

## DEMONS 731

Chapter 731 Stories of Green-er Pastures.

“... that’s all you need to know about Sylvie. Perhaps you can share some cute stories about Green?” asked Kat.

Nixilei gave a small laugh behind her hand. “Oh, perhaps I could but I’m not so sure they’d be interesting. Green is a simple girl, and most of the amusing stories from her childhood involve her sleeping in places she really shouldn’t be sleeping. Though... well I suppose I could still share a few. She’s sleeping right now and can’t overhear us.

“Hmm... well, a personal favourite of mine is when some of her cousins decided to play a little prank on her. They even got permission from her parents to set the whole thing up. It was somewhat elaborate but also very simple in premise. They put her bed on a raft and let it float down the nearby river.

“They had a full team of guards, one of which was me, watching her the whole time and her mother was keeping an eye on things as well. I... I don’t know how they didn’t see this coming but eventually a low hanging tree branch smacked into Green and she shot up, looked around, realised she was in the middle of a river...

“And just pulled the covers up over her face and went right back to sleep. I might be a professional spy now, but I was much younger back then and I couldn’t help laughing. Everyone else was mortified, well, Mumma Green was laughing as well but I probably shouldn’t admit to that part. Everyone else started looking at us like we’d lost our minds...

“But seriously, what else did they think was going to happen? In the end they waited until she floated to the next town over and used a dockmaster’s hooked pole to pull the boat back in. When she finally woke up, after quite a lot of shaking, she just asks, ‘why are you waking me up? I was having a nice nap and it’s my day off lessons?’ so of course back to laughing I go.”

Kat was laughing throughout the story and managed to get a hold of herself a few moments after “You’re right I can’t believe they didn’t see that coming. Did anyone get in trouble for it?” asked Kat.

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Nixilei gave a shake of her head and said, “No they didn’t. Remember, it got approved beforehand so Green’s parents... if not approved at least allowed for it to happen. The head of the guard wasn’t exactly pleased but they don’t have the authority to punish anyone involved, not without Green’s parents stepping in and well... you see how it all circles back. With their permission it was all above board.

“That’s not to say the cousins didn’t get chewed out once they were back in their homes but I have no way of knowing if that happened or not so... I guess they all got away completely free of consequences,”

“Is there any other sleepy Green stories you feel like sharing? That one was great!” said Kat.

Nixilei tapped a finger to her chin a couple of times. “Hmm... I suppose I do have another. It was certainly less funny at the time. Ok. So it was a large gathering at Green’s estate. There was a number of important lords and ladies there as well as their heirs. I was posing as Green’s maid at the time. Of

course I'm not a proper maid but I was trained in it, one of the better professions for a spy to know intimately.

"This was the first large gathering at Green's estate in some time. Normally she was forced to attend them at other estates, or at the royal palace. So she was feeling pretty safe at the time. The first two rounds of food had come out, Green had eaten and then she decided she was safe enough to just... go to sleep. Now, she was at the heir's table so while her parents could sort of look over it wasn't terribly convenient and it wasn't really done. The heirs were supposed to keep to themselves while the adults were speaking. Allow them a bit of freedom to mingle amongst themselves.

"So when Green lay down to sleep, it looked like, to a number of other heirs at least, that she'd just collapsed at the table. Nobody knew how to deal with that. Green was the only one effected so it wasn't a case of everyone being poisoned... but it was also Green's house, and while other servants were allowed in the kitchen, all the chefs were from Green's family. So it was a massive shock that it was Green that collapsed. Of course, she was just asleep but nobody had worked this out yet.

"The servers then came in to take the plates back before returning with the next course. The same servant had been serving Green all night so she comes out to grab the plate and their Green is, collapsed on the table. I've never seen anyone lose blood so fast. She just sort of gazed out at everyone else with a 'what the heck am I supposed to do' look. I think the poor woman was afraid she was about to be executed.

"Eventually, seeing this, I took slight pity on them all and walked up from the walls and checked her breathing. Now, I wasn't scared because unlike the others I was paying attention and saw her slowly fall asleep instead of just dropping. So I say 'She's just asleep,' and head back to the wall watching over Green. Nobody knew what to do with my additional information.

"Things still weren't good, nobody knew what was going on, eventually someone screamed... I can't remember who it was off the top of my head. I know it was one of the heirs but not specifically which one. Anyway now the adults are concerned so they trundle over, Green's father in the lead. He takes one look at Green, a second look at me, and just gives out the biggest sigh.

"I'm not sure you've ever seen it... but it's just... it's so clearly the sigh of someone who can't believe they're in this position and are so incredibly done with everything in that moment. So he just smacks Green across the back of the head and she slowly sits up and says, 'Yes father?' and I don't think he knew how to answer that because he just walked away and Green went back to sleep. After that, nobody ever really cared if Green fell asleep somewhere. It just sort of became the done thing,"

Kat smiled at the imagined scene. "I wish I could say I was surprised but that does sound like something she'd do. Has she gotten worse over time? Actually wait now I phrase it like that I want to know if this is actually a health problem. Should we be concerned?"

Nixilei made a 'so-so' gesture, "As long as she gets enough exercise it's no issue really. There's nothing actually wrong with her, in fact, technically she's got a unique skill. She can sleep more easily and for extended durations easily. She doesn't NEED the extra sleep and she could work a full day like the rest of us if she wanted to... she just really likes sleep. Green can be a bit grumpy if she doesn't get that..."

“But her parents are hopeful she’ll grow out of that for the most part. It isn’t that she’s actually sleep deprived. It... I feel a little ungrateful to use this an example but it is the best one I can think about. She’s more like a child that just had their favourite toy put away by their parents. It’s annoying and grating but it certainly isn’t sleep deprivation. People are just used to sleep being something you have to need in order to get so they treat Green’s sleeping condition as a concern.

“They look at her like she’s not getting enough at night or something similar. It makes it really funny to watch all the lords and ladies trying not to wake her just in case this is the only chance she has to sleep properly for the day. It’s NOT the case at all, but nobody really wants to reveal the fact it’s just an odd quirk of Green rather than a bigger deal. Keeps people polite and...

“Well everyone knows not to bore Green with meetings. When Green has to sit in on something as part of her heir duties, the other party is always very careful to keep it entertaining or short. Everyone has the understanding that if Green considers listening to them a waste of time she’ll just go to sleep. Then they have to decide on waiting for her to wake up, or waking them up herself. I’m not sure if you can comprehend just how awkward that would be in polite society. It’s a surprisingly effective tactic and one of the main reasons Green’s parents haven’t tried to curb her behaviour in any meaningful way.”

Chapter 732 Steel Jaw Stacy

“Do you have any of your own stories to share?” asked Nixilei, “Interesting things that happened to you or your friends growing up?”

Kat gave a light shrug, “Not really? I mean, you grew up in an orphanage as well so I imagine a lot of the stories I could have, if I did considering them interesting enough, which I don’t, that you’d seen or heard about them in your own time at your orphanage. Hmm... what unique stories...

“I suppose there is the time I took on three of Lily’s bullies at once... but looking back on it, it wasn’t anything impressive combat wise. See, my home dimension sort of... hmm... not grew out of conflict because that’s very much NOT the case. We just... moved it to more mental escapades. Bullying is all about name calling, constant harassment, sending hundreds of threatening emails. It’s mostly talking. Talking about the bad things they want to do but just a constant barrage of it.

“Anyway, I suppose that’s just background. What you mostly need to know is that your average person is very comfy. They live... well I want to say better then lords but with magic I’d be inclined to think the lords here live better... anyway. They live very nice, comfortable lives and so when I told them to stop, and they were being obstinate... well I just calmly walked up and slammed my fist into their jaw.

“The other two didn’t know what to do it about it. I mean, looking back my technique was horrible but was I able to deal with pain, and keep calm under pressure so they saw me take this girl out in one hit without so much as flinching, and I told them, feel free to do little pranks on me, but that taking it out on Lily was no longer acceptable, and that was that,”

“Yeah I can’t imagine that happening here,” said Nixilei, “I mean, sure if you looked a bit more trained, maybe if you could project some mana or something... but everyone knows how to fight at least a bit. Monsters aren’t a huge deal for the average citizen but they do still get into the cities so everyone is expected to at least know how to wack a slime with a big stick. It’s taught in schools even.”

“How do monsters sneak in?” asked Kat.

