don't bounce as much as regular animal powered ones. Something about stabilisation. Anyway, yes Kress there will be plenty of space for everyone. Without luggage it will be no problem at all,"

Kress nodded with a smile but his eyes still seemed annoyed. With that question though, everything seemed to have been answered and the silence became a bit awkward. Gareth wanted to catch up a little more with Kat to try and make sure she felt included in the team... but with Kress' attitude before the meal he wasn't sure how well that would work out. He also didn't want to ask Kat any questions she would be reluctant to answer, he wanted conversation to flow and damming it at any point would be an issue.

Green of course was sleeping, Kress was eyeing everyone carefully and Nixilei was doing the same, though much more carefully. It was only because of Kat's eyesight she could tell, and for the rest it was from years of familiarity.

In the end... nothing more was said. Gareth stood up and grabbed a sleeping Green and carried her away. Nixilei followed behind silently, waiting for Kress to leave as well before heading up after him.. Kat and Lily gave matching internal shrugs, as Lily still hadn't figured that one out for a cat, and headed to bed alongside them.

## **Chapter 645 - 645 Early Morning Training**

Kat woke early the next day. She'd had plenty of rest recently and while Lily was still asleep, likely due to her feline nature, Kat was not in need of rest at all. Kat glanced at Lily sleeping on her stomach and wondered what the best course of action would be.

\*Hmm... I really want to get up and just burn off some demonic energy. I haven't done that too much recently even though I know I should have. I don't feel sluggish but I didn't really feel all that bad when I first got around to it. It just sneaks up on you. I don't really want to wake Lily up though...\*

Kat debated internally over the chances of successfully escaping bed without waking Lily. In the end it was clear she had no idea. This wasn't a common occurrence and with Lily in Memphis form that threw things off even further. It was simply something she was going to have to take a chance on. Kat carefully shifted in place, turning to the side so that Lily would slide off onto the bed slowly. This... didn't quite work because as soon as Lily's body noticed the shift her claws started to dig into Kat's kimono.

Kat wanted to let out a sigh at this, but held her tongue knowing how sensitive Lily's knew ears were. Instead she used this to her advantage, slipping out of her outfit somewhat and depositing Lily on the bed. Kat quickly dismissed and resummoned the attire and watched Lily as she shifted around searching for something. Seeing this, Kat moved the pillow she had been using next to Lily who instantly latched onto it and curled back up.

Kat nodded and headed for the door before pausing once again. \*Hmm... this isn't a modern house... so they probably don't have fly screens. Maybe I can just go out the window and practice in the backyard? Not sure if it would be quieter than opening the door... but I like this plan.\*

Kat walked over to the window and unlatched it. The window itself pulled upwards and revealed a gap that was more than large enough for her to slip through. She couldn't walk through it, and with her wings it required a little bit of manoeuvring but it was still rather large for a window. Nodding at this Kat flung herself out of the window and spun to land gracefully on her feet. Once there she took in a deep breath... and then released as much demonic energy as she could.

A large pyre of purple fire surrounded her, freezing the nearby grass and casting shadows over the house behind her. It only took a few seconds for a fire of such large size to drain all of her demonic energy and Kat let herself drop to the ground. She wasn't completely exhausted, and could still move in truth but the desire to just lay down was strong nonetheless. Kat remained there, enjoying the sounds of nature until her demonic energy reserves reached full again. Which... wasn't all that long.

She could feel the flow of energy from Lily quite clearly. When she was completely empty it felt like a flood rushing in to fill the void. It tapered off as she reached one hundred percent again. \*Hmm... I wonder how large a reserve Lily has. It didn't take long at all to refill mine with her help... I don't know how fast she produces it though. Wait... do I have to do this more often because I'm actually releasing demonic energy for two people? Or does it not bother Lily like it will me? Hmmm...\*

Kat waved off the thought and started to practice control. She focused on trying to move her flame around in an increasingly larger circle away from her. An interesting fact she learnt while doing this was that her tail helped a massive amount if she allowed it. It would flick around behind her and guide the flame while it was out of eyesight, easing the drain on her more significantly than simply watching the flame. It was too the point she had near perfect control of it BEHIND her as long as her tail was free to follow the flame around.

Kat kept up this training, simply going through the motions and getting more comfortable with it until she felt Lily starting to stir at the end of their link. Kat glanced up at the second floor window she'd left

before dismissing the idea of just jumping back in. As mean as it might seem, she wanted Lily to experience her not being in bed when waking up.

A good thing she did, as the first thing Lily did was try to snuggle deeper into the pillow and go back to sleep. Only to realise it was not Kat at all. Lily was instantly awake and Kat could feel the slight edge of panic setting in and chose to intervene. She wanted Lily to have a bit of experience with it not a panic.

\*Morning Lily. I'm just practicing out the back.\*

She felt Lily instantly calm down before gaining a slight edge of annoyance. Lily could sort of feel the direction Kat was in though and hopped across the bed onto the window sill and looked down to see Kat now waving back up at her while a small purple flame orbited her body. Lily wanted to pout but her lack of human lips made the idea pointless. [It wasn't fun thinking something had happened to you]

\*I'm fine Lily. Come on, maybe you can practice flying with me or something.\*

Lily wanted to remain annoyed but the idea of flying around with Kat was much too tempting to pass up. Still, she did want at least a little revenge. Lily leapt from the windowsill and purposefully kept her wings tucked in. Her instincts were more than good enough to aim right at her girlfriend. Kat, seeing Lily's trajectory dismissed her demonic flame just in case and held her arms out to catch Lily as she landed perfectly.

