

## DEMONS 671

### [Chapter 671 - 671 Dare To Be Stupid](#)

With that last statement Kat decided peace was no longer an option. This Thyme was being wilfully ignorant. Kat didn't think it was possible to be so impossibly dense while fire closes in around them. Perhaps, in less extreme circumstances such foolishness could be fine, but all the Thyme in question had to do was pay attention to the sound of all the fire. Still, she was not willing to let three 'people' die because one was an idiot. That and it would probably cost them some score at the end.

Kat pulled her head from the small hole and kicked down at the floor cracking the floorboards and causing them to collapse. The combined force of her strike and all the weight from the rubble was enough to widen the hole and cause Kat to 'fall' in as well. She was ready for it of course and managed to slide down the small pile of rocks to end up right in front of Dad Thyme. She needed to crouch slightly, something she hadn't realised before, because of her horns but that was only a minor inconvenience. "Look, I've tried to be nice. I've tried to be reasonable about this but I will not have two kids burn alive because you can't be bothered to get away from the fire. I'm asking one last time. Will you leave?"

Dad Thyme didn't say anything. He simply crouched lower and shifted his shield, not to properly cover himself, but to cover the girls standing behind him. Kat even through the annoyance found the action kind of sweet. She did wonder why they were smart enough to protect 'his daughters' but not to realise the danger of the situation, but Kat had done enough pondering about this idiot. Kat dashed forward summoning her fan in its closed position. She wanted to go for a simple chop to the head and knock the fool out. *novelnext.com*

So when, instead of the shaky uncertain movements she expected, Kat watched as the shield practically teleported into the path of her blow and PUSHED HER BACK. WHAT! Kat stared open mouthed at the Thyme who was STILL SHAKING. *\*What the heck? His stance is horrible, his hands are shaking and the grip on his sword looks like he wants to strangle the thing not wield it. Why is this Thyme actually a good fighter?\**

"I knew it! You're just trying to get to me kids! Well I won't let you have them," shouted 'Dad' as they shuffled their feet around like they were trying to mimic a boxer. It took three seconds for them to nearly trip over five times and only the fact the Thyme with the pigtails held them in place stopped them simply falling over.

*\*Ok. What the heck is this nonsense? This isn't realistic at all! Unless...\** Kat paused as a strange idea came into her mind, *\*maybe it's not supposed to be? Like... this is a challenge. The point isn't to have realistic looking people, it's to have realistic enough looking people with min-challenges involved to make them come with you. This isn't a combat task and trying to make it one will fail. For the kid and his grandma... maybe I had to find them both else the kid would have gone back in anyway... or maybe not. Am I possibly overthinking this?\**

*\*Well, I have time to think about it as long as I'm willing to burn a bit of demonic energy for the slowdown... but I don't have any better ideas regarding how to convince this idiot to leave. I bet that if this is all staged there's something here that will set off another explosion. If not that, something will get the fire down here. Hmm...\**

"Is your Dad always like this?" asked Kat towards the older of the two sisters.

Ponytail shrugged and said, "No not normally, why would he be fighting for his life on the regular? He's just the local scribe."

*\*Well if that didn't confirm something screwy is going on here I don't know what more I could want for a signal. Still... it doesn't provide any good answers.\** "Right... well... do you believe what I'm saying about the fire? It's clear your father isn't going to budge on this for some reason," said Kat.

Ponytail shrugged, "I dunno. Dad does tend to be write, and he taught us everything we know... but you seem pretty polite so who knows,"

Dad Thyme glared at Ponytail for that. "That's how the devils get you. They sing sweet lullabies that sound good before ripping out your soul or casting you into despair."

Kat sighed. "Where do people get that kind of idea. Look, I can't eat your soul and I don't know how I'd even go about that if I wanted to. I just want you not to burn to death. Is that so hard for you three to comprehend?"

"Yes" said all three Thyme's at once. Luckily for Kat, the floor decided to give up slightly for a moment and a flaming pile of rocks fell through the floor off to the side.

"Well what about that?" said Kat pointing to the mostly still on fire debris.

"Happens all the time," said 'Dad' with Pigtales Thyme nodding along as if that made perfect sense.

"You can't be serious?" asked Kat pleadingly.

Just as they were about to answer in the affirmative, Kat heard another crack happen and watched in slow motion as the floor just to the side of the Thyme family started to give way. Kat moved to try and pull them out of the way but found herself once again blocked by the damned shield. Ignoring that after three attempts Kat pulled her wing up and around letting the debris slam into the tight leather skin scratching it slightly but nothing her regeneration couldn't deal with.

"One last chance. This time I won't fight you to save your daughters, I'll just leave you here. I've been MORE than accommodating. If this wasn't the last damned house in the street I checked I would've left you all by now. There are THREE fires happening at the moment. Every second you waste here fighting me is a second I'm not helping someone else. Now wake the FUCK up and look around you. If you don't think your house is on fire then not only are you an idiot, but you're also clearly blind!" growled Kat.

Dad Thyme still looked unsure but Ponytail Thyme ducked around his grip, something that should have been impossible based on his previous performance, but in the end she managed to escape past him to stand behind Kat. "I believe her now Dad," said Ponytail.

Dad Thyme looked very torn, glancing between Pigtales and Ponytail Thymes as if trying to make up his mind who to follow. Slightly weird considering the kids should be following him... but what did Kat know. At this point she was willing to just go along with however this scenario was going to play out and try to get them clear. The fact the fire took so long to spread to this room just implied further that Thyme was controlling everything so she might as well play her part.

"How can you trust her?" asked Dad Thyme, "I bet she's fire resistant that's why she blocked the strike. This is just another trick to get us to leave the safety of this room!"

Kat rolled her eyes. *\*Oh no you've figured out I have fire resistance. Whatever shall I do. It's not like I also stopped ten kilo's worth of debris from falling on you as well. Even if I can just ignore the pain at this point doesn't make it a pleasant experience. Plus, what the heck are you going to do once the room fills with fire? The floor is already collapsing!\**

"Dad, we can just run away from her once we get out of here. At the moment, we're trapped down here WITH her. If we get outside there's more room to run away, and if she's right about the fire we can avoid that too," said Ponytail, though it was clear that even if there was 'more room' they didn't believe they could outrun Kat. Not surprising considering they'd already seen her speed and strength.

Dad Thyme grumbled a little bit more but nodded. FINALLY "Alright, but we'll be getting out under our own power," NO! said 'Dad' firmly.

Kat decided to ignore him and scoop up Ponytail before sprinting up out of the hole. "GET BACK HERE FIEND!" said 'Dad' as he chased behind Kat, scrambling up the debris before pulling himself up onto the street. Kat grinned as she ran away from the burning buildings and the Thyme followed her. She did watch closely and was happy to see Dad Thyme pulled Pigtail Thyme along as well. Kat was not looking forward to sneaking around to grab the little one if it proved necessary. *\*That was like pulling teeth.. Finally got everyone out of the damned street! Let's hope the rest of the fire isn't so bad.\*?*

#### [Chapter 672 - 672 Fly: You're My Wind](#)

Green's Perspective, just after leaving the group.

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Green took off at a run dashing into the village as quickly as possible, making sure to push her mana and enchantments to the limit. The screaming stopped the experience from being enjoyable or freeing. Part of her wanted to stop and assist the few people she saw, especially one who stumbled or another walking with a cane for support... but ultimately, they weren't near the fires and they were mere copies. The chance they would get out of the city was quite high, and the chance of being attacked by monsters presumably non-existent.

Green sped past what the first fire and felt the strain on her body from keeping up her maximum speed so long. Even still, she was used to it and was able to push forward without too much trouble. The slight curves to the streets the main cause of her issues. While she was rather good at long distance running, short bursts was where she really shined. Still, this was part of a scouts job and she could managed without trouble.

*\*I wonder how Nix plans for this to play out. If this fire is anything like a real one I'm not sure there's much to be done until the reinforcements come. Then again... if this is part of the tournament maybe Thyme has plans? Could all be about damage control. We were told that we'd gain points based on how many people and buildings we save... but not that we lost any if we failed or that we needed to save everyone. Hmm... then again this is a strange task. I do not believe there has been anything similar in the Tournament to compare it to.\*? nOveLNext.com*

Green started to turn off, following the smoke she could see from over the nearby roofs. Part of her wanted to jump up and run across them, but experience taught her it was actually a rather poor idea. As cool as it looked, and as much as you wanted to as a kid, the truth was most rooves weren't well maintained. What running across rooves got you was injured. Falling through was common, with slipping on a loose tile as a close runner up. While if the rooves were lined up well it could be fast, at the end of the day, the risk wasn't worth it to any proper scout. You used them for sneaking if you had to, but never travel.