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“Oh plenty of ways. The sewer is the main way slimes get in because they are perfectly happy in that kind of environment. Otherwise, a lot of towns don’t have big walls, or walls at all, too expensive to maintain so they just... wander in. Bigger monsters can’t, and most towns have enchantments to monsters above a certain power level as long as they aren’t masters of stealth...”

“But if they ARE stealthy monsters there isn’t much we could do anyway. They’d get past the guards if they could get past the enchantment. It’s very basic, couldn’t keep a human out if they were even designed for that. They just look for large mana signatures not attached to items or people. Monsters also liked to trend larger as they grow in power...”

“Or is it more accurate to say that most monsters don’t really have a natural size cap like people? A monster can just keep growing and growing and growing until they are finally killed. So, a particularly powerful slime would be too large for anyone to miss,” explained Nixilei.

“Seems a little... Blasé Faire about the whole thing,” suggested Kat.

“I’m afraid it’s just practical at the end of the day. Walls are too expensive, better enchantments are MUCH too expensive. So we don’t really have any choice in the matter Kat. It’s just life here, and life as a town guard isn’t just about criminals. Monsters can’t be reasoned with though, and they don’t go for theft. They just jump you at some point and people need to be ready for that,” explained Nixilei.

\*I suppose I can’t really say anything against that. It’s hard to really get myself in the right headspace. Maybe I’m just too used to politicians that don’t like to speak the truth. Nixilei certainly knows how much it takes to maintain a wall or the enchantments` and if she says it can’t be done realistically, she’s probably right.

I also don’t really know how common small villages are these days. Without highways I’m not sure what’s considered ‘far away’. I wonder if they have similar systems? If they do how many people need to bunch up to get them? Do the farms I presume these larger towns have get protection as well? Or do farmers assume some amount of crop damage from wild animals are acceptable losses?

I also wonder why... well I don’t want to say technology stagnated their civilisation hasn’t necessarily been around long enough... hmm... I wonder if it’s because individuals can get so much more personal power or because lifespans seem to be a lot longer.\*

Deciding that there wasn’t much else Kat wanted to know about when it came to the subject of city defence she returned to more personal things, “Did you ever have anyone in the orphanage itself you were close to?” asked Kat.

“Not really,” said Nixilei slowly, “I had at best acquaintances. I was a surprisingly driven kid and I didn’t understand for a long time what the point of interacting with many of them was. By the time I did learn that lesson, during acting and infiltration classes, I was largely an outcast and the closest person I had to a friend was Green, I wasn’t really able to find any other close friends. Oh sure I’m able to be professional with them, but we’re not friends.”

“Don’t you consider Green a friend?” asked Kat noticing that detail.

"Hmm? Did that not translate properly? I used WAS" the translation was perfect, "because it is no longer the case. I do consider her a friend, or probably something closer to a sister in truth, but no, I was not friends with her at first. As I said I didn't really understand. Not sure Green did either, but we tried to pretend at the start. Somewhere later on we managed to stop pretending," Nixilei let her statement drift off.

"You think it's similar with Kress? No other friends?" asked Kat.

Nixilei could only shrug, "You'd have to ask him honestly. He was older than me when he joined Gareth's household. His family is dead as well, unlike mine. Perhaps he just let that bitterness fester. I certainly don't know of any friends he might have but it's not like I particularly care either? If that make sense?"

"I suppose," said Kat, still hoping for more answers she didn't really want to ask Kress about. "Hmm... well... what about... what kind of missions have you been on? I mean no specifics obviously but like... have you done seduction? I feel the need to ask because that's what I get asked as well, being a succubus,"

"Well, much like you, I just don't have the temperament for them. I can fake so many emotions if it is required of me but romantic interest, lust, LOVE. No, I just don't properly understand how to fake them. I don't even really understand flirting. I only really managed to pass that class because when I was assigned as the 'target' and needed to resist the someone trying to use flirting to get information from me... well I finished the task and still didn't know who'd actually TRIED.

"According to the instructor the answer was six. He sent six separate people to actually try and get info from me and I was forced to flirt with... eight or nine total? Anyway, the fact they couldn't get anything from me really ramped up my score despite not being able to flirt at all. I managed to get a bit of information, but apparently I used intimidation and not flirting. I just happened to get a rather submissive partner assigned for the exercise and mistook it for proper flirting. I did lose points for that."

"Why did you lose points?" asked Kat, "I mean if you got the information I don't see how you could lose points, especially if they got fooled by it?"

Nixilei shook her head, "No. Well yes? No. Hmm... how do I explain this... ok. The other spy was playing a person of interest not another spy. The person of interest wasn't supposed to have any particularly strange or unique fetishes. Just vanilla stuff. The SPY, the person behind the act, was a submissive and really enjoyed the exercise. Propositioned me after as well. Apparently submissive does not mean shy."

Kat opened her mouth to ask if Nixilei accepted the offer or not before shutting it rather firmly. Nixilei was a friend at this point, probably, but Kat was still asexual. She DID NOT take any enjoyment in learning about other people's sex lives and she wasn't about to start now. "Well, I suppose that's a thing," said Kat not really knowing what else to say.

## Chapter 733 Monster Mechanics

A short time later they were stopping outside of the 'little' house the team was staying in for the night. Kat and Nixilei hopped down easily even with Lily in hand, and Gareth walked out with Green in a princess carry followed by Kress. "Are you going to stick around Kat?" asked Gareth, "Wait, that came out wrong. Apparently, my etiquette lessons didn't stick all that well. What I meant to ask is if you wish to remain here for some length of time?"

"I plan to stick around till nightfall really. Either leave once everyone has gone to sleep or maybe just retired to their rooms. I didn't want to just leave straight away or stick around too long. Lily really wants to check out this new book of hers," Kat patted the spellbook held in place by her sash, "so I shouldn't spend too long here. What about you all?"

The group continued walking up the path once Kat had confirmed her desire to stay, Gareth was leading the way and replied with, "For now it's to rest up and then have something to eat. If we had enough food we might have stuck around for a while... but we didn't want to stock up too much just in case the tournament went on for a while. We didn't really have a timeline for it. So we have a little bit of good food to use and a bunch of rations just in case that went bad by the time we got back..."

"So it'll be something we discuss, probably tomorrow if I had to guess. It's a good environment for training, maybe doing a bit of hunting or culling to test our skills in the terrain? I'm not totally sure at this point. We're not required for anything, but we'll be expected to at least inform our families of the results soon. That will probably require Green and I to do some formal events. Winning the second round of the Tournament is rather prestigious,"

\*Doesn't Nixilei have an artifact for making reports? Why are you making it seem like you need to tell them in person or... I don't know hire a courier? Do they not know about that? Hmm, can't be bothered checking if Nixilei mentioned that to me or not last time so I guess I'll keep quiet about it.\*

"So... any idea when the next round is?" asked Kat.

"Not really," said Gareth, "We're mostly just notified of the time and place and given about a week's notice. It depends on how long the other rounds take and how long whoever, presumably still Thyme, will need to set up the round after this one."

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"Fair. You all planning anything interesting?" asked Kat.

"Nope, just regular mission stuff I suppose. Well, maybe not truly regular. We'll focus on the simpler stuff that's closer to towns. Wouldn't want a long exploration quest to be interrupted halfway or to just not be in contact at all," replied Gareth.

"Actually, about that, you said earlier 'culling or hunting' what's the difference?" asked Kat.

"Surely that's self explanatory?" said Kress butting in, "The difference is all in the name!"

Kat rolled her eyes, "Yes I'd suppose it is, but I was asking for the full context. They are somewhat similar after all. You could clearly hear the difference when I asked the question back so it's not a translation issue, you have the problem in your languages as well."

Nixilei cut in, before an argument could really start, "Hunting is about finding either a specific type, or specific specimen for parts. They might want the pelt, or the stomach or the fur. Whatever it is, that's a hunting mission. Culling missions are about eradicating monsters that have gotten too close to town, or are appearing in great numbers. Goblin culling is quite common because they don't have any useful... parts I suppose."

"Their skin is weak, their eyeballs, tongues, other similar parts don't really do anything useful for most alchemists. All they really do is breed fast and become a nuisance. So when we're killing goblins, all we care about is killing as many as we can with no care given to the body. During hunts making sure the pelt is intact, or the horns are in good condition can sometimes take up the majority of the time and effort,"

"Huh... actually... how DO monsters appear? Is it all breeding?" asked Kat.

"Doesn't even know the basics," grumbled Kress under his breath.

