
[123] [Power (Kiara)][🍊🍊]

With a full-bodied groan, Kiara slumped into the pile of cloth that was her bed. Not once had she used the thing for sleep since coming into this blasted city in the far corner of the civilized world. As a Succubus, she had need for very little sleep to begin with, but mostly, she'd grown used to sleeping with an eye open. To Kiara, rest only ever came when there was veritably no one and nothing nearby that could be a threat, under multiple layers of protection, and with a fair share of alarms. More often than not, she'd just seek some hidden corner to curl up and get shut-eye for an hour or so before she got back to it.

But these past few weeks have been hell.

Monica's heat had driven the feline into the sort of frenzy that could've seen a chunk of the city flattened. As much as Kiara boasted herself to be the prime example of a maiden specialized in nullifying and pacifying other maidens, Monica's boundless energy had pushed her well beyond the limits her body would have withstood.

As loath as she was to admit, without the Vampire's help, she would've failed to keep Monica contained. But it was over now. The feline was taking the mother of all naps, the burning painful taste of unadulterated spicy heat pouring from her finally gone. And now Kiara was out of fucks to give about anything, betting she was about to spend the next ten hours asleep.

She tried to weave some protections, she really did, but even with all the abundant energy inside of her, there was an inevitable soreness to the mere act of existing, let alone manipulating her elemental energy. Kiara lacked the mental presence necessary to push through the pain and weave a spell.

So she collapsed, closed her eyes, and drifted off to sleep.

“You know, I’d been of half a mind to tie you up before you woke.”

Kiara's consciousness had been drifting in and out for what had felt like several hours, her body ached and groaned, complaining from the meal she'd yet to fully, properly digest. But it was the amused words of a certain male that snapped her awake and into a small jolt of panic.

The Succubus didn't open her eyes, nor did she move, but her senses lashed out, feeling for any nearby presences. The only one she could detect was Rick's, sitting at the edge of the bed as he looked her over.

"What do you want?" She growled, feeling too uncomfortable to be in a tolerating mood.

"Purely for the record, you are, currently, bloated with energy, correct?"

Kiara groaned through the words. "Not in the mood, Rick."

"I'll take that as a yes," he chuckled lightly. "What I need you to do is to push it all out."

Finally opening her eyes, the Succubus stared at him in a deadpan. "I take it that you don't really know what that means."

"Pain, I'd assume," Rick nodded.

Propping herself up with her arms, Kiara was entirely unbothered by her nudity as she looked at him. "What's your deal?"

"Well, I distinctly remember a certain someone asking me to do 'the thing I did with Eva', and I've taken the opportunity to do some research." Rick wore a light tunic and pants; he carried a slight herbal scent to him. "I took some liberties, asked the experts, and prepared as much as I could."

Kiara regarded him for a long moment. She couldn't taste his emotions too clearly, normally it would've been hard on its own, but right now they were further masked behind a layer of steely resolve. "And?"

"Originally, our plan was to have Eva drain you dry, before having you reabsorb all that energy with me as the medium. Of course, you'd be restrained throughout the process for my safety." As he said this, his fingers trailed an uneasy curve through the silken sheets of the bed, stopping close to her thigh yet not touching. "It sounded very... violent, to be honest, since it relied heavily on Eva creating a ritual to serve as the funnel to shove all your power back into you. But the more we talked about the designs, the more it sounded like the contraption Lord Thorly had set up..."

His mention of that place sent a shiver through Kiara, brows furrowing as her gaze flickered at the door for a moment. The urge to run was kept tucked away as she regarded her human more warily. “I don’t sense that Vampire anywhere nearby.”

“Everyone’s near, but not literally at the other side of the door.” Rick shook his head. “What I’d like to try first is... forming a current.” He traced a circle. “You push energy out through me, and reabsorb it.”

Kiara gave him a deadpan. “You want to die.”

“I do acknowledge it wouldn’t exactly be good for my health, but I’m not keen on death anytime soon.” He nodded. “It’s why we’d have Eva and Dia present. If anything goes wrong, they’d be able to jump in and intervene.”

“And that’s what you did with the Vampire?”

“As far as we came to understand it, what I did with Eva was to form an emotional feedback loop.” His brows furrowed. “What I’d be doing here would be a bit of the opposite, closer to what I’ve done when Monica gets into a fight.”

“Cower and hide?” She arched her brow skeptically. “No, wait, what you’d usually do is get yourself right into the middle of the fight and either bluff your way out or get yourself nearly killed.”

“Har har.” He laughed dryly, rolling his eyes. “No, what I’d be doing would be the opposite of this.” Reaching out to his arm, he pinched it, hard.

Yet it was Kiara that yelped, a sudden sharp pain blossoming in her arm as she instinctively reached out to cover the exact same spot. The sensation had been almost completely real, in a way that her senses couldn’t have even guessed wasn’t an illusion. The jolt made her realize her mental defenses had remained lowered throughout the exchange, and she hastily raised them, doing her best to cut him off before he could try anything else.

“And that right there is the reason why I wanted to talk this out first.” The human sighed, rubbing his forearm. “It occurs to me that you don’t trust me, but trust is kind of a two-way street, so with that in mind, I want you to take the wheel.”

She looked at him, he stared back. “What?” She asked.

“Right, you guys don’t have cars, what I meant—”

“I can infer, Rick, I’ve stuck around you long enough.” She sat up, fully meeting his gaze.

“What I don’t get is what you mean. Exactly.”

“I’m well aware that my immunity to your powers is entirely reliant on me barely having any elemental energy of my own,” he said. “So, take the wheel and show me what you’ve got.”