Green was snapped out of the zone when all of a sudden, the houses just vanished and all that was left was forest. Cutting off the flow of mana slowly Green managed to slowly drop her speed until she was just running under physical power before reducing herself to just a walk and finally stopping. Looking around she saw that there no houses whatsoever in front of her, but behind her there was a billboard with fake trees on it. *\*Well this is weird.\*?*

Looking up, Green found that the fire was somewhere in the forest. *\*Why is there a forest in the middle of town? Also... do trees count as buildings? Surely not right? Do... do we care? I mean... does it even matter if this whole section burns down?\** Green looked over to the nearest set of houses and saw there was another road between the trees and any of the houses. The chance of the fire spreading out of the forest looked quite low. *\*Hmm... I don't really hear anything... but the crackling of the fire might be masking things... dammit. I guess I'll have to go check this out.\*?*

Green first gave her legs a light stretch, working out the slight muscle pains and hoping to ease herself into things properly. She'd just taken off without really warming up because of what she thought was the necessity of the situation. Now that she'd properly internalised that this was just a task, she decided a couple stretches wouldn't go amiss. *\*While I'd be willing to risk injury to save a real life, injury during the Tournament is different. Especially when it's just the first round. Nix is alright with things like pulled muscles but not the best.\*?*

Once the stretching was done Green dusted herself off and powered up her items once again. Launching herself forward and leaving a small whirlwind in her wake Green kept her eye on the ground as she moved through the forested area. The pathway, what little there was of it, was at least clear of debris. In a normal forest jumping from tree to tree is often safer than braving the underbrush. Piles of dead leaves, burrows and just random sticks can be overlooked if not exceptionally careful.

Around a minute into the forest, Green started to hear the sounds of panicked screaming. *\*Well shit there are actually people in here...\** Green gave herself a last boost of speed, not something she could keep up for extended amounts of time, but for now it'd be enough. Just moments later, Green started to see the fire. Individual trees set alight, mostly around the canopy which she was pretty sure wasn't right. Combined with the fact the fire didn't seem to be spreading all that much.

Her confusion was only amplified as after passing around a few more trees she came face to face with a massive wall of fire. Slamming her heels into the ground Green cut all of her mana off in an instant. Her body continued forward, sliding on her heels for a bit before it started to pitch forward, taking an awkward step forward to prevent faceplanting Green felt the momentum try to push her further forward but she just dug her heel in a bit further.

It almost worked, but she was forced to take one more stumbling step forward, and counted herself luck that was all. Within touching distance was a great burning wall of fire. It was about twice as high as she was tall and the heat of the flames was already starting to cook her where she stood. Green backed up a few paces as she took in the massive flaming wall that certainly wasn't spreading. Even to the branches the fire was practically licking.

*\*Ok... this is super weird. I can hear people screaming on the other side but this CANNOT be natural. Hmm... is this just part of the test... or is there a fire mage controlling this? A fire artifact could also be an option... this is a pretty common dungeon trap as well... hmmm... I guess the question is. Do I go over it? Or try to find a way around?\**

Green looked to the side and tried to see around the trees blocking her sight. It was... successful enough. She could make out the fact the fire was curving. *\*Hmm, well if they are going to the trouble to change it from 'wall of fire' to 'curved wall of fire' I'm gonna bet they just made the thing encircle the people trapped here. Green thought for a moment of what the best course of action would be. So... I can clear this jump... but I think I want to climb a tree and jump from there. No telling what's on the other side and while I can jump the fire, what's to say the landing zone is safe.\*?*

Green looked around at the nearby trees and saw that a couple of them were very much on fire when you tried to get to the top half. Luckily there was actually a nearby tree without any fire... unluckily it didn't have any branches until the very top. *\*Well that's just making things annoying.\** Green was a good scout and while it was a bit mana intensive...

Green took a few careful steps to the side and two steps back before activating all her enchantments, letting mana burst from her as she sprinted straight for the tree. Three steps away Green leapt and flipped around to land on the bark and kept running, pushing her mana so that the wind further reinforced the grip her boots had on the trees. Green felt her mana drain quickly, wasting plenty to keep herself stable. It was worth it in the end though when her hand reached up and wrapped around a thick branch. Flipping herself up and over it, Green landed on the branch steadily and inched towards the fire.

*\*Well... that was quite a bit harder on my mana than I would have liked. Now I have to deal with whatever this shit is with... about a quarter. Shit. I didn't realise I'd burn all that already! At least it'll recharge quickly... shit. I'll need to burn MORE to soften the landing... and maybe to get a boost on the jump to prevent myself touching the fire. Yeesh that run was longer than I thought. Hmm... maybe I need to get the enchantments checked out.. That really does feel like too much mana.\*?*

#### [Chapter 673 - 673 Round And Round](#)

##### Green's Perspective

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On the other side of the flaming wall was a somewhat small gathering of houses. It was too small to be even called a village. Just ten buildings total. A lumber shed, seven houses, a storeroom for everything that wasn't lumber and the general store attached to it. The Thyme's were all running around in circles, almost literally. They seemed to be repeating the pattern of running out of their houses, around the clearing a little bit before entering another house and waiting a few moments before doing it again. They didn't even have the decency to pick the same house each time.

Which... made a bit of sense really. Each of the houses were basically the same. A small squat two story house that wasn't really large enough to contain more than a few rooms. In fact, they looked more like holiday cabins then real houses. *\*Hang on... is this a resort? I thought this was a lumber camp... then what's with all the lumber? The small general store? I'm so confused right now... but I guess it isn't overly relevant.\*?*

Looking at the 'people' closer Green looked for someone that could be classed as a leader or even just someone that looked slightly more impressive. Green quickly found an issue with that idea as well. Every time a Thyme left a house to start the next round of running around scheming their outfit changed and sometimes their entire appearance shifted, gaining or losing hair, masculine to feminine. Green thought it might have been tied to the house they exited but watching the houses didn't reveal a pattern either.

*\*Whatever. This is clearly a test of some kind... perhaps I have to help them all escape the fire? I'll have to jump in and see what I can use.\**

Green checked her mana and saw it had recovered... a little bit. Frankly, while the observations were nice she was mostly just killing a bit of time to regenerate her mana reserves. The 'people' were clearly just going through the motions and hadn't become more solidified characters just yet, if they ever would. Even the 'people' she saw on her run in were more realistic then these ones.

*\*Maybe I should wait a bit longer? There's no real telling how long Thyme will let this song and dance go on. Hmm... I wonder if we were meant to tackle each fire one at a time and have it not really advance... or maybe it'll tick forward after a certain amount of time has passed. Like... the fire wall will keep burning for twenty minutes, then start on the town? Hmm... that's something I forgot about. Do any of the Thymes look like the caster.\*?*

Green quickly changed her observation pattern to look for Thyme's that could be the fire mage. She was looking for Thymes that didn't have any metal on them, that looked old enough, for she was assuming this would be realistic, and weren't moving too much. Sadly that last one really messed things up as unless the Thymes were inside the houses they never stopped moving. The metal wasn't really a good indicator either. Most Thymes had something, a wedding ring, a necklace, one even had a pocket watch for a few costume changes.

The other notable thing was that while none of the Thyme's were armed axes were everywhere in town. Their lack of armaments was only a few steps away at any given moment. *\*Hmm... I don't know if that makes the logging camp idea more or less viable. Real lumberjacks wouldn't just leave their axes out in the open like that... but resort cabins wouldn't have a bunch of axes lying around... unless they're for chopping firewood? Hmm... maybe that's actually a point in the resorts favour.\*?* NOvelnext.cOm

Whatever it really said, Green was now standing up and getting ready to jump. Her mana was still recovering but as much as she'd like to take a short nap, she wasn't particularly reliant on her mana for combat and this seemed more like a puzzle to solve then a combat situation. Worse comes to worst Green knew she had enough mana to climb one of the houses and jump back out. She'd be practically out afterwards, but if the fire dropped so the villagers could follow her... that might actually be a win all things considered.

Sucking in a deep breath Green sprinted down the tree, taking light steps to keep the branch from wobbling too much until right at the end when she kicked down forcing the limb to bend for a moment before flying back up to her waiting feet. Green slammed both boots into the branch as it came up to meet her launching herself safely into the area. She intentionally aimed for a spot between houses, not wanting to risk the roof construction with a landing there.