Kat made sure to move with Lily for a few moments to bleed of the momentum rather than just stopping Lily in place with her enhanced strength. \*That could have been dangerous you know. If I caught you wrong that might have really hurt.\*

Lily puffed up her cheeks the best she could as a Memphis and glared at Kat. [I trust you. Besides, you needed a bit of punishment for just leaving without letting me know. We aren't on Earth at the moment what if I thought something bad happened to you?]

\*Lily we have a permanent mental connection that lets us talk to each other. Plus, I thought you needed the practice. What if I need to get up and do something during the tournament or another Contract and can't stay in bed with you? As a cat you seem to need more sleep and that's fine. I don't even mind just hanging out in bed with you most of the time, but on Contracts I don't want to lock myself into that.\*

[I understand]

Kat nuzzled into Lily's side, making sure to be careful with Lily's wings and her own horns as she did so. Kat felt that Lily really did understand even if she wasn't happy with the result of things so Kat let her own feelings flow down the link to try and raise Lily's spirits. "Now. Let's fly!" said Kat cheerily before winding up and giving Lily plenty of time to realise what she was about to do. Lily had a split second of panic before glee took over which signalled to Kat she was ready to be launched.

Kat let Lily go and the Memphis was thrown into the air. Kat followed up by jumping afterwards and stretching out her wings. Lily led the way with Kat following behind as they flew around the house. Lily wasn't really confident enough to try flying between the tree branches or doing anything fancy but Kat was happily doing flips and twists behind her.

"Mind if I join in?" Kat and Lily turned to see Green waving at them from the balcony at the front of the house. Her wings were glowing and much more clearly visible to Kat, though for Lily this was the first time seeing them at all.

"Sure!" said Kat.

Green smiled and jumped up behind them to follow the train. "I can't fly all that long but this looks like a lot of fun. I'm a little jealous you can fly with your girlfriend. Maybe I need to look into something for Gareth. Maybe a fancy bit of armour or a whatever really."

Kat gave a shrug and sped up to twist around Lily and grab her out of the air to pull into a hug. "I think that's a great idea," said Kat before placing Lily on her head to allow the Memphis to launch off again. Lily was tempted to just stay there but jumped off anyway.

In the end the three only flew around for a few more minutes before Green was forced to land.. Unlike Kat and Lily who could fly pretty much indefinitely, Green wasn't really old or powerful enough to use her wings in a similar manner.

### **Chapter 646 - 646 A Magical Carriage? Where's The Princess?**

Once Green stopped flying the others also headed inside to have a little bit of breakfast. It was just some simple fruit stored in the kitchen for Kat and Green, Nixilei had already eaten so her meal choice would go unknown, same with Gareth. Lily ended up with part of what looked like chicken meat though the body structure wasn't quite right considering the bird had a rather large tail, but that was ignored because it was tasty enough for the Memphis.

Kress hadn't appeared just yet, but there was still about an hour before departure so this wasn't a major concern. Once they'd eaten Kat went back to the yard to keep practicing with her demonic flame. This time she was testing the effect her wings had on her demonic flame control but... it was rather lacklustre, especially compared to her tail. Her wings did provide some control, but only right next to the wings and they were much worse than the assistance her tail provided. It only really provided extra stability right at the edge of her wings because the standard control from the rest of her body extended nearly as far as the wings did. They just added a few more centimetres to her precise control range at best.

Lily spent the time getting more comfortable with flight, trying harder manoeuvres while near Kat. She only fell out of the sky once, but Kat was able to catch her easily at the time. Lily was attempting a barrel roll but kept her wings tucked in too long and nearly hit a tree so in her panic to get out of the way nearly hit the ground as well. Otherwise her attempts went quite well. Her instincts guided her for the most part and there were no other issues.

Nixilei came out dressed in her combat attire and sat leaning against the wall as with a book as she watched the pair practice. Green was nowhere to be seen (likely asleep on Gareth somewhere) and Kress didn't show his face at all until all three walked out the front door with Gareth holding what looked like a toy carriage... though based on context it was assumed to be the magical one.

Gareth nodded to the practicing pair, missing Nixilei because of her position and walked to the front of the property line where the stone road was. It looked a little like concrete, but based on the mix of colours and textures, what was more likely to have occurred was that someone or a group of someones

placed a bunch of nearby stones into a roughly road shape then had an earth mage come through and smooth it all out.

When he reached the road Gareth placed the carriage down before jumping backwards quickly. As soon as he cleared the area the carriage started to shake and rattle before ballooning up to full size. It sounded awful during the transition. Demonic things were able to shrink and grow seemingly without issue. This carriage... Kat wondered just how sturdy it would actually be. The wood groaned the whole transition and there was a few seconds where it sounded like nails on a chalkboard before seemingly going silent.

Lily needed to dive to the ground and use her paws to cover her ears to try and limit the pain. Kat found it similarly unpleasant though had more inborn defences for that kind of 'attack' alongside better pain resistance so she mostly ignored the event. [That was horrible!] complained Lily as she hopped into Kat's arms to burry herself and be comforted.