Kat and Nixilei ignored the interjection, "They certainly CAN. They also appear out of thin air in places that have sufficiently concentrated mana. Normally it'll be a slime or a goblin, but occasionally it can be more deadly. The general rule is that the more powerful the monster the harder it is for it to spawn naturally. You won't find a dragon just appearing anywhere for example.

"The mana sort of... stabilises into a creature long before it would reach the strength most would require. Even in particularly mana dense areas... they tend to spawn multiple weaker monsters rather than just a single powerful one. I never studied it myself, but apparently it's quite rare. Not every collection of mana spawns a goblin, it's just that they're weak enough that millions of pockets of mana capable of it every few minutes appear and SOME of them spawn goblins."

"Huh. How come you don't get monsters appearing in cities?" asked Kat.

"Well, the basic answer is that a monster can't spawn in an area with a monster already in it. The same is true for the sentient races. We have a... a 'presence' of mana that disrupts monster spawns. Imagine... imagine that you need a completely clean patch of pavement. Natural mana acts as the rain, clearing things off and sending it to the sewers... but that can only get things so clean. Sometimes it's enough, but it doesn't always rain, and when it does, it's not always enough.

"With enough people around though, they leave tracks on the pavement. Enough tracks and the pavement starts to have the dirt and muck caked on. If the layers build up too much, they become the new 'floor' and even if the rain washes away the top few layers, they don't actually get back down to the clean pavement necessary. Does that make sense?"

"Yeah I guess that tracks... and it prevents other monsters from spawning?" asked Kat.

The group opened the door and Gareth headed for the stairs to put Green in one of the beds. Nixilei moved over to the chairs with Kress taking a look at the two and heading upstairs by himself, apparently not really willing to involve himself in the conversation anymore. Kat and Nixilei together were clearly too scary.

Nixilei made a wobbly thumbs up gesture, once she sat down "For the most part yes. Some monsters, and we don't really understand why this is... sort of... keep the area around them 'clean' enough to spawn in reinforcements for a short time after they are created. A goblin will normally hole up wherever it comes into existence for about a day and get two or three more fully formed goblins for their troubles.

"That strange thing that nobody has really been able to work out is why they lose that ability, or if they do for sure. The mere act of observing this sort of thing can sometimes spread mana or 'dirt' over the area making it much harder to actually happen. Based on data from captive monsters we can make estimates that lead us to believe that they spawn. A few tests were conducted to prove monsters do

spawn, involving a very heavily enchanted test chamber that was rather large in size and YEARS of waiting for it to actually work to prove monsters do spawn into thin air.

"It just isn't something you SEE. If that makes sense. We have a lot of evidence, technically circumstantial, but everything we know about the process implies that it cannot be observed because it would introduce at least some outside mana into the process and disrupt the whole thing. Really, it's one of the big research topics that comes up and dies down every few decades. It's something we'd love to be able to control, or understand properly but is always just out of reach.

"I'm not sure if you have an equivalent, but researchers will show this ground-breaking new technique and say we're just 'five years from figuring monster spawning out' but I've read the detailed history books on it. It was one of my research assignments in school actually. And it shows that people have been making those claims for at least 300 years, probably longer. The library only covered 500 years well, and the major events behind that somewhat poorly,"

"Hmm... I wonder if getting a demon to do the observations would work?" offered Kat.

"I don't see why it would..." said Nixilei clearly asking Kat for the answer with her tone.

"Well... we don't have mana at all. I'm sure demonic energy does disrupt it somewhat but perhaps with the right setup they'd be able to see it from a distance?" explained Kat.

"Hmm... it certainly could work. You really I MUST suggest that to my employers. Even if it doesn't work, if it hasn't been tried before... this is the sort of thing I can't just sit on you understand?" said Nixilei.

"Yeah no it's cool go head," said Kat, wondering if Lily would be mad she didn't agree on the condition she also got to look over the data. Kat doubted Nixilei would agree, or be truthful about agreeing at least.

#### Chapter 734 End of Tournament Arc

Eventually Lily woke up and started asking questions. Kat would have participated more in them if Lily didn't simply ask Nixilei questions about magic Kat already knew the answers to. Lily could feel the faint amusement and smugness from Kat but ignored it in favour of more questions while they still had time. Kat was simply basking in the pure joy radiating from Lily as she asked those questions or really, Kat asked those questions for Lily. Kat wasn't really of a mind to mention to Lily the unnecessary nature of those questions, and was thankful Nixilei didn't mind that Kat was 'repeating' herself technically. Lily did manage to ask things at a few oblique angles to make Nixilei think, but they were questions not even Nixilei had known the answers to.

One such question, "Is mana generated in the soul, pulled in from the outside or absorbed and then multiplied?" and it was simply a question Nixilei had never thought to ask. Mana simply WAS for them. Nixilei knew you could go to mana starved areas but she'd never been to one. Her mana regen wasn't noticeably different anywhere she'd been, even in high concentration areas. But was that because her body already took in as much as it could? Or because it came from within?

Kat had pointed out, the fact her new body managed both meant that the body had to have something to do with it, but that it was also linked closely to the soul. What that meant in truth though, wasn't something anybody had answers for. Kat had tried querying D.E.M.O.N.S, something she was realising



was becoming a rarity. She just didn't NEED it as much as she once did. Things were clear enough that she just... stopped.

It did help her get a better understanding of why most demons didn't use it for everything. There wasn't a reason to. It might have been a massive database, but even with all that information at your fingertips. It just wasn't necessary all that often. Still, Kat did ask, and was told she didn't have clearance for it. Another issue of the system. It didn't restrict her often, and demons seemed to share a lot of information fairly freely despite that.

The system really only got uppity, as proved by the fact she got two favour tokens out of it, when someone tried to buy or coerce that information from a demon. She didn't know for sure if there was a limit on the sharing but Kat suspected that friends and family were completely fair game. Something she'd initially been rather concerned about. Her status as a Nondem seemed like a bigger deal. Though she wasn't quite sure why that was.

\*Why do you think Lily? That D.E.M.O.N.S doesn't want that getting around?\*

[Well, the only people it's been perfectly happy for you to tell are people who live on Earth, where you were a human and still sorta pretend to be sometimes, and the demons. My best guess is that demons doesn't want Demonic Energy Corruption to blossom into a huge issue. Like... hmm... no it would probably spread like a plague. Might even have something to do with the Angels. If things really did get so bad because a couple thousand people got corrupted... that already could be world ending if they're strong enough]

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Of course, Kat learning that particular nugget of wisdom caused Kat to encourage Lily to just ask more questions about magic. Kat also decided she was shoving that particularly morbid, though likely quite accurate, thought all the way down in the darkest parts of her mind. No demonic zombie plagues for her. No thanks.

She instead pondered, while stroking Lily of course, what energy system the angels must use. Kat new D.E.M.O.N.S wouldn't be any good for answering that one. What could they use though? Demonic energy perhaps but based on the fact Angels were seemingly stronger would imply if they used the same magic system Kat did it would be called something else. \*The question is... What?\*

Lily was asking some question about how much knowledge of the thing you were healing was required which Kat relayed. \*Hmm... I doubt it's called like 'angel juice' or something dumb like that. Wait actually... there are only three kinds of 'Higher Energy'. Qi, Mana, and Demonic. Does that mean Angels use one of the other two? Both of the other two? Or perhaps... hmm... is it possible there's something a step above Higher Energy? Highest Energy or something?\*

\*Because... it's also occurred to me that Dimensions aren't really designed to hold Angels. That's why the angel behind the painter was just a projection and STILL stronger then I am. No universe comes pre-packaged with whatever Angels need. So... do they provide it themselves? Possible I suppose but somewhat strange... hmm... \*

[No way to know for sure Kat,] Supplied Lily before once again asking for a question to be relayed. This sort of thing continued up until meals were brought out for everyone. Kat did actually partake but

simply grabbed a bit of salad alongside Green. Lily made a dash for what remained of the meat in the house with Kress moving in to claim the rest. Gareth and Nixilei had to make do with what was left, mostly salad but a bit of bread was available as well.

After eating Lily curled up and went to sleep while Kat made some idle chatter over food. Green actually managed to stay awake after her meal was done, joining in for once and asking some details about Kat's life. Kat of course, knowing Nixilei wouldn't hesitate to share, talked a bit about the orphanage she grew up in and the school she attended.

When Kress found out about how Kat grew up he looked like he'd sucked a lemon. It seemed Kress wasn't able to properly compute the idea that the orphans in the room were actually the majority (if you don't count Lily, which Kress, due to his pig headedness did NOT). The fact Kat was perfectly well adjusted, or at least seemed that way despite living in an orphanage her whole upbringing was another bit of odd dissonance he couldn't really deal with.