The ground approached rapidly but Green had practiced this countless times. She packed a bit of air beneath her boots, releasing it just before hitting the ground to slow herself slightly before hitting the grass and rolling forward to bleed off her momentum and springing back up onto her feet in the middle of the chaotic street. She had counted 21 Thymes in total, though with all the outfit swapping it was a guess. Perhaps more waited in the houses.

As soon as she hit the ground Green kept her eyes focused on a nearby Thyme that ran into a house. She waited for them to come out and smiled when they exited without a new wardrobe for once. *\*Seems things are already progressing now that I'm inside. I think I'll take a quick look around for someone 'important' and try to get them on my side.\*?*

Green didn't have to wait long, she soon spotted a Thyme with a top hat, long hair with a feminine figure and most importantly a pocket watch. Jogging over Green intercepted them, "Excuse what's going on? Why is everyone panicking?" asked Green calmly but firmly.

Tophat Thyme turned and looked at Green for a few seconds with eyes glazed over before shaking their head. "Wait... what was I...?" mumbled Tophat. "I... what are we doing? Why is everyone running around with the fire! Who are you miss? Do... what's going on here?"

*\*Well that's interesting. So it seems like there wasn't just a spell to keep the flames burning but something to keep everyone panicked as well, or at least that seems to be the act that's going on. I'm a little surprised I'm not feeling any fear or panic if that's the case though. Dammit, how did I not think of that? I was too distracted by the fact they're all Thymes. I just assumed they were on a loop that was barely being maintained by the main Thyme conscious not that there was a spell of some kind at work. Shit. That's just sloppy scouting.\*?*

"Currently you're all surrounded by a wall of flames, that's not really spreading to the forest. Everyone in here seems to not really notice the flames and they keep switching what house? Cabin? Whatever, which building they run into. It keeps changing and..." *\*Do I mention the clothes swapping thing? Nah let's not just yet,\** "I was sent here to check out the fire. This isn't the only place that's currently burning. So... any ideas?" explained Green.

Tophat tapped 'her' foot a few times as 'she' looked around the area, eyes scanning the other 'people' in search of any recognition in their eyes but even when one Thyme that had a cloak and pants on but no shirt ran past and didn't so much as glance at them, Tophat realised they were on their own for the moment. "Ok... first things first we need to decide if the lack of true panic is better for planning things out or if we should get more people in on this. You seemed to be able to snap me out of it just by interacting with me so grabbing others might be helpful... but frankly freeing everyone right now would just be a mess.

"I don't exactly trust that we could all work together as a group without issue while panicking. Even after breaking the spell I don't feel great, a bit like I'm just a slight fright away from going back to mindless

panic... which is weird because I don't feel all that much fear right now. The flames don't seem to be doing much and the area is mostly intact, the people are fine... but... just a feeling in my gut that I should be careful I guess," said Tophat in response.

*\*Hmm... that's a tough choice. Quality over quantity is what we want in that case... but it's not like I know how capable any of these other Thymes are. I'm lucky the first one I picked was so level headed.. They aren't freaking out much at all... hmm... is that suspicious? Nah, if they were putting up an act to pretend not to be the cause I think they'd do better.\*?*

#### [Chapter 674 - 674 Big Enough](#)

"I think we can pick out five... no four so that we have a total of five residents working with us. Hopefully you can help me pick which ones exactly we want, but with a few people we can start working on a plan," suggested Green.

"Hmm... yes that sounds like a good idea," said Tophat "How did you pick me for this? I believe that I've met expectations well and I do hope we can repeat the process."

Green shrugged and said, "Honestly it was just the pocket watch. The rest of your outfit helped as well, but I was specifically looking for a Thyme with a pocket watch. Um... hmm..." Do I mention that everyone was swapping outfits? Sure, why not? "the thing is, before I entered into the fire ring everyone was changing their outfits around. I saw one of you with a pocket watch a few times in a row and was looking for another."

Tophat looked concerned at this revelation. "You said this was before you entered the ring?" Green nodded, "Hmm... I don't really know what to think about that. I... I don't think I was ever not myself... but I suppose I wouldn't really know in that panicked state would I? I wonder why our attire swapped around so much. I do notice that nobody is picking the same house multiple times in a row... which while weird is... acceptable enough. Hmmm... I don't really know what to make of it to be quite honest."

*\*Well you took that rather well. I'm glad but... I don't really know what to suggest now. Ignoring it? I mean really, what did I expect as an answer? Granted the chance they knew something was too good to pass up... but now I feel a little silly I was so hopeful.\** "Well... perhaps we should just focus on the others? Four people sound good? How do we want to pick them?" asked Green.

Tophat looked at Green with a raised eyebrow at the blatant attempt to switch topics. 'She' wasn't the biggest fan of just ignoring the bombshell Green had dropped on 'her' but... there wasn't exactly much to be done about it. Perhaps Green could carry 'her' outside of the flames and then they could look back in... but what would that really accomplish? Tophat could also see that it wasn't happening anymore, though the housing thing was still strange. "Indeed... I suppose we want to pick them based on... usefulness perhaps? Take that guy for example," said Tophat. *noVELnext.com*

Green followed Tophat's pointed finger to a wiry Thyme with baggy pants a long sleeve shirt and a nice pair of leather gloves that, while expensive looking, were also obviously well worn work gloves. "Yup I can agree with that. If we're going for that sort of thing what about..." Green trailed off as she pointed to another Thyme. This one was about average height but had a flannel shirt on and arms that looked more like tree trunks than human limbs... and it wasn't because of the dryad's bark like skin texture.



Tophat nodded, "Right, I think those are two good picks for lifting things. Is there anything else we might need or want to look for? I can't really think of anything other than perhaps needing some of the stronger residents for lifting supplies, maybe logs. We might be able to build something to get across the fire and muscle always helps."

Green thought for a moment before she spotted an old weary looking Thyme with grey hair. "What about that one? Maybe they know some secrets of the place?"

Tophat shrugged, "I'm not sure... this is a resort during part of the year and a logging camp during the rest." *\*Well that answers that question,\** "but... for some reason I can't remember which one it currently is. I do know I run the general store... however that's it. If they still come around during logging season they have to be an old veteran and might be useful... but if they're just here on vacation..." Tophat trailed off, point obviously made.

Green tapped her foot a few times debating if it was worth it or not but ended up shrugging and saying, "I think it's worth the risk. We need calm heads at the moment and even if they aren't from around here their age should give them some experience at the very least. Personally I think it's worth the risk. The question is... who do we want for the final person?"

Tophat gave a sigh, "Honestly I don't know. I'm leaning towards just... not bothering with the final person until we have a bit of a plan. I like the three we've picked out. Two lots of muscle and a pinch of brains. If we find out we need more help we can recruit extras... but it'll already be a bit of a mess with just three. We can't be certain they'll all want to help, or be calm enough to help. Now... who do we start with?"

*? \*Good question... I want to grab the older looking Thyme last because I feel like with a big group they'll be easier to convince. The other two... I can probably fight them if I need to but... there really isn't anything personality wise to go on.\**

Could be a gentle giant or a super macho man. "I guess we'll just have to see. Now, shall we grab them together?" asked Green.

"Sure," said Tophat. The two headed off together towards the closest choice which happened to be the buff Thyme. They walked up to 'him' before circling the figure a few times looking for a response they didn't get. Tophat motioned for Green to do whatever it was she'd done the first time, and Green frowned realising she'd been waiting for Tophat to do something, not realising Tophat had no real idea on the process to wake someone up despite it being so simple.

Getting herself together Green shook the figure and had a split second to react to the fist that came swinging her way. It wasn't overly fast and Green dodged it easily, but didn't return strike, she simply watching carefully as Buff looked around with a somewhat dazed look on 'his' face for a few seconds before the eyes cleared up and 'he' said, "What... what's going on?"

"We'll explain in a moment if that's ok?" asked Tophat softly. Buff looked at the sound of the voice and seemed to think for a full minute before FINALLY nodding in acceptance. With one more added to their numbers they moved over to the next target. The older looking Thyme was actually closer, but Green moved past them to the gloved Thyme, despite the funny look Tophat gave her.

Green resolved herself to once again be the one waking them up, so a quick shake on the shoulder and Green was stepping back. This time the Thyme didn't react violently instantly, just shaking their head a bit before their eyes landed on Buff and they stepped back into a defensive martial arts position, "I don't want any trouble," said Gloves.