Kat happily caught her girlfriend and started to carefully brush her fingers through Lily's fur. \*I know it was pretty bad. Hopefully it won't make any noise when we inevitably need to shrink it. At least we'll know in the future? It's pretty bad but... not much to be done about it now. At least it looks nice.\*

Lily still wasn't happy but she was forced to agree with Kat on the appearance issue. The carriage had four large spoked wheels with the larger wheels at the back being about twice the size of those at the front. The spokes were quite plain, the only unadorned part on the entire vehicle in fact. Lily believed this was to help maintain integrity on the wheels. Still, they were a nice burgundy coloured wood like the rest of the carriage, in the unpainted sections at least. Those unpainted sections were mostly the trimmings on the carriage. All the edges had a nice burgundy colour shining through with the four lamps set into the corners of the carriage compartment being completely unpainted but were carved to look like hanging fruit. The light inside of them was some kind of clear liquid at the moment though and it didn't glow at all.

Continuing with the nature theme the compartment was carved to look like the canopy of the tree. It was painted a dark royal blue and had veins carved into it to look like leaves. The overall appearance was of overlapping leaves with the gaps in the 'foliage' being the windows that allowed those inside the carriage to look out. The supporting structure was carved burgundy with painted lines of silver and were carved to look like bark. The main thing that helped everyone know it wasn't bark was that the carvings went against the natural grain of the wood, and went vertically.

On top of the carriage was a flat space that you didn't really notice if you weren't looking. It was clearly for storing luggage but Kat's eyes noticed there was actually two benches on either side that she assumed could be used when there was no luggage involved. Of course there was also the coachman's bench, but it also had a stick connected to the wheels that seemed to be how it was steered. It was carved to look like a gnarled branch with a few painted leaves at the top, otherwise it was burgundy like the wheels.

"All aboard!" said Gareth with a cheer. Armour clanking as he stepped into the carriage. Green drifted in behind him with Kress taking up the rear. Seeing this, Kat walked over to the carriage and leapt up the luggage area and confirmed the presence of two benches before sitting down.

Nixilei came last and pulled herself up to the coach area before continuing up to the baggage area. Seeing this, Kat placed Lily down on the chair and moved over to help, pulling the Fae up easily. "Thanks for that," said Nixilei.

"No problem but... who's driving?" asked Kat.

Nixilei dusted herself off though in reality there wasn't anything on her robes at all. Taking a seat beside Kat so that she was facing forward she smiled and said, "I will, though I'll be connecting my mana to the carriage rather than using the device at the front. It's not recommended but I'm just ensuring it moves forward for the most part so I can get away with it. Why did you decide to sit up here?"

"It just seemed easier," answered Kat, "I thought I'd let you guys sit downstairs, and it lets me avoid Kress. Well, I was pretty sure somebody would be driving but as long as that person wasn't Kress the plan was to sit here once I saw the carriage. Seeing all three of them go inside just solidified that"

Nixilei nodded as she placed her hand on the wooden bench. It glowed for a second before the carriage lurched forward before settling into a more natural acceleration pattern. "Hmmm. I suppose I can understand that. Though Gareth will be a bit upset. Green would be as well if she bothered to stay awake long enough to think on it, but after flying around with you I'd guess she's already asleep again."

"Why would Gareth mind?" asked 'Lily'

"Gareth really is hoping to include you more. He's the heart of the team and sees you as part of it. It's the main reason he's starting to look at Kress with more confusion. He wants us all to get along, especially if you'll be the demon, we have with us for every round. So, he wants to chat a bit, make you feel comfortable... and Kress isn't really helping that. Still, he wouldn't ever push. He's sweet like that," answered Nixilei.

"Well... do you have anything to talk about?" asked Kat with a shrug, "I don't mind hearing about you guys I suppose... maybe about Gareth? Do you like him?"

Nixilei raised an eyebrow at the question. "Well, hopefully you don't mean romantically," Lily sighed hearing this and Kat looked so confused. Seeing this Nixilei nodded and kept speaking, "glad to see you aren't one of those girls. To answer the question though... he's a good man. I think he'll be good for Green. He's quite carrying but also very duty orientated. He'll make sure she actually participates in important functions while making sure to look out for her.. She'll help him relax more often and know that someone will forever be by his side... even if it's just to sleep there."

#### **Chapter 647 - 647 Nixilei's Past.**

"Well tell us about Green then," said Kat after seeing how general her explanation about Gareth was., "You'd know her a lot better than Gareth"

Nixilei sucked in a deep breath. "My relationship with Green is complicated... as is what I think about her. When it comes to Green I wear so many hats. I'm her bodyguard, spy, servant, enforcer, friend, cousin, sister, keeper, jailor, information broker. So many things."

"Well... that's... yeah that's a lot..." mumbled Kat trying to wrap her head around the fact. She'd guessed most of those... but... some were a surprise. Like 'jailor' or 'enforcer'. "Why do you fill so many roles?"

Nixilei shrugged, "That's another simple yet complex thing I suppose. See, Green's parents go around and look for talented children in not so ideal households and recruit them. I was one of those children, and I happen to be both skilled and born on the same day, though different year, to Green. Things spiralled from there I suppose."

"That doesn't sound great... why would you serve them so faithfully when recruited like that?" asked 'Lily' making a few logical leaps that didn't line up with reality. When Kat relayed the question, Nixilei gave a long sigh.