Kress thought of Nixilei as a little crazy, and while Kat wasn't someone he liked, he also wasn't a complete fool. He could see Kat was well adjusted, or could at least put on the act well. Hearing that her parents were killed which resulted in her going to an orphanage was a particularly interesting bit of information.

Kress, despite his anger at the world, did know that he was quite lucky Gareth's family picked him up to act as Gareth's friend and bodyguard. For those with modern sensibilities it might be an odd thing to think, but Kress was, while perhaps not old enough to make such a decision, he was old enough to remember MAKING it, and old enough to realise he couldn't survive on his own. It was a great honour, one not many in Gareth's province could acquire.

So to know that Kat arguably had a rougher upbringing than he did. That she too had parents that were murdered (despite Kat's claims of an accident Kat still had a person to point the finger at... if she'd ever bothered to ask who was in the other cars) it was paradoxically decreasing Kress' fondness for Kat. Despite evidence of their similarities...

Kat was just a further reminder of things that Kress didn't like. Now Kress didn't only see Kat, a demon, as the source of his old pain, but also of what he could have been. Her parents died too early for her to remember and that is just another thing Kress wasn't lucky enough to have. Well, in his mind at least.

Many would argue that any good memories of a person's parents should be treasured and that Kat didn't have them was a travesty... but nobody said Kress wasn't hypocritical. Still, despite his increased dislike for Kat... Kress didn't challenge her to another duel. Kat was waiting for it, and thought Kress was close to declaring a fight... but he still wasn't an idiot. Despite all the poor leaps in logic, he wasn't so completely gone from rationality to believe he could actually take Kat in a fight after last time.

Seeing what she did to Irwin, while suppressed after he lost so soundly was both another sore spot and a very clear indicator that he wasn't her equal. Another unfair thing of course. A few weeks of practice and already she was a formidable armed combatant with proper form and an instinctive grasp of combat. Of course, that was just what it looked like. Kat largely had to brute force some of the instincts with her mental speed, and she was still more comfortable punching things... but Kress didn't see it that way. Even if Kat didn't use weapons for the fight with Irwin.

## Chapter 735 The Great Book Quest

Eventually, it was time to go. Green had headed off a bit earlier to shower and go to sleep, while Kress stormed upstairs even earlier, pretty much as soon as the food had been eaten. Nixilei and Gareth stayed downstairs a bit longer and Lily was actually the first asleep. Still, Kat considered it time well spent, and bowed to Nixilei and Gareth. "I'll see you all next time," before the familiar world of fire engulfed her.

When Kat got back home it was night time still, and with Lily asleep it was quite obvious what the next course of action was... putting away Lily's new book of course. Kat was tempted to place it nearby so that it was easily accessible in the morning... but Kat wasn't willing to let Lily lock herself up all day reading it either. Instead she put it on the top shelf in her cupboard, a spot that while not terribly hidden would keep Lily from reaching easily. Kat wasn't totally sure how good Lily's wings would be on Earth but the room was small and the shelf wasn't wide enough for her wings to fit anyway. With that done Kat was able to curl up happily with Lily on her stomach and go to sleep.

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Lily was actually the first one to wake up. She'd finally caught up on sleep and had nodded off much earlier. The fact Kat got back in the middle of the night helped Lily as well. She uncurled herself on Kat's chest stretching her body and giving her wings a light flap. Taking a look around the room, she couldn't spot her new book on magic and tried to frown, facial features preventing that for the most part. [Hmmm...] Lily looked around Kat's room and double checked her sash. [So she didn't forget to put it away... but I don't see where it was... hmm...]

Lily sniffed the air and was pleased by the detail. Her soul was syncing up further with her body and she could understand smells in a way she never had before. While this was Kat's room, Kat was often away doing other things. This meant the place wasn't completely saturated with the same scent. She could smell the slightest hint of burning, presumably from the spot Kat returned and the pathway Kat had to take away from it.

Hopping off the bed, Lily sniffed the carpet, following Kat's footsteps until... the cupboard. [That's just rude. Can I even open this? No, despite my size I am strong... but I'm not sure that helps. Hmm... well I can check.] Lily pushed her paw up against the gap and thanked Vivian for designing the house with cupboard doors on wheels. When the door slid open Lily poked her head in enough to use her body to push it the rest of the way open for jumping back.

What she saw did not impress her. Or rather, Kat knew her a bit too well. The precious knowledge she was looking for was in clear view. At the top of the cupboard. On a small shelf that she would need to jump to if she wanted to grab. It was too close to the ceiling to drop down into, and too small to just fly in. It might be close enough to the ground for her to jump into though.

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[The question is. Do I want to try? I doubt Kat did this just to annoy me... but... on the other hand... she said I could check it out once we got back home.] Lily shuffled around a bit, needing the carpet with her paws as she debated the merits of waiting for Kat, or trying to get the book herself. [Honestly the

biggest argument against grabbing it is the fact that I'm not sure I can turn the pages. I'll probably need Kat for that... and if I steal the book back now... hmm yes I guess I should leave it.]

Now, if Lily was still human that would be the end of it. The decision was made. It was more beneficial to wait for Kat despite her own desires. On the other hand, Lily was a Memphis and she was hunting. Perhaps not prey but her mind always valued knowledge highly. Something valued more highly than prey... well you can't just give up on that can you?

So despite deciding not to actually take the book, Lily still very much wanted to get to the book. She prowled backwards, taking in the distance carefully and testing the spring, or lack thereof, the carpet provided. A few quick hops later and Lily was ready. She lowered her haunches and positioned herself perfectly. The angle was a bit steep, but Lily didn't want to hop off the bed and risk waking Kat, that is, if the springiness from the bed didn't kill her momentum. Lily ready herself one last time, and then leapt!

Straight into Kat's arms.

See, Kat had gotten up in response to Lily's rapidly changing emotions. She was well rested and didn't resist the pull at all. So she just happily watched Lily mess around on the carpet and ready herself for the jump. Kat simply stood off to the side and remained still. Without any movement, Lily's eyes wouldn't be alerted the same way and her mind just blocked Kat out. Kat wasn't a threat at all, so her mind didn't deem Kat's presence all that important to their hunt. Well, until they were grabbed out of the air.

\*Good morning Lily.\* Thought Kat as she gave Lily a small kiss on the head, careful not to get her eyes poked out by Lily's horns. \*I see you're trying to get at your book.\* Kat's amusement was very prominent through the link. Lily didn't even need to look up to see the big smile on Kat's face.

[I wasn't going to open it though! I just wanted to get it down] complained Lily mentally. Kat grinned. \*Yes I know Lily, I heard that whole discussion.\* [Oh] Kat sat back down on the bed, bringing Lily with her. \*Oh indeed Lily. Now, as happy as I am to let you read it now. Perhaps we should go visit your parents first?\*

[Do I have to?]

\*Lily... why don't you want to see them? It's been a while since you spoke and I let you get away with not visiting after we returned from the Hub. We can duck over for just a bit, I don't even have to leave you there Lily. Tell me what's wrong?\*

[I just... well... I just don't want to deal with it honestly. It's going to be really awkward that I don't have my human form right now. It means you'll have to translate for me and I just can't picture it going over well. Mum will probably blow up about it. I don't know if she'll try to make it seem like I'm trapped like this, or pretend I can't actually be a Memphis, or well she'll probably just say cat.]

[It'll become a whole big thing, and I can't get you to yell at her for me. Even if I could get you to yell at my mum, it'd be wrong. I should be the one yelling, not my translator... but of course I can only really hiss at her. Maybe make vague threatening gestures with my claws. Can't we just... avoid all that until I can transform?]

Kat pondered for a moment. Tail swishing around behind her, flicking at the creases in the bed. \*I'm really not sure if I can or not. Even if I was willing to tentatively agree not to talk to them, Vivian would

certainly pressure us into visiting. They are also your parents. They'll be worried, or at least somewhat concerned. Is it really right to just avoid all that?\*

[Yes] retorted Lily easily. [My mother ignored the fact that you were a good person for over a year. I can pretend that I live here. It's not like I can go home on a more permanent basis until I can change anyway. I can't really open doors and I need you to speak for me.]