Buff rolled their eyes and flexed a little bit but didn't say anything, simply looking to Green for queues who promptly looked at Tophat. Tophat rolled 'her' eyes but began speaking. "We're locked in a ring of fire currently. We have deduced that a panic spell has been cast over the residents. We need either a way to leave the fire, perhaps a hidden tunnel, or by making something to get over the flames, or alternatively a way to remove the flames. Finding a water pump, or perhaps the artifact we believe is keeping the whole thing functioning."

Gloves looked uncertain, "Well who put you in charge?"

Buff shifted their body slightly to stand in the path between Gloves and Tophat, not blocking line of sight, but making their presence known should things get too heated. "Nobody really," said Tophat, "I wanted Green to continue leading but she seems to have past the buck off to me. I was just the first person she woke up."

"Why ain't she showing us around?" asked Gloves

"Well SHE," interrupted Green, "is from outside of town. I'm here helping the firefighters but it's not like I know any of you or the layout of this place other than what I can see. I thought it was better to pass things off to someone else and Tophat looks like she knows that she's doing"

Green was a little surprised when 'Tophat' just accepted the name 'she'd' been given. Didn't react at all as a matter of a fact, just a nod at the start acknowledging Green was from out of the fire. Gloves frowned at this, "In that case, perhaps I should take charge. I know my way around quite well in fact."

Buff just let out a slight growl as 'he' leaned forward, showing they weren't impressed with the suggestion. *\*Dammit. We don't even have the last member and they're already fighting.. Bother.\*?*

#### [Chapter 675 - 675 Another One Bites The Dust](#)

Green gave a look to Tophat with a raised eyebrow. Tophat saw this and nodded before making a shoeing motion. With confirmation it was the right idea, Green carefully stepped backwards and away making sure to do so with slow smooth movements that wouldn't properly register in the corner of a person's eye. This way Gloves could keep up their tough guy act while Buff humours the poor sod.

*\*This was exactly what we were worried about when waking up too many people. Fighting is really just a way to waste time when we don't know how long we have. I can't believe the SECOND... or well third sort of, person we picked is already causing problems. At least it they're somewhat distracted and I can wake up the last person we want... but truth be told... I'm not sure it's worth it. Let's hope they have something to bring to the table.\*?*

Green carefully followed the target from a slight distance. She was about to wake them up straight away but she could still easily hear the argument going on behind her and decided to wait till Gray Thyme was inside a building so that she could explain things before introducing Gloves. Green would also swear at

that moment she was tempted to use up her mana to throw the idiot over the wall of flames and sort it out without their help.

Green slipped in behind Gray as they left the door open as per usual and waited to see if they did anything interesting now they were inside a house. Gray just seemed to look around for a few moments before walking into the kitchen and drinking a glass of water. What? Once that was done Green watched with undisguised confusion as they calmly walked back to the door. That jolted Green enough to get back into action.

Green tapped Gray on the shoulder carefully. A swift breeze looked like it could do in this Thyme and she made sure that while the touch was noticeable it would cause no problems. Thankfully, it seemed to be enough to wake Gray, who stumbled slightly trying to take a step, pitching forward. Green reached out to grab them under the elbow and helped support their rather light weight before carefully putting them down. "Sorry," mumbled Green.

"No no, it's alright deary... what... what seems to have happened? My head feels like its full of potion fumes," moaned Gray.

"You were under a spell Gray," said Green assigning this Thyme an easily remembered name, "everyone is running around panicking and there is a fire surrounding the town and we, that is myself, Tophat and two others that... well they're mostly for muscle and while one is cooperating with us, the other, Gloves isn't really interested in helping they just want to be in charge."

Gray let 'her' fingers strum across the top of the walking stick in 'her' hands. "Hmm... yes I can certainly see the mystical interference there. You know, I was actually a rather powerful mage back in my day before I was cursed and had my mana eaten out from inside me... I may not have the strength to cast spells anymore... but I might be able to sense where the mana powering everything is coming from, especially from the middle of it."

Green smiled and clapped her hands together a big smile on her face. Proper mana sense was a rather rare skill after all. Most mages had to cheat with a spell or enchanted equipment. *\*Granted this is very much in Thyme's capabilities, but I'm very glad they let this 'random civilian' have the power as well.\** "That's perfect. Let's go introduce you to the others," said Green as she exited the house.

novel**N**ext.com

What she found outside was... less than ideal. Gloves was no listing achievements and reasons they should be in charge, many of which Green knew had to be made up unless... *\*Hmm... some of these things Thyme could certainly do. Stopping time on an island, finding an ancient artifact that's over ten thousand years old, clearing up a curse that had been plaguing the Nirash tribe for hundreds of years. All perfectly reasonable for Thyme... but...\** "Grey, does Gloves actually have all that much mana?" whispered Green.

Gray let out a quiet chuckle, "Not at all. In fact, they have a rather low amount inside them consider they've reached adulthood. Hmm... now that I look closely... they only have about twice as much mana as I do and I've been completely crippled. Truly a sad existence Gloves."

Apparently despite their pitiful mana pool their hearing was better than average. "Huh? Who you call pitiful grandma?"

"I am sonny. I've known this village since you were less than a shine in your pappy's eye. I may be retired but I can still handle a to bit punk like you. Puffing up like a crowing rooster trying to pretend he's the toughest in the pack because he can screech the loudest... and right next two a better specimen twice your size," sneered Grey.

Buff let out a quiet sigh knowing this wasn't the way to defuse the situation. "Huh? What was that you old fossil? Just because I ain't as old as the trees nearby doesn't mean I don't know what I'm doing. Just sit down on your rocking chair and let the real men handle this."

The three 'females' or at least Green and the two Thyme's pretending to be female glared back at Gloves for the insinuation. Green's desire to throw 'him' out of the village was growing. Purely for the benefit of everyone of course. "You're damn right I'm older than some of the trees here. I was here when this little slice of the world was founded. I helped build most of the original houses. My knowledge will be invaluable. What do you have to offer?" sneered Grey

"Well my leadership skills of course, and my strength. What more do I need?" scoffed Gloves.

Grey narrowed 'her' eyes and said, "Well considering I hardly see any leadership skills from you so far and that we're already covered in the muscle department you bring nothing of any value to the table. Perhaps I should roast you over the flames a bit, char your skin and use it as a shield. Might harden you up a bit."

Green gave out a tiny yawn and slunk to the ground. The grass was nice and soft. It had been a big run, she was low on mana, and these idiots wanted to waste time fighting. So she did what came naturally to her when Kress and Nixilei wanted to go at it for a bit. She decided it was time for a nap. Tophat was giving Green a look of pure dissappointment... but the young woman had already closed her eyes and drifted off. She didn't see it, and because it contained no true hostile intent she didn't feel the gaze either. Green was giving off a small slip of a smile and Tophat had the reasonable urge to join in.

"Apparently she can sleep through a crisis," grumbled Tophat under 'her' breath.

While this was going on Gloves had pushed up their sleeves and tried physically intimidating Gray. Gray was indeed smaller, but not by that much, and most of it was from their somewhat hunched back. If Gray stood at full height 'she' might even be taller than Gloves. "Well all I see is an argumentative old women too stuck in her ways to accept anyone else taking the lead. I bet there is a reason you retired, perhaps you should return to it. Clearly it wasn't doing you any favours though," shot back Gloves.

Gray decided that they'd endured enough insults. Taking the slightest combat pose Gray slid the walking stick in hand so that the base was clenched in they're fist. They then proceeded to smack Gloves multiple times on various pressure points. Pressure points that didn't really exist on a dryad but dropped Gloves to the ground anyway. It was a more extreme option then was possible in reality, especially in 'combat' even as basic and one sided as that combat had been. Still, it happened and Green heard the thump of Gloves hitting the floor. Peaking at the 'argument' with one eye she saw that Gloves had been downed. Languidly puller herself to her feet Green asked, "How long will he be down for?"

"Grhmhm, in my prime I'd say that'd take him out for a good six hours. As it stands though... maybe twenty minutes. Gloves is a weak fool but still in the prime of his life. I wouldn't commit to anything

longer than twenty minutes. He could wake up any time after that. Just... keep in mind he can technically hear us. Do with that information what you will," explained Gray.