"It's really not like you're thinking. When I say recruit, I really do mean recruit. Though... for children like myself, those whose family is rather poor, the parents are given two offers. One is a promise of training once the child reaches their teenage years in return for a few decades of service, or a bag of gold for the parents and they'll take the child," explained Nixilei.

"Why would anyone agree to give away their child like that?" asked 'Lily' but even as Kat relayed the question she herself knew the answer, and responded out loud anyway. "That's the question Lily wanted to ask... but I think I know. For them... the child is an extra mouth to feed. The gold isn't really all that important to Green's family, what it is though... is a temptation.

"Any family willing to give a child away for a few pieces of gold is likely not a family that child wants to be. If they refuse, the promise of future training is just as good if not better for Green's parents. They have a whole loyal family if they go through with it. They provided a great chance to that families child, and the child gets to be trained by them for many years."

Nixilei nodded, "It is as you say. The money is not a large amount, and certainly less than the cost of a slave in some areas of the world," Nixilei noticed the look on Lily's face, with Kat mirror it to some extent, "we only have criminal and debt slaves do not worry. Truth magic makes the courts rather simple affairs. Anyway. The money. It isn't much, perhaps a year's worth of food at most and yet... for many that is enough like it was for me own parents."

Before Kat or Lily could ask any more questions, Nixilei continued, "Once a child was separated from their parents, we were put into an orphanage set up though... to call it an orphanage would be incorrect. They would provide basic food and shelter for everyone, but always had rewards ready to hand out to those who were exceptional. They would test us in magic, in maths, in history, in fitness, practically anything that could be tested was. I always managed to score among the best... and I just didn't stop.

"I believe I was... two when my parents gave me away. I was seven when I met Green for the first time. I'd been trained for around five years, always striving to be better. The training didn't stop afterwards either, but it was when I was seven, I met Green. She's a few years younger than I am so I was asked to look out for her when she started to play around in the 'yard' which was really a large section of forest Green's family owns. I was also told something rather interesting that I didn't properly understand at the time. 'You serve Green but answer to us'.

"It took me years of puzzling over that phrase to work out what they meant... but I eventually figured it out, or at least I assume I have. They never answered me when I asked. To me... it means that while I do report to them what Green's doing, and they have paid for my training and looked after me for many years, I don't serve them, but Green. Her interests come before theirs, though they are still her parents and sometimes what is best for Green is not what Green believes it to be." *novelNext.cOm*



Kat nodded, but Lily hissed slightly. Kat relayed Lily's concern, "I still don't like the fact you're raised from such a young age to serve them..."

"It's not so bad," said Nixilei as she glanced around at the trees. "a chance at a proper magical education is quite valuable. A standard education as well. Reading and writing is a valuable skill. Most people just know how to recognise a few simple words relevant to their job. I've even seen my parents, from afar a few times, and they weren't the best of people. It was actually my first real spying mission outside of the compound. I was to find these two people and report on them. I didn't know they were my parents at first.

"So, I watched them for a month. I took notes on their behaviour, how they interacted with regular people, each other, what their jobs were, if they were doing anything illegal. I did this for a whole month not knowing who they were and found them to be detestable. My mother is a whore. I don't use the more refined name, prostitute, because she doesn't even have the self respect to join a brothel. She's just known around town as someone who would sleep with anyone for a few coin.

"I don't even mind that fact too much. The issue was that while spying on her I found out she also tends to steal things from... 'clients' all the time when they're asleep. Little things that would be easy to miss, but so random as well. A pair of underwear, some food from the cupboards, old socks. It really is just anything she thinks she can get away with. I don't even know why. It isn't as if she doesn't manage to make decent enough money to live by despite her attitude.

"My father isn't much better. He's the 'town handyman' which is a polite way of saying that he's too useless to have a proper job. Mother makes the majority of the money and he picks up what work he can so that when she yells at him for spending most of his time at home, something she does as well, he can say 'I did that' or 'I had a job this week' but most of the 'jobs' he gets are more pity than anything else from old friends that he grew up with. They don't pay him much either. They know who his wife is, so they give him just enough to 'get her off my damned back' and not a copper more.

"But he's just so slothful. He doesn't stay in shape to make his work either. He doesn't try to learn a trade. He doesn't teach himself so that he may take a desk job as a scribe or something... he just... does nothing unless he must. Truly I wonder if he's my real father. In the end, my parents are married so perhaps it's a strange hope... but both of them aren't the sort of people I'd want to associate with.

"Now, knowing this, you can probably imagine how I reacted when I handed in my notes. My trainer asked me if I knew why I was spying on them, I answered because of the woman's thefts, and she laughed at me and said, 'while it is nice to know, she is not so important to us we'd waste a talent like yourself spying on. No, we asked you to watch them because they are your parents and to offer you a chance to go back to them before properly joining our Lord's ranks.'"

Nixilei sucked in a deep breath as she let out a cracked shaky laugh. It sounded almost like she was going to tear up, but it was also clear her eyes were completely dry. "They had the guts to ask me if I wished to leave for those fools. They asked if I wished to leave what had become my home. A place I excelled. A place where I could spend time with Green, the one friend I'd been somewhat forced to acquire. They asked me if I wanted to leave them for a hopeless man and a thief. I'd never been so insulted in my life.