\*I could stay over instead? I don't have to drop you off. I could spend time with your parents as well you know? I mean, we've really messed up the whole 'introduce your date to the parents' stage of things... That is a thing right?\*

[Yes Kat it is... and I suppose we did... but I just... I don't see the point? Or rather... I don't think it would be worth the extra effort. My bed isn't all that different to yours, just a bit smaller, but the real issue would be spending time with my parents. I already said it. I don't believe my mother can stop herself causing a scene. Even if we started working on our issues... they aren't resolved. Can... can I just stay here for a bit longer?]

\*If you can convince Vivian.\* Kat could feel Lily flinch at that judgement. She wasn't changing it though.

#### Chapter 736 More Callisto Backstory?

Kat stood frozen on the stairs in shock, her mouth wide open at the sight before her. Kat could also feel through the link Lily was in a similar state of complete and utter disbelief. In front of them stood Callisto up on a ladder, bucket of water on one side, herself on the other. She was using a wet rag to clean off the fan... and frankly neither girl new how to deal with this. *noVELnext.cOm*

[You know. Despite the maid outfit this is so weird... I mean... I've never seen her actually cleaning anything have you?]

\*Not unless you count the dishes she usually refuses help with. I... I can't believe it either. I mean she's said she's responsible for the cleaning multiple times, and I new that intellectually... but yeah no. This is the first time I've ever caught her in the act so to speak. I'm just... not really sure what we're supposed to do now.\*

Callisto was humming under her breath a song that both could hear thanks to enhanced senses, but didn't sound familiar to either of them at all. The older woman was completely absorbed into her work. Or so they assumed. It took thirty seconds of staring for Callisto to smile and say, "I hardly think it is appropriate for you girls to be staring so much. You are both in a relationship no? Unless... is this what you both enjoy doing together? Certainly an odd hobby for someone asexual like Kat to partake in,"

Kat just returned a confused look at Callisto as Lily worked out where the woman's train of thought was hinting towards. Embarrassment flooded Lily as she tried to come up with some response. Kat saw her girlfriend floundering and decided to make use of her ignorance for a change. "I don't really know what you're implying but we were both just surprised to see you cleaning. We've not actually seen you in the middle of it... ever."

"That is a bit of a surprise. Not a large one, for I do tend to clean in the night, especially when it does not require making excessive amounts of noise. I find it is better for my concentration. I do not need to provide meals for anyone else, I know where everyone is, I can open the windows to help things dry out

without worrying about noise or the neighbours doing something silly like burning a mattress. Yes that did happen. The only cleaning I really do during the day is in personal rooms. I do your room when you are away, as that is a frequent enough event. Vivian's while she is at work, and Sylvie cleans her room with me after I did it by myself and she complained," explained Callisto.

\*Yeah. I can see Sylvie doing that. She kept things quite clean in her room at the orphanage, even picking up after the others in her room to make sure it was spotless when it came time to clean. Truth be told, I imagine she asked to help Callisto with far more than just her own room. Callisto probably denied the request though. I wonder if it's because of the chemicals? Or some other reason.\*

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[What I feel like asking is when she washes her clothes. Callisto apparently doesn't sleep so like... when does she shower? She wears what looks like the same maid outfit all the time but it's spotless every time we see her. I don't know that we've ever heard the washing machines, which for you is odd, considering your advanced hearing. I'll keep an ear out now that I have it as well but I wish to know]

"What about washing your clothes? Lily brought up an interesting point that we've never seen you wear anything else... and since you don't really sleep there's no natural time to swap clothes," asked Kat.

"I am not sure I wish to hear such a question from the person who has not worn anything other than that kimono in all the time I have known you. Still, to answer your question I made some minor modifications to our washing machine to make it run almost completely silently. That mostly revolved around building a box to insulate sound. A few other little details so it does not overheat or build up excessive amounts of fluff on the foam and now you do not really hear it.

"As for my outfit. I tend to replace it once every twelve hours. It does not always work out exactly like that, but it works out closely enough. I tend to take a shower just before everyone gets up for breakfast, something I have not yet done this morning. Then I will take a second shower after everyone has eaten dinner. Something else of note is that I tend to eat during the night as well. As I do not sleep and continue my work, whatever that may be at the time, I require additional caloric intake. Something that was not always apparent to me," explained Callisto.

"How did you figure that out?" asked 'Lily'

Callisto finished the last of the cleaning on the fan and started dismounting the ladder with a sigh. "The truth Lily? I did not. I found myself with the shakes quite regularly and I was losing weight. Despite my hatred for my parents, the only thing they did well was make sure I was fed. Granted, I was the one doing the cooking, but I was taught only how to make adult portions and not to waste food. So what food I didn't eat at the time was put off to the side and needed to be finished before the next day.

"The extra food from that arrangement made me overlook how much extra I was eating once I was freed from the duty. Well, that and the fact I had aged and required more food from that as well. I could not figure out where my weakness was coming from. I perhaps thought it was some sickness I did not properly have diagnosed in my earlier years. It is another thing I appreciate Vivian for. I was certain I had no choice but to waste away before I turned thirty.

"As I was routinely overfull from trying to finish as much of my plate as possible while it was still at a good temperature, because of course my parents would not allow me to store food in the fridge and

reheat it, I simply got used to it involving some sort of pain. The pain of hunger towards the mornings, the pain of being overly full during the days. The gnawing pain in my stomach I was getting after I moved out didn't really register as hunger. Vivian had to point it out,"

Kat frowned. "I know your parents are bad... but that sounds pretty horrible... and you said that was the least bad thing they did to you?"

Callisto made a 'so-so' gesture and explained, "I was more indicating the fact they forced me to cook all the meals from a young age. It was my favourite of the chores. In fact, I never considered it a chore at all. I enjoyed cooking and it was my escape from the rest of my duties. While I have now made cleaning my own thing, something that is mine to give, not my parents to enforce, I hated it with a passion when I was younger.

"Now I cannot stand the idea of leaving anything dirty. I used to spite my parents by skipping over certain areas and things as I was cleaning. Nothing too noticeable. Perhaps I wouldn't clean out a favoured mug properly, or I would simply fold the sheets instead of washing them if I thought I could get away with it while they were out. An alternative was also to wash them and then fold them before they could fully dry. Hmm... what else did I do. I believe I made a point not to clean my mother's favourite chair for a year once. I cannot believe I got away with that particular misdeed,"

"Oh..." said Kat unsure of what to say really. Lily, knowing a little more about psychology instead prompted Kat to ask, "Should you really be cleaning all the time then?" with Kat adding on, "I'm happy to help out with it,"

Callisto shook her head firmly, "No girls. I do not need assistance with this. Before I laboured for people I hated. I despised the role they forced on me. Now I clean for Vivian. She is, as I have said before, the best thing to happen to me. She got me away from my parents. Provides me a place to live, refuses to let me pay for the groceries most of the time...

"And now I happily clean for her. What might be hard for some to grasp is that I am GOOD at cleaning. Especially with lacklustre materials on hand. It was not irregular for me to be tasked with the removal of a stain or a beating despite not having the products on hand to deal with such a thing in most cases. I am now past that point in my life. I am content."

#### Chapter 737 Vivian's Tragic? Backstory

After that there really wasn't much else to ask. Well, in Kat's mind that was the case. Lily was still bursting with questions Kat could occasionally feel across their link but even Lily knew that it wasn't quite right to press Callisto further for those answers. Perhaps Callisto would have been fine with it, but neither were willing to risk that. So Kat and Lily, or really, Kat with Lily surprising, helped put away the ladder and bucket while Callisto washed her hands and got started on breakfast.

It was a bit later that Vivian and Sylvie wondered downstairs. Sylvie's eyes lit up when she saw the demonic duo and instantly commandeered their attention. Sylvie took Kat's lap, and Sylvie cuddled Lily on her own. They did have to be a little careful with the seats because the table was not so high that their triple stack of 'people' could fit their 'legs' underneath it. To avoid this Kat pushed the chair back a bit. It did mean that when food came things would be a bit awkward, but they'd make do... maybe. Lily would probably jump on the table solving the problem anyway.

Callisto was making omelettes for everyone with slight variations in the ingredients. Kat's had extra chilli, eating up a large number of the chilli seeds from Callisto's and Vivian's alongside a few finely chopped chilis just for herself. Sylvie and Lily both had half sized omelettes that didn't have any chili at all in them, with Lily's getting diced ham added in and Sylvie getting bits of apple. Vivian's had quite a few herbs thrown in and Callisto added shredded spinach to her own.

Well that was going on Sylvie asked, "Hey Vivian... what tragic backstory do you have?"

"Pardon?" asked Vivian confused.