*\*Well... that could have gone better I suppose.? But you know what. I'll count this as a win. A very odd and slightly counterproductive win... but if we need that ass we can wake him up... or better yet just pick somebody, anybody else.\**

#### [Chapter 676 - 676 Threw It On The Ground](#)

Green was still dead to the world, Tophat was still glancing around worriedly and Buff was making sure that he was ready to step in should things get serious while Gloves... Gloves was still causing issues with Gray. "Old age must have rotted your brain if you think you've got any useful information left to share. Then again, they say 'those who cannot do teach' so perhaps you've got some wisdom to share." Snickered Gloves

"Boy, just because some people are hacks doesn't mean you should have skipped out on your lessons growing up. They keep the mind sharp... so I suppose it's no surprise you have the attention span of a goldfish, the grace of a drunk hippo and all the majesty present in a dung beetle. I doubt you'll ever take up a teaching career though. No wisdom in that noggling to pass on even if you wanted to," sneered Gray right back.

Green suddenly felt herself waking up and sniffed the air. *\*Hmm... that smells like a bit more smoke than normal.\** Green glanced around at the wall and was rather disappointed to see that it was now actually starting to shrink. Not by much, and to the untrained eye not at all... but Green wasn't untrained and her eyes were up to the task. Groaning she pulled herself back to her feet before dusting herself off. Just because they were burning time now didn't mean it was time to rush.

*\*What a shame. I was just hoping for a good nap while those two got it out of there system. Now instead I have to mediate somehow. Ideally Tophat will mediate and I can just be the scout or be the magic expert. Granted I'm not really an expert on magic but how hard can it be to destroy a magical artifact powering a fire wall? It doesn't seem overly complex.\*?*

The ones not arguing noticed Green's return to the living and looked to her for guidance. *\*Urgh, where's Gareth or Nixilei when you need them. I do not want this leadership position. Whatever fine. I guess I'll make do.\** Green gathered a clump of air in her hands for a few moments before slamming them together creating a bang reminiscent of a gunshot going off next to your ear. "Enough. The fire is finally moving and we don't have time for this anymore. Gloves, shut the fuck up. Tophat and I woke you up because you have workers gloves and we could presumably use the muscle. Nothing more, nothing less. If you don't want to work with us, LEAVE. Oh wait. You can't. Because there's a GIANT WALL OF FIRE WE'RE TRYING TO DEAL WITH." Shouted Green.

The Fae sucked in a deep breath calming herself. "Now, Gray, I understand that Gloves is a little irritating, I have a similar teammate. However, he also knows when it is the time and place for such things. You're just purposely antagonising Gloves at this point, it's rather obvious. Stop. It's like watching a veteran soldier beat up a cripple who keeps challenging him to a duel. Funny the first time, boring the second, and pitiful the third. You're better than this. Stop."

Gloves didn't look happy at this pronouncement and opened his mouth to complain but Green drew her dagger coated in in wind and jabbed next to his ear sending a gust of compressed air shooting past and just barely nicking Gloves flesh drawing a thin line of blood. "Now is not the time. I don't like being the leader, but apparently I've been volunteered. Now. Gray. Where do we look for the artifact?"

Gray sighed and looked over at Tophat, "Do you know about the secret room under the general store?" at Tophat's extremely confused look Gray sighed again though the movements were much more exaggerating. Shoulders heaving as she leaned more heavily onto her cane as if aging a decade in an instant. "Nobody takes the time to do things properly anymore. Under the general store is a secret passage that's supposed to be used to evacuate in the event of an emergency. Parts of it ended up collapsing in an earthquake a twenty years back and nobody wanted to bring in the personal to fix it. That being said... a rather nice room managed to survive and is still connected to the store. I'd bet we'll find it there. The tunnels used to connect to all the houses, but I think only the general store still has the required tunnels now."

"Ok let's go then," said Green with another much softer clap as she spun on her heel. She didn't even wait for confirmation from the others. At this point they could either follow her, or do their own thing and she didn't rightly care which of those options it was. Taking things slow while trying to work out exactly what was going on was fine... when the time limit wasn't so obvious. A glance to the side told her that the fire wasn't speeding up... but by virtue of the circle shrinking at a consistent rate the area it held would be decreasing a lot faster than the perimeter.

Green got to the general store and didn't even bother checking for locks simply kicking the door down. Unlike Kat it didn't fly off the hinges, Green just knocked out the small strip of wood keeping the lock in place. With the store open Green saw a smattering of vegetables, a bit of salt rope and a few other bits and bobs. "Where do we need to go?" asked Green still not looking back.

She heard what had to be Gray shuffling forward, two legs and a cane an easy gate to pick out from amongst the crowd even with the fire and screaming. "It's under the counter," said Gray as they stepped around the wooden bench and pressed a combination into the cash register before hitting the confirm button. The sound of straining rope and coiling gears tickled her ears as Green walked around to see a hole opening up in the floor. Noticing there was no ladder anymore Green grimaced and jumped down herself.

"I can catch you all as you come down. Though I might need some help for Buff. Someone grab a lantern as well, we might need it," yelled Green as she hit the floor. The impact was fine but the mana cost was another chunk out of her not yet restored reserves. *Novelnext.com*

Tophat was the first to take the plunge, easily being caught by Green with Gray following after quickly. Gloves stood at the edge awkwardly for thirty seconds before Buff pushed him out of the way and jumped down. This required a bit more effort. Green created a cushion of air on her gloves, releasing it just before Buff reached her to bleed off some momentum, letting him hit her arms as she moved with the weight, spinning slightly and depositing him off on the ground. *\*Oof, not as heavy as he could have been but not great on my arms. Note to self, do more lifts during practice, clearly my arm strength is falling behind. Well that or Buff was a lot heavier than he looks.\*?*

Gloves scowled and dropped down, not wanting to look weak in front of the others. Green had no trouble catching him and so once again the crew were all back together. Gray started walking first, as they were the one with the lantern, heading down the tunnel. Everyone else had to crouch slightly with the low hanging ceiling but it wasn't so bad.

In fact, it only took a few turns for a bright orange glow to be visible up ahead. The group sped up as much as they could reaching the small room in no time at all. It had a few runes carved into the floor and a glowing orange crystal hovering in the middle. "That must be it!" shouted Green with joy. *\*I'm so happy it was easy to find this thing. We could have really been given the run around. Now how do I deal with this...\** "Gray any ideas here?"

Gray carefully walked up to the crystal making sure not to disturb any of the markings. "Hmm... this has so small runes of it's own. Likely a spell crystal of some kind. The other runes in this room might not even be connected to it. We just have to disable the crystal safely and the fire should die down."

Gray spent around thirty seconds studying it before Gloves strode forward, "What are you waiting for? This has an easy solution granny,"

Gray raised an eyebrow at that, and said, "Oh really? You think you're equipped to deal with complex rune matrix?"

Gloves had reached the crystal now and lightly put his hand on it. "Of course not. We just gotta stop the fire though, so we do this!" Gloves wrenched the crystal out of the air and slammed it into the ground shattering the crystal on the floor. Everyone else in the room just stared at him in shock.

"Gloves," said Buff in a deep gravelly voice. "You're a dumbass."

And that was the moment the explosion went off.

#### [Chapter 677 - 677 Caution.](#)

Green stumbled as the world shook. The violent discharge of mana from the crystal didn't seem to originate from the broken shards on the ground, no it was somewhere else and it was shaking everything. Dust and loose stone fell from the ceiling as Green fought for a moment to keep her footing. The shaking didn't last long and once it was over Green threw her mana into the wind letting her move with her max speed, not caring for the inefficiency of the expenditure to position her behind Gloves and slam the palm of her hand into his neck. Dropping him instantly. It was somewhat risky, and had a chance to be a fatal attack, but Green wasn't terribly concerned at this point in time.

*\*Dammit! I don't know if just killing the bastard isn't a better idea. If this was all real he could have risks at least a dozen lives with that idiotic move. I can't believe he would do something so unbelievably dumb. If this was real, the lives were real I'd be much angrier... but I would also be less likely to risk simply killing him... but my anger might push me over the edge.\*?*

"Buff can you Carry gloves? He's an idiot and I won't have him risking anyone else. If you need to drop him, DO IT. I will not have you risk your life for that little shit. I wish I was surprised but honestly I feel like I should have seen this all coming and that's on me. We need to get out of here as fast as possible and assess the damage, probably start leading people out. Gray is there any of way out of here?" shouted Green intensely.