"So there you have it Lily. You wonder how I could be so ok serving someone like I do? Especially when I was taught so well. To think for myself. To reach for greater heights. To understand what it means to

give up my freedom to serve. I was even given that chance to walk away. So I answer you with this.. It was an easy choice, and not one I'll ever regret."

## **Chapter 648 - 648 Governmental Systems And YOU**

[I have... very mixed feelings about Nixilei's past. I mean... I get why she's so willing to defend it. Things worked out well for her and it has been basically only positives... but she had a chance to go her own way and by the sounds of it she didn't even consider leaving and making a name for herself. Plus... part of me wonders if they were even her real parents? How hard would it be to fake something like that...]

\*I dunno Lilly. As someone who grew up in an orphanage I know I'd do anything for Gramps. He took care of not just me, but also a tonne of other kids. He made sure we could all eat well, we went to school, warm blankets, and a roof over our heads. He also made sure to vet the parents who adopted out kids rather well. He'd always meet them personally and wasn't above telling them they weren't allowed to take kids.

Most of the adoptions came through Gramps' network of contacts that he built up over time. Always looking for couples that would love and care for kids. I'd happily work at the orphanage for the rest of my life if I thought Gramps needed the assistance. Heck I sort of did work there for years. And when I finally got adopted, I received this wonderful kimono from his wife. I wear it literally all the time. I think Nixilei made the right choice.

They didn't just raise her. They educated her, fed her, protected her. They gave her a chance to seize the best life possible... and then let her walk away. I think I'd be disgusted with her if she did return to her parents regardless of what they were like once she met up with them. They aren't real parents, just biological ones. It's why I have such difficulty working out how to treat Vivian. She isn't really a mother to me, but she at least tries, especially for Sylvie. It's hard because of my age. Still, I'm getting off topic now. My point is, I think Nixilei made the right choice. Family over biology.\*

Kat could feel Lily's unease through the bond so Kat added a bit on. \*Well think about your parents. Would they ever give you up for a years with of bills?\*

[NO! Of course not! Even... even if I haven't been the biggest fan of them in recent times, especially since they never liked you... they would NEVER sell me for something like that. Especially not when education was already on the table. Damn. I guess I see your point but I still don't really like it. I wish this world wasn't stuck in the feudal era but it's probably going to stay that way.]

\*Why? Isn't this like a fantasy trope? I just assumed we ended up in this world during the feudal era. Even though I know from little bits here and there that it's lasted quite a while surely it'll end eventually?\*

[Maybe? I suspect it's more complicated than that. See, the issue is with personal power. In the past, it was based on your strength of arms, and catching more food because it let you expand your family. After that it was about making the most money to increase the size of your family, and eventually your family became a country.]

[That was the height of the feudal era, kings and queens and lords aplenty. They had a lot of power over other people. They controlled a lot of the important things and could essentially do as they wished because they had the political power to do so. Here though... people have the magical, or martial power

to do as they wish. I imagine that noble families are stronger on average and tend to marry power people, making their kids stronger on average.]

[Over years and years, a bonus like that adds up. Along with the fact that at least some of them are smart enough to train up others with potential and have them work for their 'house' to further increase that power. What things like the enlightenment and the technology age did was even out that power curve. Here though... where knowledge isn't the only kind of power... it's a lot harder to move past the feudal age. Especially if there are monsters or something like that. You need powerful people to keep everyone safe, and not everyone can be strong enough to truly stand up for themselves.]

\*Well... I guess that makes sense... though now I feel bad for ignoring Nixilei. Shall we get back to that? I'd be happy to listen to you talk about why fantasy like settings are stuck the feudal world another time.\*

[Woops. Sorry. You're right we should get back to that.]

"Sorry about spacing out on you, we were just having an internal discussion about a few things. Didn't mean to ignore you, the bond is still kind of new," said Kat.

"That's fine, though if you don't mind my asking... what were you speaking about?" asked Nixilei, curious.

Kat felt a sense of approval coming from Lily, so she nodded and said, "A couple of things. The first was weather or not she approved off how things turned out with the orphanage-like place you grew up in as well as mentioning there was a chance the people you were asked to watch weren't actually your parents...

"I counted talking about my own experience growing up in an orphanage," Nixilei's eyes shot open wide and Kat nodded, "yes I grew up in an orphanage as well. The old man who ran the place went by Gramps' and looked after everyone quite well. I was the rare exception and didn't ever get adopted out even though I was one of the youngest brought to the orphanage and the oldest after I'd been there for over a decade. Still, I agree with how you did things. I know if Gramps asked me for a favour I'd help without hesitation."

Nixilei swallowed heavily. "Yes... yes well... it's nice to know someone who understands. Even Kress doesn't really. Gareth and Green certainly can't... and even some other kids I grew up with don't really understand. Not the way I do. To answer your friends question though, I didn't necessarily believe they were my parents either... but I do look a great deal like my mother. Furthermore they gave me the contract they signed handing over my care and it was certainly her signature.