"Well, I know Callisto's and Kat and Lily just heard it as well... and I also know Kat knows Lily's now. Kat and I are both orphans. What tragic backstory do you have?" asked Sylvie again, the picture of innocence.

"Sylvie... I don't... I don't really have one? I mean, I enjoyed school, I didn't get bullied, I was popular and even if that caused its own share of problems they were problems I could handle. My parents were, wait no ARE good people... I didn't exactly have a tragic upbringing or some major childhood trauma. Things are good. Sure I had a few... interesting incidents in my time as a child but nothing like the rest of you," said Vivian, her normally beaming smile somewhat awkward.

"You might not have anything tragic but you do have a few interesting stories from when you were younger," yelled Callisto over the exhaust fan.

Vivian rolled her eyes. "I suppose Callisto is right. If it's just an interesting story you want..." Sylvie nodded, "ok. I guess... the first one that comes to mind is from when I was nine, about your age I guess, and I was sick on the day of choir practice. There was a solo number required and nobody wanted to volunteer. I'm not sure who thought of it first, but one of the girls in the choir decided that it'd be a great idea to put my name forward instead.

"So, I come back the next day and I'm getting all these strange looks from a few people. The choir had already spread the word I was doing the solo. I'm not sure who was responsible for THAT either. I suspect it was a girl called Gracey. She probably wanted me to make a fool of myself, either by declining the role and being known as the one who didn't sing," Kat frowned, "yeah kids are like that. She wasn't singing either of course, but that was the first 'win' condition.

"The second would be making sure that I freeze up on stage. Which... is a reasonable fear I suppose. I've never been all that great at singing. I've heard I have a nice voice a few times, but it just doesn't translate to singing. I joined choir because I LIKE singing not because I have a good voice for it or any real skill."

"Of course, Vivian being the singer in question meant she had no issues just getting up on stage and singing," called out Callisto.

Vivian smiled at the interjection but shook her head, "Callisto is making it sound much easier than it was. Being aware of my lacking vocal talents I didn't expect a good show... but I was willing to get up and sing anyway. We were young and I did still find it fun. What my housemate is neglecting to mention is that I spent the next month practicing every afternoon to bring my performance from 'screeching monkey' to 'out of tune piano' which was a massive improvement to my ears. My only wish is that video



cameras were more common back then. Not to record my performance, but to record the standing ovation I received for the solo at the end,”

Kat’s face started to open up in shock before Vivian shut that line of thought down, “No it wasn’t THAT good. My parents were just very supportive and saw how hard I practiced. They hopped up clapping first, then a few of their friends joined in and after that people felt like they had to get up or they were spoiling the mood. Mob mentality is a powerful thing. What I wish their was a recording off is the rest of the choir. I’d love to have seen whichever bitches thought I was going to fail. The shock and horror on their faces as I got a standing ovation would be glorious!”

[I didn’t think I’d ever see Vivian being the slightest bit vindictive,] Kat internally agreed, but also managed to think of a few moments Sylvie got back at people who caused issues just to give Kat the run around. It made the whole thing less surprising. Sylvie was the one to say it though, even if perhaps she didn’t mean it, “I didn’t think you’d be vindictive at all...” in a sing song voice.

Vivian gave a light shrug as Callisto finished up with the cooking and started to hand out the plates. Lily hopped off to the other end of the table away from everyone else who was eating. Callisto grinned and quickly sliced the omelette for her into much smaller slices. “Well Sylvie... I’m not really but sometimes the opportunity is just too good to pass up. I didn’t even have to do anything to them to get back at whoever it was. It’s the best of all worlds really, and just because I don’t seek out those kinds of things doesn’t mean I’d shy away from it either. I just wish there was a camera so I could see their faces. I was forced to stand ahead and slightly to the side for my solo, so I wasn’t able to look back and check what they were doing without it being noticeable,”

“Honestly that does sound like something I wish you’d recorded. Though I’d be more interested in hearing you sing then the revenge,” said Kat.

“Oh, I suppose I could still try... as long as you’re willing to sing a few songs as well?” offered Vivian.

Kat gave an shrug as she reached around Sylvie to pick at her own food. She appreciated the extra spice Callisto had tried to add but it wasn’t really the same. Her tastebuds weren’t human anymore and as such she didn’t react to capsaicin the same way a human would. Oh it tasted nice and did give the dish a bit of extra flavour, but if Callisto was trying for spice Kat could actually feel she’d never get there. “I don’t mind if I sing as well. I’m sure Lily would enjoy that. Though... any other interesting stories from your youth?”

Vivian tapped the edge of her plate with her fork a couple times. “Well... there is a few I suppose. I’m just trying to think about what you’d find interesting. Like... there was the time I almost burnt down the shed in our backyard. That was rather harrowing at the time but I’m not sure it’d be interesting in the retelling. I was just trying to help set up the fire with my Grandad, but I was wearing long sleeves I was too close when we lit the fire up together.

“My sleeve caught fire and I had just enough presence of mind to quickly take it off before I could get any severe burns... but not quite calm enough to realise it was a bad idea to throw it into the wooden shed we had in the backyard filled with tools... and fuel for the lawn mower. It was all very scary for a young girl, well, I think I was fourteen so not THAT young, but Grandpa planned ahead and had a bucket of water off to the side ready. He just chucked that on my burning shirt and crisis averted.”

## Chapter 738 Sylvie's Turn to Tell a Tale

"I guess if we're all sharing then... Sylvie do you want to talk about your own tragic backstory?" asked Vivian. Kat froze at the question. \*I... oh dear. I... hmm... shit.\* Kat actually knew Sylvie's 'tragic backstory' already and wasn't terribly impressed with the flippant way Vivian asked. Finding her adoptive mother's eyes though... Kat saw nothing but utmost serious within them. Despite how Vivian had asked, this wasn't a joke. What Kat didn't really was that her flippant way of asking was Vivian's way of giving Sylvie an out. A simple joke in return would let her know the topic was not to be touched. Her eyes betrayed the seriousness of the question.

Kat missed this of course, and offered, "I can... I can tell Vivian and Callisto for you if you want Sylvie. You don't have to be the one to do this."

Sylvie wrapped Kat's arms around herself and said, "No... no I want to do this. I... I think it's good to tell everyone. I do not mind if they know and I think that maybe I should explain things. I guess... the first thing is that I obviously do have a bit of a sad past if I ended up in the orphanage. There's no way to avoid such things for kids like us. Where to start though. A lot of what I know now was only obvious in hindsight, or looking back and piecing some things together.

"Well... I suppose I can start with my mother. She died in childbirth. At least, that's what I was told. I have no reason to believe she didn't, but I never saw like... death certificates or anything. I have however seen quite a lot of pictures of my mother and we look quite similar so I'm inclined to believe that she is dead and my mother. The exact cause of death... maybe it was childbirth, maybe not. I was a very early baby apparently, and that makes me wonder about things. See there are some... other things that I know about her that muddy things somewhat.

"Where to go next... well, I guess I'll briefly touch on the fact that I was raised for most of my life by my grandparents, or arguably just my grandmother? We'll get to that actually. So... my father. I know nothing about him. Grandma and Grandad didn't like to talk about him, and his name isn't on my birth certificate. I know. I checked. What I'm not sure about is why he isn't listed.

"In hindsight, I'm able to recognise a few things from what Grandma didn't talk about. I now know what rape is for example. It was covered in school a little bit. The possibility is certainly there... but I also got the feeling that Grandma only ever talked about mother when she was younger. Not super young, but younger. Oh, that's another thing, my mother was forty-eight when she had me. Quite late, and she never married anyone before that.

"Grandma... I got the feeling she was always talking about mother from back when she was in her teenage years or in her younger adult life before avoiding the topics all together. From what little I know about her from the neighbours, when I got the chance to ask... my mother engaged in sexual relations with a large number of people and likely had at least on drug related habit she refused to break off.

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"I have no evidence to suggest she was a prostitute, but I do not know how else she made money. From what I can figure based on my memories, I think my mother had a... I believe it is called a 'mid-life crisis' very early in her life. Perhaps at thirty? She stopped working, or changed professions, started hanging around bad people and never got out of that hole really. If I had to guess, she was not technically a

prostitute but I believe my mother found wealthy men to sleep with and let them pay for her bad habits. It's why I wonder if it's true to say she died in childbirth. I... I wonder if something else caught up to her before the end and they managed to save me."