Buff sighed while shrugging his shoulders and making his way over to Gloves unconscious body. The fact that it was wasn't solid wood giving away the fact he was still alive to those in the know. Green of course hadn't seen a 'corpse' to realise this fact and didn't really care either feeling no remorse at all for taking care of a problem, perhaps permanently. "I'm afraid not Green. If there are other exits, I don't know about them, and I don't know if they'd survive that recent explosion. We'll have to go back the way we came in,"

Green growled but starting jogging in that way, looking back to see Buff easily keeping off and Gray struggling to keep up somewhat but not complaining nor falling behind. It was a clear effort but she was a tough old bird. Well that or the fact she lacked real muscles was really helping things. Tophat was managing well enough, though her face was slightly pinched. As the group ran Green asked, "Is there like a ladder somewhere in the store? I know there was some rope but I think I'd be better of using my mana to help," *\*Even though it's dipped back down below a quarter after taking out Gloves,*

*\* "then bothering with that."*

Gray huffed sucking in air as she ran to answer the question, "I do believe... that there... might be a small... ladder somewhere... in the back... maybe."

Tophat jumped in, "Sorry Gray... I know that" Tophat sucked in a deep breath between steps, "the ladder broke somewhat recently and I never replaced it."

Green shrugged as she ran, "We'll just not worry about it. Actually... Buff... would you be able to throw the other two up? Perhaps I jump up first, help catch them at the top while you throw then come back down for you?"

Buff got a thoughtful look on his face as he jogged, easily able to focus as the running, even with a burden, wasn't hard for him. "Yes" was the simple answer. It was a firm answer, if not an expressive one. Green almost wanted to ask for more details but that was enough in the end.

It also helped they just reached the end of the tunnel. "Actually can you throw me up first? I don't think I can afford to waste anymore mana,"

Buff didn't even answer this time, simply grabbing Green with surprising care and then hurling her up out of the hole. She was somewhat surprised at the swift action, but well used to the speed. Green was able to turn herself in the air and land firmly on the ground at the top of the hole. "Ok ready for the next person," said Green.

Gloves came flying out of the hole next and Green did consider doing the right thing... but she was feeling a little vindictive and simply pulled the body off to the side letting it drop rather than catching him properly. "Next!" said Green.

This time it was Tophat that was thrown, Green swiftly moved to the side and pulled Tophat while she was still in the air. This meant that Tophat came down onto solid flooring, and only stumbled slightly as Green moved them further away from the hole just in case they fell backwards. "Next!" said Green once Tophat was stabilised. *Novelnext.com*

This time, instead of a person Gray's walking stick actually came up first, and Green swiftly handed it off to Tophat. Green then watched for a few moments before Gray came flying up after them. Not trusting



Gray's legs Green stood as close to the edge as possible and pulled Gray into her arms. It was tough, as their similar size made the act somewhat awkward as Green quickly moved backwards away from the hole. Green felt her arms straining under the weight though her legs were able to manage. *\*Another damn sign I need to sort out my arm strength.\*?*

Green carefully let Gray sit up and leave the hold next to the counter so that she could use it as support until Tophat handed over the cane. Green sucked in a deep breath before jumping down the hole. Buff was able to take one large step back to avoid her landing and while Green wanted to use her mana for to soften it, she didn't have that to spare really so she took impact with her body, bleeding of a lot with her legs and rolling forward to take the rest of the impact.

"Ok Buff. Here's how this is going to have to work. I'm going to need to see if you can get onto my back. I don't have the arm strength to lift you nor the right technique to launch you up without either giving you my boots, which clearly wouldn't fit on your feet, or holding you in some way. Now the issue is that the hole isn't all that wide. So once we start lifting I'll need you to try and launch me up and backwards as well. Can you manage that?" explained Green.

Buff just said another lone, "Yes" with complete confidence. Green wasn't quite feeling it but had to be ready to try. Green lined herself up as best she could so that Buff was directly above the hole when standing behind her. Green crouched slightly as Buff shifted his weight onto her back and frankly looked a little silly, legs pulled in, massive frame leaning on her, but Green pulled through. Not waiting for a go signal she pushed almost all of her remaining mana into a downwards burst launching the two. Buff was ready and as soon as he felt them moving up pulled Green not up and above him, but in close and to the side protecting her with a bicep.

Green winced as she heard Buff's arm smack into the side but he made no sound as they cracked through a couple floorboards and ended up in the room. Buff through Green off to the side and reached out to grab the counter pulling himself forward and off to the side. Green dropped to the ground panting. Her body struggle to replace the missing mana she'd spent.

*\*Curses. I've let it sit too low for too long without proper rest. I know better than this dammit. A Fae should always be more careful with our mana levels and I just ignored it. If I'd just let myself reach the cap, or even halfway but I kept using it while nearly out. I'll be fine, but... I think one more full powered spell will take me out of things.\*?*

Green grimaced and rose to her feet despite the gnawing feeling in her stomach crying out to be filled. Her mana levels were around a tenth, if not less but she managed to stand and make it outside, cursing under her breath at what she saw.

The flame barrier had been keeping the flames from spreading before, well they weren't now. Most houses had burning rooves, the nearby trees had started to burn in earnest. A slow crawl along the surprisingly wet grass.. While the wall was no longer in play, most of the fire from it still was and now, instead of a slow even ring closing in on them, it was a series of wildfires eating up the available space.

#### [Chapter 678 - 678 I Will Survive](#)

"Grab everyone you can and get them..." Green paused as she looked around for a good spot to leave. The wall of fire was gone now but that didn't mean the town was any less surrounded. The fire burned

lower, not powered by the crystal anymore, but it would still be too much to walk through in most areas. That was, until Green managed to spot an area between two houses. The ground must have been softer there as the explosion had taken out a large chunk of dirt, leaving nothing for the fire to burn. There was of course fire just past it, but that was a good enough starting point, "get them over to that crater!"

Green and the others got to work. Green intentionally went for those further away from the rendezvous on account of her being the fastest. Buff also took note of this and headed in the other direction, grabbing the furthest Thymes by the shoulder before shaking them and pointing to the crater. Two Thymes tried to ignore Buff, but they just slapped them around a bit before piling the Thymes up onto their shoulders with Gloves. It didn't even slow Buff down.

Tophat was doing what they could, taking a few moments with each person to calm them down before sending them on their way. It was slow, but effective and worked every time. Gray on the other hand would order them to the crater, and when ignored, start whacking them on the shins with her walking stick repeatedly till they decided it was just in their best interest to stop arguing.

Green only had one major issue, a Thyme that was limping asked her to get a walking stick for them... but the house they indicated it was in was clearly on fire, so Green said, "I'm sorry sir, but it's too late for that walking stick, now please come with me we're running out of time." Which was true, at this point they were. This was one of the last Thymes and the last Thyme Green personally would wake up. The fire was getting hotter and she was really feeling it. She was sweating a good deal and wanted nothing more than to use mana to keep herself cool with a gust of wind. Sadly that was off the table.

"I'll manage on my own then," said the Thyme as they hobbled forward. Green nodded and turned, only to see that the other Thymes had been collected, there was just one more and Buff looked like he had that all handled. Green was about to run off anyway when she realised just how far away they were. Turning around Green swooped in and placed the hobbling Thyme's arm around her neck. "I can manage I can manage," but Green ignored them.

The Thyme, while annoyed, wasn't suicidal enough to actually fight Green, just complain and she started to make... acceptable progress. In the end though, Buff made it to the crater, dropped off the two stubborn Thymes, and then jogged over with Gloves still on his shoulder before easily picking up the hobbling Thyme and placing them on a shoulder. They grumbled slightly under their breath but didn't complain.

Green and Buff arrived in the middle of the crater, Tophat had taken a position at the 'front' of the crowd and was doing what she could to keep everyone calm with Gray standing off to the side, occasionally raising her walking stick and glaring at people, "We have a plan. Please just remain calm, we are gathering all the villagers now. I need everyone ready for the next stage. This is a nice safe zone for now, but if the temperature climbs too much we'll still be in trouble," A gasp ran through the crowd but Gray raised her stick and Tophat continued, "I said don't panic. We are aware of this and taking steps,"

*\*That's great to say and all but frankly it's a bit of a lie. I don't really know what to do at this point. The fire is spreading to the trees and a lot of the undergrowth. It's not spreading as fast as I'd expect from real fire but it's not exactly slow either. My best idea is to punch a hole through the fire with an air blast, but I'm not sure if that will be enough. We might have to lean on Buff a lot. I mean, I'll definitely be out*

*of it if I blast a big enough hole through the forest, that'll take everything I've regenerated. He'll need to carry me, Gloves and maybe that Thyme with a dodgy leg?* **NoVelNext.com**

*Damn I'm thankful for Buff. If I didn't have him we'd all be so screwed. I really wish I had some other competent help though. Gloves was such a big let down. It'd be nice to see Gareth, Nixilei or more likely Kat hear soon. There's no way Kress has finished dealing with his shit, but I really do hope that the others can arrive. Kat has the highest chance of getting here sometimes soon... but no sigh of her yet and the trees will make her hard to spot. Hmm... do I have any better ideas? Not really?*

*Is it worth risking panic by taking the time to form another plan... no. Tophat is barely keeping them all calm with the assurance that we already know what we're doing. We'll just have to hope for the best and see what that can do for us. Damn. After all that effort it'll be coming down to a mad dash through the forest. Certainly not ideal, but not the worst thing ever.\*?*

"Buff, can you throw me up? Just to the lower hanging branches, I don't want to be burned. I just need to take a good look at what lies ahead of us," explained Green quietly. Buff just nodded once again, the calm quiet self assured Thyme new his capabilities, and this was well within them.