"I know this because I checked a bunch of the contracts she had signed as part of my investigation. Furthermore, we were encouraged to talk to the other kids about there parents. Most... weren't great but a couple were in much better places, some even had new brothers and sisters the family was able to raise because of the money there were given. A small number even went back to their parents... with mixed results. I won't talk about those stories they aren't really mine to share... but suffice to say, I have a hefty amount of evidence to believe they are my real parents. I do wonder where I got my healing affinity from. And my intelligence... and a few other things,"

Kat nodded satisfied with the answer, while Lily was still mulling it over. "Well, other than that, we were also talking about how you all still operate on the feudal system of lords and ladies. We've advanced past that somewhat... though it came with a whole host of other problems. Lily pointed out the big difference is that Nobles here are quite a bit more powerful than your average citizen, unlike back at home."

Kat wanted to mention the fact there was no magic, but that would just raise a huge number of questions like, why was Kat a demon, why was Lily a cat and potentially others. So Kat implied more that the power difference was nothing major instead of explaining there was no real power difference, just who had the most money.

"I suppose that would help..." said Nixilei thoughtfully, "but I can also imagine how it could cause problems. How do you do things? Is it one single ruler for everyone? Or perhaps a council of some kind? I doubt you all rule yourselves?"

\*Oh God. How do I explain our mess of a political system to someone from another world? I don't even know how to explain it properly to the orphanage kids! It makes such little sense sometimes... Lily ideas?\*

Lily started to relay her explanation through Kat, "We essentially draw up lines around certain areas and then have people vote for a temporary lord. We do this at a town level, a state level, and a country level,"

"Well... I suppose that makes sense. If the Lord is only temporary though how do you manage long term projects?" asked Nixilei.

[Ha ha. That's the kicker Nixilei. We don't. We also like to blame all the problems on the previous guy and leave another batch for the one after. Not sure we should tell her that though...]

\*Lily are you sure the feudal system is worse?\*

[Honestly Kat... the more I think about it... the less sure I am.. I wonder how demonic taxes work? They have amazing Healthcare.]

## **Chapter 649 - 649 Nixilei's Future?**

After shelving the conversation about the best government structure one could strive for was, Kat decided they needed a more light hearted topic. "Well, you've mentioned that training is one of the main prizes people are after in terms of the Tournament. What about you?"

Nixilei nodded, "It's the same for my. Apparently the largest information broker in the world is one of the people offering training. The fact that I know so little about them is already quite enticing for someone like me. As good as I am at healing and fighting, spy work is actually what I enjoy the most. I know that one day, Green will grow up a bit more and won't need me as much. Well, that and Gareth will step into a lot of my roles, he already has. When that happens I want to take over Green's family spy network and expand it massively...

"Though I also quite like fieldwork. Perhaps I'll head the organisation for a while, remake it to my standards before passing it off to an apprentice and returning to field work? I'm not certain but I'm very

interested in whatever training someone so mysterious has to offer. I've even heard rumours they have Healing affinity... which would be great but I'm not holding out much hope really."

"Why is that?" asked Kat.

"I thought that one would be obvious Kat. Nobody even knows their real name, what chance do I have of actually finding their true affinity? Not only that I've also heard they have half a dozen other affinities aside from healing and they can't ALL be true. Nobody could handle so many. I believe the largest recorded number of affinities in history is five? Yes, five but even that is just from old legends. Four is allegedly possible but I only know of people with three for sure. Well, two really. I think Thyme MUST have three, and I know the Elf King has three...

"But it's not particularly impressive. He has water, ice, and fog, which sounds good for synergy reasons... but a powerful enough ice mage can make water and fog... and a powerful enough water mage can make ice and fog. Fog mages can't really make ice... but the point stands... his affinities just mean he has a bit of an easier time branching out. It's not so much synergistic as it is overly similar." Explained Nixilei.

[Huh... picking affinities seems a lot stronger than I thought. Perhaps we should ask Nixilei for her thoughts on my choices? We can't change them now but it would be nice to know how good they are together.]

"Well... if you don't mind Lily wanted to ask about her affinities?" Nixilei nodded so Kat continued, "She was able to pick them when she got her new body, it's the reason she's a cat at the moment, her soul is recovering somewhat from the procedure. She chose Paper, Shadow and Space."

Nixilei's eyes widened. "Such a thing... to get a whole new body and new affinities? I wasn't aware you could even add affinities in such a way. I thought they were bound to the soul... then again if you have the power to move a soul perhaps... anyway, you asked me a question. I... I don't really know much about paper affinity. I know of no one famous who had it. I'm actually a little surprised it can even be an affinity... but you would know better than me.

"With that being said... Shadow and Space to have some synergy together at least. Shadow can pull off a few little space tricks without Space affinity but... together they can do great things. The most famous instance of a combination Shadow and Space mage was a legendary thief that went around stealing mansions from people. Apparently they cast a shadow so large it swallowed buildings whole before they would be sold to someone else on the other side of the world. No Shadow mage could keep something so large in their shadow like that. You need both. The same could be said of Space mages.

"They tend to have issues interacting with enemy mages unless they are careful. A powerful Space mage might have been able to steal a mansion but they would have to do it by cutting off the mansion and putting it in a pocket dimension people and all. Rather than taking the mansion it would be more accurate to say they sliced the world itself. They'd also need a rather long time to get it done. That's just one example of what they can do together. What were you hoping to get out of Paper affinity?"

"The biggest reason for choosing paper is that I already have sort of an affinity for it. I love books and have spent most of my early life gathering knowledge," said 'Lily' "so I figured that would help in some way. I'm not sure why but I did. On top of that, I was thinking of using my Shadow affinity to write on

the paper, perhaps creating interesting effects that way. Then Space because it synergises well with shadow and I wanted a movement affinity."