Sylvie was speaking rather robotically. She was not the most expressive child, but she did usually have some inflection into her voice. Sylvie was currently explaining her thought process with the same dry tone one would use to speak about the projected economic development of the town for the next quarter. It was clear that she was simply trying not to feel anything about the information so that she could get it all out into the world before breaking down. Kat didn't notice it when her tail joined her arms and pulled Sylvie in as tightly as she dared. The fact Sylvie was carefully rubbing her thumb over Kat's arm was just a coincidence of course. Kat didn't need reassuring at all.

"My guesses into my mother's life make it hard to know exactly why my father is not listed on my birth certificates or talked about. It is possible he found out she was pregnant and left her. It is possible she had sex with a number of people around the time she got pregnant and did not know who was the father. It is possible," Sylvie trailed off slightly, licking her lips once. Twice. Three times. Kat squeezed the little girl slightly harder until Sylvie tapped Kat twice in quick succession to get her to let up. "It is possible... it is possible with what I guess of my mother's drug or alcohol habits that she was drugged and raped, or simply indulged so much she didn't remember."

Sylvie shook her head ever so slightly to clear away that train of thought. "Regardless. For me there was no 'Mum and Dad' only 'Grammy and Grampy'. Though... Grampa wasn't able to stick around too long either. Well... he died when I was... six? I think? I can't remember exactly if it was before or after my sixth birthday. It was a... a major effort. I didn't realise it at the time either but Grampy was responsible for a lot of things.

"He did the cooking, the cleaning and made sure Grammy knew what was going on. Grammy mostly spent her time looking after me and telling me stories about my mother. Stories about how she used to like to draw, or the kid she thought was cute that used to live down the road. She talked about the time my mother got a bunch of kids together to throw buckets of water at their school teacher on the last day of primary school. All sorts of fun stories. I... I didn't realise it then but Grammy's memory was already quite bad. She wasn't really making new ones.

"She knew who I was and she knew a lot about mother, but she didn't actually know much about me. She'd pretend well enough I didn't notice as a five year old, but looking back it was clear... it was clear her mind was going. When Grampy died though. I think she might have as well," Sylvie shook her head again and gained a slightly thoughtful look. "Hmm... that might be unfair. Grammy tried when she could... I know she had some kind of dementia. Not which ones, the doctors wouldn't explain it to me. Thought I couldn't understand.

"I think she couldn't form new memories properly for as long as I knew her. Grampy helped jog her memories with things. She could tell me stories because they happened a long time ago. That's most of what she did. She knew how to keep me safe, like her own children. An old memory. She could tell me stories. Old memories. Yet... despite the big tv in the living room she never turned it on. Now that I look back at things. Considering how often we were in that room. I'm not sure she knew how. She certainly didn't know where the remote was.

“Anyway. Grampy used to do things to remind her. Place the washing down nearby, in the same spot. We’d eat breakfast lunch and dinner on the hour without a second of difference. It was always the same thing as well. Er, same thing each month. Grampy had a set of meals he’d rotate through each day with it being the same every month. For months with thirty one days we got treats. I’m sure he did other things too I didn’t notice but...

“When Grampy died, he was... I think he was 102. He was VERY old. I didn’t understand how old that was really. He... looking back on it he’d aged very well, especially with all the housework he still did. One day. He just... he just didn’t wake up. I was very sad of course, but I had to hold it together for Grammy... but I don’t know if she was ever herself after that.”

Chapter 739 More Sad Things. It’s the Last One I Promise

“Grammy just sort of... existed after that. She didn’t really do anything. I mean... she got up... and then she’d sit in the lounge room until it was time for breakfast... but she wouldn’t cook the food... and for the first few days I didn’t know I had to be the one to make it. She’d just... look at the table so lost. As if she could no longer comprehend what was going on. Like... like she knew she had something to be doing, eating, but there was no food so clear that was wrong...”

Sylvie gestured at the empty plate in front of her before sucking in a breath and continuing. “I’m... I want to say I’m ashamed to admit it took me two days to work out I needed to be the one to cook... but I think based on what I know I did quite well. So... I started to cook. Well, not really I started to prepare frozen meals and chop up what fruit and vegetables I could. Grammy would eat them, but she never really talked to me after that. Eventually though... the food in the house I knew how to prepare ran out...

“So I started to use the money I knew the location of to get more food. I asked one of the neighbours to go shopping with me and I grabbed what I could. That kept us going for a bit... until the bills started to come in. I didn’t know how to PAY them and Grammy hadn’t spoken for weeks at that point. So I just... sort of did nothing. That was until... I think it was two months after Grampy died that Grammy woke up and asked “Who are you?” before looking away as if the answer didn’t matter.

“Well... after that someone from the school came around. Grampy died during the school holidays but school had been on for a few weeks now and they’d heard nothing at all from us. So my teaching came around and saw what was going on and well... they called somebody, who called somebody else and a short doctor’s checkup for Grammy and then all of a sudden I’m being told that I have to go to an orphanage because Grammy can’t take care of me anymore...”

Sylvie’s eyes weren’t the only ones that were wet with tears. Lily had buried her head into her front legs, curling up into herself the best she could so that she didn’t have to look. Callisto was pointedly looking at a nearby wall, the faintest mist to her eyes. Vivian was sniffing, tear tracks streaking down her cheeks but she didn’t look away. She was the one who asked and she was willing to LOOK THE PROBLEM IN THE FACE. Just because her heart felt like it was being stabbed didn’t mean she should look away. Kat kept her face frozen, but the lines of tears were clearly visible. Not needing to breath meant sniffing was less of an issue.

“And... I... I don’t know what to do about that. I mean, I know what I did... but I’m not sure how ok I am with how I dealt with it. See... I... Grammy’s still alive I think. I just... I haven’t visited her though, or really thought about her much. I... I don’t really think Grammy is alive. Or... no. Words... Um... clarify...

“Right. I think people are their minds. Their experiences. I loved Grammy and her stories. I loved how she always had time for me, even if she could have been doing so many other things. She was always there even if it was just to watch me read or do homework. Even if I know now that might have just been because it was a routine, I still loved that. Grammy doesn’t talk anymore. Can’t talk anymore.

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“She’s barely human still and I don’t think her body is really a person. I’ve mourned Grammy and said goodbye. She’s dead. As much as it hurts me. She died the day Grampy did and her body is too sad to get the message. That’s what I think. That’s what I know emotionally...

“But sometimes I think I’m doing the wrong thing not visiting her. Grammy took care of me for years and I could not go to the hospital to check up on her? But... but I’m not checking up on HER am I? I’m looking over her ‘dead’ body. I can’t decide if visiting her is like digging up her casket to speak to the body or praying at her grave even if she didn’t really die in that hospital bed but back at home. So that... that’s that. That is...”

The damn finally broke and Sylvie started all out bawling. Kat, before she could find herself in a similar position stood up, Vivian catching the idea and following behind. Kat prodded Lily mentally to show her what she was planning and Callisto got the message some how as well. They all headed over to the couch and through some massive feat of will managed to get into a somewhat reasonable formation before they all started crying themselves.

Kat was half lying half sitting across both Callisto and Vivian as they were hugging her and Sylvie. Kat’s wings were behind both but she had unwrapped her tail to include everyone in the hug. It wasn’t really enough to wrap all the way around all of them but it was enough to get everyone and that made the difference. Sylvie was still on Kat’s lap, now being held aloft by three sets of hands. Meanwhile Lily managed to squeeze herself into the gap between Sylvie and Vivian snuggling herself into Sylvie’s side to try and calm Sylvie and herself down.

The crying continued for quite a while. Even Callisto let out a few noises through her restraint. Vivian grabbed one of the couch’s pillows to cry into mostly to avoid getting snot all over everyone else. Kat was surprised at the amount of water and didn’t notice that her tears had started to freeze over and her eyes were glowing. Lily, the only one who could notice wasn’t looking at all. She was trying to deal with her own emotions and Kat’s as best she could and failing to avoid being sucked into her own whirlpool of sadness.

Eventually, Sylvie asked, in a very soft, sniffly voice, “Do you think I’m doing the right thing?”

That was enough to pull everyone most of the way out of their sadness. The need to give Sylvie an answer much stronger than their desire to keep crying. Vivian answered with, “I think she’d want you to be happy. I doubt your Gammy would want you to suffer on her behalf,”

Kat added in, "Nothing needs to happen Sylvie. Not only would it be difficult to visit whatever hospital she's in... if things really are as bad as you say I don't think she'd notice. I agree with Vivian, I doubt Grammy would want you to torture yourself over this,"

Callisto, ever the intellectual offered a very different piece of advice thought, "There is one thing to consider though. We all have confirmation that souls exist. Lily's knew state is a tribute to this as well as the information from D.E.M.O.N.S. I believe that there is quite a high chance that she did not lose her memories, but perhaps her soul. You described her as simply going through the motions..."