*\*Buff you're the best. If I didn't already love Gareth I might be willing to kiss you when this is all done. Who even cares that your just a Thyme clone at this point it'd be worth it. Heck I still might. He has been an absolute wonder.\*?*

Green readied herself as Buff bent down slightly and turned his hands into a stepping platform. Green felt a twinge of unease at the way she was about to be thrown but didn't have long to contemplate that fact. Launched into the sky Green looked around and was pleasantly surprised that the fire was spreading, but not too badly. An air blast WOULD be enough, but they'd need to be ready to run. Green was getting ready to land when she noticed Buff holding out his arms. Letting herself fall sideways she landed easily in Buff's grasp. "Thanks Buff. I'm going to announce the plan, but I'll need you to carry me afterwards. I'll have no strength yet. You still good?" whispered Green.

"Yes. I will be fine for a while. Can keep up easily, especially if held back by some members of crowd," said Buff in a somewhat shocking display of verbosity.

"Thank you" said Green happily before she jogged to the front to stand by Tophat who was still keeping the lid on everything. "Tophat, you want me to announce the plan or announce it through you?"

"I think it's best if you do it Ms Green. I've been keeping things steady for now, but I can't then jump in with the plan, they'll wonder why I didn't explain before," said Tophat.

Grimacing Green nodded and strode to the front of the rock Tophat had been addressing everyone from. "ALRIGHT!" shouted Green before waiting a few moments to make sure that she had everyone's attention. "I'll be using my mana to blast us a pathway out of here. I need everyone ready and willing to run before the fire can refill the gap. You don't need to run forever, just this first 200m. Get ready to run on my signal. You'll know what it is."

Green then turned around walking to the edge of the crater as she gathered her mana into the enchantments on her armour. *\*I'm going to have to force this through my boots. I'll probably fall over but aw well.\** Green raised one leg pointing her show forward as she forced the mana down into her

shoes. She could feel herself straining at the limit, her mana channels wheezing as the last droplets of it were squeezed into the spell.

BOOM

Green stumbled backward into Tophat, who barely managed to keep them both upright. Green's ears were ringing from the sound and body shaking from the exhaustion. It took everything in her power to not turn into a complete noodle and pass out right there but the Thymes needed to see she was ok. Just for a bit longer. Green's ears were still ringing when she watched the first person run past her, followed by a dozen others, all charging forward away from the burning town. Green smiled and felt the last of her strength go as the one leg she was standing on gave up. Pulling her and Tophat down.. Buff was clearly ready for this though as he took them both into his large arms and ran forward, now carrying 4 people with no trouble.

#### [Chapter 679 - 679 Timber](#)

This is still Green's perspective

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Buff jogged forward at what to him was a reasonable pace. That reasonable pace was already passing a number of the slower Thymes even with the four people he was carrying. Green was basically a wet noodle. She was simply surprised to have kept her conscious together at all. She was flat against Buff's shoulder with eyes glazed over. Part of her wanted to just go to sleep despite the fact she'd managed to avoid that fate... but the rational part of her knew it would be best to stay awake just a bit longer before collapsing.

Tophat was sitting somewhat awkwardly on Buff's shoulder and needed to hold herself in place to avoid falling off. Buff was big yes, but not quite so broad in the shoulders as to be able to keep two people either side. In this case Tophat ended up half on Green and half falling down Buff's large arms. She was very awake but made no move to get off Buff. The big Thyme was faster then Tophat by a long shot and it wasn't worth forcing him to stop just in case.

The Thyme that had been hobbling was doing quite well. They had a nice comfy seat even if it did require them to hold onto Buff's head for stability. Gloves... well they weren't awake to realise they were the chair in this instance. Hobble's weight was keeping Gloves from just falling off and that was all the help the fool was going to receive. He'd wasted too much time before ruining everything and nobody was enough of a saint to protest the somewhat poor treatment.

The fire was crackling all around them and the trees were starting to burn somewhat. The leaves were already up in smoke and many of the branches were heading the same way. The trunks hadn't quite gotten hot enough to start truly burning but the fire was already making Green and the others sweat. The heat alone would start to cause problems for most if they had to keep running through it for too long. While the forest wasn't liable to go up in flames all of a sudden, the slow roasting from the continuous heat would still be enough to do them in.

That's why, Green felt like jumping for joy when she saw a dark dot flying down towards them. It could only be one thing. \*KAT!

\* The demon in question slammed into the ground next to Buff and shouted, "Green, are you alright?"

"Mrgmhmr" was the best approximation of what Green could manage. She'd tried to say, 'I'm alright'

*\*But apparently I lack the strength for actual words. Urgh... I really should have taken the time to rest on that first tree. Running across town, then through the forest then to jump and it just kept going. I really abused my poor mana pool today.\*?*

"Um... hmm..." Kat had started to jog next to Buff, the other Thymes giving her a decently wide berth at this point after seeing her landing crack the ground. "You seem safe... little weird you're getting carried... but... it's hard to tell if you're struggling or this Thyme here is carrying you because you're out of breath. The lag of gag is telling, but you're sweating horribly..."

*\*Kat you IDIOT. We're in the middle of a fire of course I'm sweating!\** Sadly for Green she was the only one. None of the Thymes were bothering to fake having sweat glands and Kat herself wasn't really feeling the heat. Seeing all the others completely fine was leading her to guess the fire wasn't actually that bad. It was. The Thymes were just ignoring it because even just minor parts of Thyme were more than able to stand up to fire of this level just like Kat.

Luckily Tophat was on the case, "No she's fine. Green had to use all her mana to make a path through the fire. I'm surprised she's even conscious at all. Buff here has been a big help, doing literally ALL of the heavy lifting. Solid guy really. He deserves a raise. Not even sure what he does for a living or what the pay is. Certainly not enough,"

Buff shrugged his large shoulders proving once again that his name was fitting. Tophat needed to cling desperately around Buff's arm to ensure she didn't slip during the motion, using her other hand to keep Green in place as well. The other side fared a bit better, but Gloves nearly slipped off to the side. Then again, nobody important was at risk, so it was fine.

"Right... right. Um... what can I do then? You seem to have this handled even if the forest is on fire. I'm not really sure I can do anything about that to be honest. Buff looks like he's got the whole 'carrying people' thing down. I mean, I could take one or two people off your hands if you want Buff?" asked Kat unsure. She'd rushed here after helping Nixilei but while things weren't perfect they were running smoothly enough.

As if Kat's question invoked some sick retribution from a bored god, a creaking sound resounded through the forest even over the top of the fires and Kat turned. Green wished she could see what was happening at the time as Kat dashed forward. Towards the front of the column one of the trees had started falling over and Kat leapt straight at it, colliding with the burning log in mid-air. She strained against the weight, but was being pushed back. While she could lift it on the ground, her wings were not capable of supporting such weight. "QUICK I CAN ONLY SLOW IT DOWN!" shouted Kat.

Buff instantly sped up, no trouble at all and many followed him even as the tree continued its fall as if in slow motion. The issue was the three Thymes Green could see behind Buff that were likely not going to make it in time. *\*Shit shit shit. What can I do? I can't move, I can't use anymore mana. What can I do? Shout a warning perhaps?\** "Grehr" attempted Green. She wanted to say something. Anything. Maybe an encouragement to run faster, maybe a warning to stay back. Didn't matter as her mouth wasn't up to the task right now.

The three were quite a bit behind having been struggling to keep up and as the falling log came into view for Green it really hit home that they had no chance to stop it. That was until Kat's feet hit the ground and things stabilised. Green's eyes went wide as Kat supported the entire 50m tree all by herself. It didn't matter it had cracked part of the way up, it was still a huge amount of tree. It also wasn't optimal for the others. They managed to avoid getting hit, but now they were hesitating, Green could see it.