Nixilei tapped the rims on her glasses as she thought on Lily's words. "Hmmm... certainly an interesting idea. Considering how rare Paper affinity is, I can't comment on if mixing it with Shadow will work as you wish it too... but I think I should. Probably won't be very mana efficient, but... hmm... perhaps if you work in Space as well..."

"If you use Space to designate an area as 'yours' you should be able to change the rules up a bit... and with Paper and Shadow to solidify those rules... hmmm... you might be able to do something truly great with those three... though it will take practice to meld them together and access to all three affinities. Do you have that at the moment?"

"No" said 'Lily' "Just Paper for the moment, if I even have that. My soul needs to recover and then I need to be stronger to use all of them. Is there anything I can start doing before that though?"

Nixilei's face became slightly pinched. "I... hmm... you put me in a difficult position. Yes... there is technically... but I don't know about your soul. There is something every novice mage needs to do... but I don't know if it would be right for me to tell you... I know the temptation of knowledge is great... and to finally be able to use magic... I've always had mine so I'm not sure I could resist if somebody told me how to practice even if I shouldn't... no I know I couldn't because the trainers had to physically stop me a few times when I first learning..."

"Sorry Lily. Without knowing it won't cause you damage I can't in good conscience explain where you should start. If I ended up causing you harm... I'd feel rather bad and I'm sure Kat would be rather annoyed with me... and Green would make that odd not quite pout with the 'I told you so face' she never gets to use because I'm normally right. Yes. Truly a horrible fate I must avoid." Nixilei gained confidence in her decision not to tell Kat or Lily anything towards the end once she considered the 'consequences'.

[I suppose that's fine. I'm a little annoyed... but she's also very correct. I'd make the attempt as soon as she told me, even if it's likely I should wait till I get a humanoid form again...]

\*Yeah probably. Let's just... ask something else then?\*

[Why not ask about why she isn't going for Healing training?]

Kat relayed the question and Nixilei just gave a slight shrug in response. "Honestly... healing is a very well-studied field. Plus the world always wants more healers. It isn't hard to get books on the subject or find someone willing to take an apprentice for a few years in exchange for service or money. Unlike the other more combat orientated affinities there is... I suppose a culture of sharing... mostly. I'm not so foolish as to believe healers can't attack people, but I do know those spells are kept tightly bound."

[Yeah I bet a high level healer could give you like... super cancer or something. That would be really deadly]

"What about you though Kat? I doubt you'd ask for training considering you'd have to stay on this world for a while. Plus, I'm not really sure what they'd be able to teach you anyway," said Nixilei.

Kat was going to give it a moment to think but realised this was a good opportunity to talk about herself, something Nixilei had mentioned Gareth had wanted. "Well actually, I recently just finished learning how to use these somewhat properly," said Kat as she pulled out the fans. Kat also wasn't willing to say she'd learned them 'properly' because she could still feel that Heartfelt Contract wasn't complete for some reason.

"Ah, I remember those. You manage to learn them since the last round of the tournament? Who was your teacher?" asked Nixilei curious. The fan wasn't a common weapon.

"Well... it was the strange slime girl called Mai..." started Kat.

#### **Chapter 650 - 650 A Fae And A Demon Sit On A Bar. There Is No Punchline.**

As Kat finished recounting her time with Mai to Nixilei Lily started yawning more and more. Despite Kat's insistence she get some sleep Lily stubbornly stayed awake to participate in the discussion. The problem was, by the time Kat had gone over the abridged version of her training Lily was practically asleep already. "Lily please. You haven't slept that much recently and your feline body clearly needs more sleep," begged Kat.

[I'm fine I swear. I'll just stay up a bit longer. Maybe I can rest while you do tournament stuff.]

\*No. You've brushed this off one too many times Lily. I will not see you neglecting yourself like this. Either you go to sleep right now or I'll hand you over to Green and tell her to hold you tightly like a stuffed toy while SHE sleeps. Then you'll have much less of a choice. So either curl up on my lap and get a bit of rest or be forced into it.\*

[Fine.]

Kat could feel Lily's dislike of the idea, but she past the point of caring about that. The fact she didn't just sleep while Kat had been going over her time with Mai was already silly. Kat knew very well that Lily knew that whole story. With Lily's grudging acceptance Kat moved Lily onto her lap. Pretty much as soon as she curled up Kat could feel her drift off to sleep.

"Sorry about that. She clearly needs more sleep but she's been trying to stay awake to spend time with me for some reason," said Kat.

"It's fine I understand. I'd be worried too if my significant other wasn't resting properly. Though, I will say now that she can't hear me that I'm surprised you ended up with a girlfriend. I didn't think you were gay at all. I never noticed you checking me or Green out and while I obviously don't know what Lily looked like when she was human I do know I'm rather attractive and so is Green. She must be something really special," said Nixilei softly.

"Well, she is quite special... but the reason you didn't see me checking anyone out is because I'm not gay," said Kat in response.

This seemed to confuse Nixilei slightly for a second before realisation seemed to strike. She was still wrong of course, but she said, "So are you Bi or Pan then? Or was Lily not a girl before... or... well I don't really know any other options frankly."

"What's Pan? Wait no, that doesn't matter. I'm asexual, I don't really have a sexual attraction to anyone. That's why you never saw me checking anyone out," said Kat.