"But perhaps you may wish to consider it as that exact thing happening. I think it is possible her soul moved on at the same time as your Grandfather's. If you further take into account the bond between Kat and Lily, I would posit a lesser form of such a bond, where your Grandfather was keeping them both in the physical world to look after you when they should have moved on some time earlier..."

"With his death that link snapped and her body lost what made it truly human. I do not really think we have any way of testing my guesses but I would not be terribly surprised if that was actually what happened, or some slight variation close to it,"

Kat opened her mouth to retort... but found what Callisto said made a lot of sense. Hmm. I... hmm. While Kat was pondering it, Sylvie's expression cleared up somewhat. "Yes. That does make sense. I... I think that even sounds rather correct."

\*Dammit. D.E.M.O.N.S... it's not like I can just check if she still has a soul or not is it?\*

User Kat is informed that attempting to use User Kat's Dream Walk ability would fail on anything lacking a soul.

\*Oh you have got to be kidding me! I can't believe you actually gave me an answer you... YOU! Dammit!\*

[What?]

Kat shared the memory of the answer. [Oh. OH. What... Oh dear. Do... do we offer? Do we even want to test this? I mean... we CAN but... should we?]

\*I don't know Lily. I wish I could forget the last twenty seconds or so.\*

## Chapter 740 Emotional Cascade

Everyone took the time they needed to recover from the impromptu crying session. Lots of hugs were given and the mood was significantly improved. Callisto headed off first. She held things together the best of the group on the surface but truthfully, she was likely closer to Sylvie than Vivian was... and in recent weeks perhaps even closer than Kat herself. Callisto wasn't crying like the others but she was perhaps the least fine. Kat had the benefit of hearing a lot of this story once before and could prepare herself. Callisto did not.

After that Lily gave Kat a glance as well. Part of her wanted to stick around with her girlfriend but she recognised that Sylvie probably needed a bit more space. Lily ended up heading off with Vivian to do something on Vivian's computer. Kat wasn't sure what that was, and she was trying to ignore the emotions coming from Lily at the moment. It wasn't exactly working but she was trying. Sharing

emotions was great when the happiness reinforced itself. When it was a less pleasant emotion neither were really fighting... it really wasn't a good feeling at all.

Finally it was just Kat and Sylvie left on the couch. Kat went to unhook her hands from Sylvie and give her as much space as she wanted only for the little girl to grab hold of Kat's sleeve. "Go with me." The words were shaky but there was conviction there. Kat stopped in place and turned to look over Sylvie slowly before picking her up and heading for the stairs. Now Kat wasn't exactly sure where they were supposed to go but her best guess was Sylvie's room.

So that's where Kat headed. When Sylvie didn't say anything at the top of the stairs Kat kept going. When she stopped outside of Sylvie's room and received no further instructions she opened the door. When she did... well. A lot had changed. Sylvie had things in her room now. The first and most obvious was the large desk that Chekov had made for Sylvie. It sat next to the door and took up most of the back wall. The closet was on the right side of the room and there was a large bookshelf on the left. The walls had been redone at some point to a soft green. The bed was in the centre of the back wall, but the size of the room meant there was plenty of space between it and the desk despite that.

The covers had a fairy forest on them, much like the desk. There was mostly trees but the occasional splash of colours and wings added a bit of extra fantasy to the ensemble. It didn't seem like it came with pillowcases though because they were both white with a basic set of stripes running through them. The bed frame itself was nothing remarkable either. It was just a basic wooden frame with a thick backboard attached to it.

Kat ignored the chair at the desk, as well as what looked to be a new laptop as well and headed for the bed. She shifted aside the pillows with her tail and set herself leaning against the headboard, pulling Sylvie into her lap properly. Sylvie didn't say anything and Kat started to run her nails through Sylvie's hair. Taking it as slowly as she could, carefully working out the non-existent curls with so much attention to detail it was only possible with her unhuman senses. Every single strand was checked and while Kat brushed out larger clumps she had her eyes on every hair at least once.

Sylvie eventually decided Kat had played around with her hair enough and started snuggling into Kat's body. Kat let it happen and wrapped the little girl up with her tail as she stared at the desk mostly just because it was there. Kat didn't take in any of the details, it was simply the direction she moved her gaze to give Sylvie yet more time to get herself together. It wasn't common for Sylvie to break down like this.

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Even when she first moved into the orphanage. Sylvie was always a mature little girl. The nine year old liked to act more like she was ninety most of the time. Logical arguments, calm demeanour, a room so clean you'd think nobody lived there. Kat felt a flash of happiness at the fact Sylvie could still feel things so strongly before a wave of guilt smothered that. Kat let out a light sigh, not able to stop the act but limiting the noise she made so as to make it impossible for Sylvie to actually hear her exhale. Sylvie still felt the odd movement of Kat's chest though, as it was had its rhythm disrupted.

For a moment, Sylvie considered using that as her chance to start talking... but she didn't want to speak. She was safe in Kat's arms. The rest of the world could wait. Her other feelings could wait. This was a good thing and she wanted to keep it that way for as long as she could. So she did.

With Kat's demonic physique she was able to remain mostly still for the next hour without trouble. Even when a human would need to shift, Kat simply didn't. Her body was limber and her body was strong enough to keep pumping her black blood around despite Sylvie's weight. Sylvie did move positions a few times but not often and only to get slightly more comfortable. The second hour passed much the same way. Sometime during the third Sylvie drifted off to sleep.

It was a bit after the fourth hour was up that Sylvie opened her eyes again and regained her bearings. There were a few moments of confusion before she shuddered. Realising what had already happened. Sylvie tried for a few minutes to just go back to sleep but she wasn't tired anymore just drained. That didn't mean she couldn't be stubborn about it. Sylvie took another ten minutes to say anything. "Hey Kat?"

"Yes Sylvie?" responded Kat, voice still perfectly crisp and clear, no trace of any exhaustion.

"Thanks Kat,"

"Anytime Sylvie," answered Kat happily as she brought her hand up to Sylvie's shoulder to rub gentle circles. Sylvie leaned into the touch and sighed.

"I do not like that I broke down so much this morning. I should not be crying about it," said Sylvie firmly with all the surety of an eleven year old that thought they were an adult now they were in their team years. Kat had to give Sylvie props for starting that phase of her life early.

Still, at least this was familiar enough territory for Kat. "Sylvie, there is nothing wrong with crying. Everyone else was crying as well, in fact the person crying the most was Vivian and I think she's the oldest of us. Or maybe Callisto? I don't actually know which of the two is older and they're born in the same year so the point is pretty much irrelevant."

"But that's Vivian, it doesn't count," said Sylvie firmly.

"Why not?" asked Kat. Sylvie gave a pout in response, so Kat continued, "No I am genuinely asking. I am not trying to press you into accepting it's ok to cry just yet... but I do want you to think for a moment. Vivian is an adult in terms of age. She has a university degree... I think... I KNOW she has a high paying job. She's given her friend a place to live and offered it basically for free because she makes that much money,

"Vivian loves her job and was able to adopt two kids essentially on a whim without the financials taking a noticeable hit, and you KNOW Callisto would have said something if it was actually an issue. You've got a brand new computer and everyone, including Lily got personalised desks from a master crafter. Vivian, is by almost all definitions a highly successful adult. This morning, that same adult was bawling her eyes out, and I bet she has no problems with it. So why do you?"

Sylvie let out a long sigh as if she was suffering under the weight of the world's idiocy and flopped back into Kat. Sylvie wanted to point out Callisto didn't cry but that would be a lie. Callisto didn't make noise but she was very much crying as well. On top of that, as much as Sylvie looked up to Callisto as the type of person she wanted to be in the future...

She also couldn't do that without knowing that Callisto held Vivian up on a pedestal. Callisto was self aware enough to know she gave Vivian an exceptional amount of credit for many things, likely too



much. Callisto just didn't care. To Callisto Vivian was the most important person. So even if she wanted to point out the fact Callisto didn't cry, she knew the cleaning obsessed woman would say the fact she didn't cry properly but Vivian did was a failing of hers and not Vivian's.

So Sylvie just sighed again and leaned into Kat.