*\*Hmm. What should they do here? Kat might have stopped the log but the fire is still burning strong. Will they run through the fire, maybe ducking to try and avoid it, or will they do something else?\** Kat had the answer apparently because Green could somewhat hear Kat saying something to the three but she didn't catch whatever those words were. A few moments later, Kat seemed to get her answer because the trunk was shoved off to the side letting it crash to the ground and removing Kat from view.

*\*Are they going to be alright? I hope Kat knows what... she's... WHAT THE HECK?\** Green watched in surprise as Kat suddenly showed up soaring over the fallen log. She had managed to grab all three Thymes quickly. One was sitting on her shoulders like a kid, another clung to her back like a monkey and the third sat in her hands. Kat's wings had been completely flattened by this choice which meant her current air time didn't have anything to do with them. Green smiled slightly at the sight, drinking in the view of Kat soaring through the smoke. *\*I bet Nix would appreciate this view. I mean, it's still super badass even I can see that.\*?*

Kat hit the ground and stumbled slightly, all the extra weight doing her balance no favours and Green's breath hitched in her throat. Kat's tail whipped out and hooked around a nearby root sticking up and held her in place for just a few seconds before Kat righted herself and kept charging forward. Green let out the breath she was holding and managed to smile despite the exhaustion she was feeling. *\*YES. GO KAT. Stick the landing.\*?*

With that rush of relief came the flushing of what little adrenaline Green still had in her system causing her eyes to droop. *\*Stay... stay awake... gotta gotta... safe... Kat... Kat keep safe...\** Green's tired mind had decided enough was enough and she floated off into dreamland. Kat had things in hand for now. She'd done her part.. It was time for a nice nap.

#### [Chapter 680 - 680 Girl From Petaluma](#)

Nixilei's perspective

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After fighting off an 'attacking' tree, the journey was much less hectic. They managed to outrun the fires in large part due to the wind forcing the fire back a good deal. Green remained completely unconscious and hadn't woken up, and Kat was still carrying the Thymes she'd picked up before. They weren't all that heavy and while it was awkward, it was also something shockingly easy to get used to in the end.

The Thymes didn't seem to tire. Oh sure some times like Gray would play it up as if they were breathing hard and about to collapse, but Kat watched them all closely and not one actually slowed down any further. They also didn't stop for a break. Kat knew, mostly from teenagers who thought she didn't know how to run properly, that keeping up a decent pace was hard, and that once you really started to struggle, you were pretty screwed. The fact Gray could huff and puff and stumble over their cane for at least five minutes at this point was clearly abnormal.

When they finally made it out of the forest, the once empty street was now filled with Nixilei with a team of volunteers behind her. Nixilei was looking around and spotted Green and Kat rather quickly. Seeing that Green was out of it, and Kat wasn't panicking about Green's state she turned to Kat and asked, "Kat, what's the situation?"

"Um... I might not actually be the best one for that," said Kat as she slowed to a stop and allowed the Thymes to finally put their feet on the ground again. They didn't even bother to say anything as they got off and started to group up off to the sides without any issues, "I managed to run into the group after they left... wherever it was they were. I think it was a little town? Hard to tell with all the fire honestly. I didn't see it, just met up partway. Green's out of it... um... maybe that Tophat Thyme might know more? Actually I'm not certain why those four are sticking around"

Nixilei glanced over and realised Kat was speaking the truth. While Nixilei didn't yet know their names, it was Buff, Tophat, Gray and sort of Gloves who were still nearby. Tophat had dismounted from Buff's shoulder at some point and the Hobbled Thyme had vanished off into the crowd. Buff now just had two passengers but the group was sticking around. Nixilei turned slowly to face the group and tilted her head slightly. She was projecting a look of 'well say something'.

"Um... yes well..." said Tophat awkwardly under Nixilei's penetrating stare, "I'm Tophat and I guess I was somehow put in charge of things? Green didn't want to be and just sort of... forced the job onto me? I mean I'm used to dealing with people I suppose but things were quite hectic at the time. Then again... I was the first one snapped out of the fear spell. So I guess... I mean I can tell you the story if you'd like?"

Nixilei pursed her lips and glanced at the forest. The fire wasn't visible but the smoke was, and the sound of crackling could still be heard. Standing here was realistically wasting time. The thing is, how realistic was this at the moment? Nixilei had seen a few strange things and expected this story to contain a few more. *\*Hmm... is there any order I can give my minions while I'm hearing this story? Gareth is already heading over to Kress... so I suppose I could send them over for support there... but do I still need them to finish dealing with... whatever this is?\** ~~novel~~ Ext.com

Nixilei turned to the assembled helpers and then back to the group of three useful Thymes. "First off, are you all willing to lend a hand for the rest of the crisis?" asked Nixilei.

The three nodded at the question. "Ok great," said Nixilei. "I think... um... I don't know your names?" the three replied rapid fire with the answers, "right ok. Gray, I think I'll leave you in charge of getting the group somewhere safe for the night. I presume you know the town well enough for that. Additionally... and I mean no offence... but you looked tired when you were running and with your age and the cane slowing you down, that's probably the best place. Unless you know a lot about the industrial district?"

Gray shook her head, "It's fine lass, just good planning. Seems you got a better head on you than the fool Buff is carrying around. Actually, I'll grab a couple of the stronger lads from my group and take him off your hands as well. He's worse than useless."

*\*Oh god. I bet there's a story behind that. I really hope Green wasn't the one to knock him out. I have no idea how that would count in regards to our point total, but it's just unprofessional.\** Of course, Nixilei doesn't actually know what Gloves had done. Then again, if she was in Green's place there would likely have been a corpse left back in the burning remains of the town instead of an unconscious Thyme on

Buff's shoulder. Still more professional though. "Sounds good. Now, with that sorted, Tophat give me the important version. Leave out what you can, but spare no important details."

"Well... it went something like this..." Tophat started to explain what had happened based on Green's words as well as the events Tophat was actually around for. Gray called over two other Thymes and took Gloves off Buff who just handed him off with a slightly smug smile. When Nixilei got to the part where Gloves shattered the crystal, she whipped her head around to the now empty street where the other Thyme group was, feeling a strong urge to slit someone's throat. Luckily for the groups point total, they were already long gone at this point.

Eventually the story had finally wrapped up. Kat and the others were getting a little antsy by the end of it. They'd had to sit around and listen to a fairly extensive report of what had just happened rather than actively fighting any fires. Nixilei was unconcerned though. The industrial sector was something they'd get to when they got to it. The forest contained only one small town and the instructor Thyme had said 'Buildings left standing and civilians' and last time Nixilei checked trees weren't buildings.

*\*By the sounds of things, the town is a complete write off. There isn't anything we can do to save it at this point. The fire might spread more with the trees... but if that's really the case it's probably too late to contain it anywhere other than at the edge. The wind means the fire is REALLY spreading on the other side, but that just leads out of town and frankly that isn't my problem. Not sure what counts as 'dealt with' but if we can sort out the industrial area we can come back for to this later. With the wind I doubt any houses are truly at risk for this section of the city.\**

"Start heading over to industrial district. Walking pace. I want nobody left behind and I still need to think," shouted Nixilei to make sure everyone nearby heard her as she started off down the street. *\*I think the plan for the district has to be getting the mages to cast a rain spell using the water from the river. It's not as close as I'd like it to be but that's the best option by far if they can manage it. If they CAN'T then I'm going to need a lot of buckets for this operation. Alternatively I could get the Earth mages to start smothering things but I suspect the size of the fire will be too large for that to be anything other than a countermeasure.\*?*

Nixilei glanced over at Kat who was currently running circles around the group. Literally. The demon girl must be bored or something because she was intentionally circling around everyone. *\*Hmm... maybe I should send her off first? Yeah...\** "Kat, you're by far the fastest here, especially with Green unconscious. Run ahead as fast as you can before meeting back up with us and reporting the situation. Get a birds eye view if you can. There's no rush, but time is of the essence."

"On it!" shouted Kat with a salute before dashing off down the street. *\*She has far too much energy after all this. What I need is a good nap like Green. At least I haven't needed to burn mana for anything really. The Thymes that 'die' turn into blocks of wood and the healthy ones can't really be healed properly because they're all technically Thyme and I have no fucking idea how that crazy thing biology works at the best of times. Hmm... ignore that. That way lies madness.. Focus on alternative plans if the rain won't work.\*?*