"How did you end up with a girlfriend then?" asked Nixilei with some interest, "I would think being asexual that it wasn't really something you or well... I guess just asexual people in general would be interested in?"

Kat shrugged, "I have no idea how it works for others so I can't really say. I can happily say I love Lily, but I will admit one of my main worries is that I don't love her the way I should. I mean, I'd do anything for her and perhaps that matters the most, but I kiss her because she enjoys it not because it does anything more for me than a good hug. I imagine one day she'll want to have sex as well, and I'll happily go through with that because it's something I'm sure she'll want."

"Really? I assumed something like that would be disgusting?" said Nixilei, the question hanging in her words.

Once again Kat could only shrug. "Not for me at least. The only thing that differentiates it much is that it feels quite private... but I have no inclination for or against it. It'd be like... hmm... asking me if I want a slice of bread as a snack. Perhaps not really, I could certainly be doing better things, but it isn't the worst thing in the world to eat. Plus, say in this example, Lily baked the bread, I'd eat it to make her happy just as I would 'eat' her to make her happy. It's not really a pain or a pleasure, it just is. We'll see how it goes though. It's not something either of us are ready for. Well, Lily more so than I. It doesn't feel all that special to me."

"Fascinating." Said Nixilei before flinching. "Sorry. I didn't mean to look at you quite like a science experiment," Kat shrugged having not noticed, "but it's just such an interesting perspective on it all. We had a rather... comprehensive 'talk' at the orphanage. Very detail orientated. Especially for those of us with talent for spy work just in case we were interested in taking on... seduction missions. Certainly not my cup of tea... but I was always ready to learn so I went through the WHOLE course." Nixilei shivered slightly.

"It's fine. Though if you don't mind my asking... what about you? What is your sexual preference?" asked Kat.

"Bi with a heavy female preference. I'm basically gay in a lot of ways just not quite," answered Nixilei.

"See that... I don't quite understand. How does that work exactly?" asked Kat rather unsure of Nixilei's stance.

"Hmm... for me I suppose it's a matter of ranking things. I like traits more commonly found in women, soft skin, long hair, pouty lips... those sorts of things. Though... I have seen a few noble men who fit that definition and I don't require boobs to get me going... but... I am also a virgin so I can't say if I'd rather be with a girlish man, or just a girl on a more permanent basis. I haven't even really dated, just a few date assignments are the closest I've ever gotten and I was assigned to girls for those missions so really I can only assume," said Nixilei with some hesitance. It wasn't really something she liked opening up about. Romance and lust were very small parts of Nixilei's world so they mostly stayed in their box.

"Right..." said Kat seeing Nixilei wasn't all that comfortable with the topic. "Is there something else you'd like me to talk about?"



"Well, tell me more about how you and Lily got together. What do you see in her and what made you say yes? Or ask her out? I don't think that was quite covered?" asked Nixilei.

"Well... I think things had been building in the background for a bit. I was very much unaware, at least consciously... but I met some... new friends I suppose, and they all seemed to be pushing me to realise something. That something was my likely love for Lily, or her love for me perhaps, but I didn't notice at all, what with being asexual and having no experience at all with that.

"Still... I think I started to think on things a little bit in the back of my mind... so when Lily... well it was a big mess. She kissed me, I said things, she said things, there was a lot about her past before moving to my school that I don't want to tell without her permission... there was a lot of crying... ok no, I should do this justice. Let me explain..."

Kat went on to explain in detail a scene that was rather easy to call up from her memory. With perfect recall it was possible for some to be hard to find. Not this memory, it was so emotionally charged and important to Kat it was never too hard to recall. Kat outlined everything, skipping over Lily's own emotionally charged past but covering the rest of the confession in exacting detail. "... and that's it really. It was... a bit awkward on both are parts and looking back on it I also sort of wonder what I was thinking trying to convince her I shouldn't be her girlfriend at the same time as telling her how much I wanted to be but... well... it worked out."

Nixilei seemed to be backlit as she smiled, perhaps her magic was helping emphasise how happy she was to have the story shared with her despite the rather small smile she sported. "Thank you for sharing that, I imagine it was very personal. Plus... I don't think it's weird at all you tried to discourage Lily somewhat. You were unsure of yourself just as she was. Sadly, I can imagine what it was like from her perspective."

Kat, while not completely social savvy in relationship terms, was not so dense to miss that rather large clue being dropped. "So you had a bit of a crush on Green when you were younger?" asked Kat hoping she was right.

Nixilei shrugged, "Somewhat. It really was just a childish crush, and I grew out of it without any broken hearts. No offence to Green... but she isn't what I actually want in a partner. She's beautiful sure and I will happily serve her to the end of my days... but our personalities don't mesh well for romance, at least in my opinion. On top of that, the power dynamic would never disappear, I serve her family and dating her wouldn't have changed that making things awkward..."

"She also would like much nicer with her hair grown out a bit, her habit of sleeping everywhere while adorable is somewhat irritating, and I'd hate to have to deal with the way Gareth does and obviously, Gareth and her engagement. She really does love him so I can safely say she's straight. As I said, once I started really looking it was clear I didn't really want to court her. She was just the only reasonably aged woman I was close to that had a pleasing enough appearance for the crush.. Once I really looked at her," Nixilei ended off her speech with another shrug.