The Succubus shifted, staring from him towards the door, and then back at him. Kiara carefully reached out with her powers, not towards Rick, but towards the door in an attempt to peer beyond it. Something was definitely amiss, and as she began to slowly inundate the room with her energy, she reached a boundary of some sort and realized what it was.

The room had been sealed off, no wonder she couldn’t sense anyone. The feline could’ve been standing at the other side of the door and Kiara wouldn’t have noticed a thing.

She ignored Rick for a moment, standing up and setting aside the complaints from her joints and aching body, knowing full well that the pain she felt was nowhere physical. It wasn’t the sort of pain that a healer could patch up; similarly, it was not the sort of pain that a psychic could numb.

As she approached the door, she realized the room had changed. There were now metal rods on each corner, the rods themselves carrying enchantments of... Kiara didn’t recognize the patterns, nor the way the metal and blood energy swirled. But as she reached her arm beyond the border set by the four rods, she felt no resistance as she moved past them. There was only some mild inconvenience, but the goal of the enchantments were clearly to keep her energy contained.

Hers, specifically. “Who made these?”

“Raphaella and Eva worked together,” he answered. “I’ve been told they’re attuned to your energy specifically, making them exceedingly efficient at keeping your power boxed in.”

Now it made sense, the protection the Vampire had been wearing had been the basis for which they’d built this contraption. “It can’t trap me here, though, it has no physical component, only energy. I can just walk through.”

“It wasn’t meant to be a prison, Kiara.” Rick shook his head. “I thought we were past that point, but if it needs to be said, then you can always walk away.”

Despite his words, the Succubus caught a hint of apprehension from him. No, not quite. Kiara turned back to face him, approaching the bed, meeting his gaze as she took careful note to savor his emotions one by one. They were faint, as usual, but there was a zesty touch of desire to that resolve he was putting up.

“I’m usually a light sleeper,” she stood before him, entirely naked and unbothered, waiting for his eyes to roam her body but finding it amusing how not once did he waver. “You used the bond to keep me asleep while you set this up, didn’t you?”

There was no shame to be found in his emotions, only a touch of amusement. Kiara scoffed at the arrogance of it, leaning closer, but stopping short as her back shot a twinge of—

And the pain was gone.

The succubus recoiled a little, hand on her lower back, tail whipping around twice. “You feel old,” Rick spoke with amusement. “Was it this bad since we met? Your whole body feels like a creaky house.”

With a glare, she sensed the touch of the bond upon her. “It’s only this bad when I overfeed or overextend myself; it’s somewhere between indigestion and a strained muscle.” Had Rick wormed his way past her protections? When? How? Kiara leaned over once more, about to snap the connection again, when she noticed the barest twitch of his eye and a barely perceptible sudden tension on his shoulders. “So this is what you meant.”

Her back didn’t hurt anymore, even if it did feel like a bit of a rusty hinge. Yet the pain was not within her; it was Rick who was taking it away, a feat neither psychics nor healers had ever accomplished. Was this related to the soul, perhaps? Kiara was entirely uncertain, and with the sudden lightness that was traversing her body, she found herself increasingly uncaring.

“It’s a start,” he replied with a calm expression. “You keep talking and talking about wanting to let go, wanting to let loose. Well, this is your chance.”

Perfectly trimmed brows creased. “You don’t understand what you’re playing with, Rick.”

“I think you overestimate yourself.” It was with a bratty smirk that he leaned back. “Old, decrepit, and frankly speaking, rusty. Either you find someone you can snap in half, or you give up. I think you’re just scared to fail.”

Kiara’s hackles rose as she stepped closer, reaching out to grab his tunic. “Fine,” she growled, a husky whisper of a sound. “Don’t come crying when I break you.” Immediately, she leaned into him, reaching into her overstuffed reserves of energy and pushing some of it through their kiss.

Rick’s body tensed as he was flooded with almost too much. Almost. If Kiara had learned one thing from saving him from elemental overdose, it was exactly and precisely

how much he could withstand. She took his lips with ravenous hunger while her focus remained on the energy; it was barely twice the average of what an everyday human would hold, but for someone with her level of experience, it would be plenty.

Twisting the energy into knots, she began to form the foundation of a simple loop. “You love it when I kiss you,” she whispered into his ear, teasing at nerve endings on his mouth, worming the spell into the rose-tainted sweetness of his arousal.

With a snap, she locked it into place and sealed his fate for the next hour or two. The human, entirely unaware of the new pleasure circuit that had been ingrained into him, leaned forward and kissed her neck.

Kiara’s mouth tingled, and she moaned, suddenly breathless, every breath of air causing shudders that ran through her body.

“Is that it?”

Every word he spoke brought a shiver through her body, her mouth alight with delight, her body suddenly hot and needy. “Oh, you’ve done it now,” her threat came out in a soft cooing sound, pinning him to the bed. Kiara wielded her power like a pair of scissors, slicing away at a handful of key points within his tunic before yanking it off him, tearing the remaining fabric as if it had been nothing but parchment.

“I liked that one,” he lied, pretending to complain even as he reached out to pull Kiara into a kiss.

The Succubus denied him, a finger on his lips summoning shudders of pleasure through him, and in turn, the human forcing it onto her. Kiara’s breasts ached, and she prepared a special spell of her own. “You want me to get serious, do you?” She pushed out more power; it should’ve felt like moving a limb that had fallen asleep, yet now there was no discomfort, only resistance from lack of a proper workout in well over a century.

If Rick was suckling on her pain and dishing out his pleasure, then what would happen if she applied her spell on herself? Kiara’s lips curled into a smirk as, while keeping him pinned with her left hand, she traced a finger down her clavicle and onto her chest with her right. Lines of light coalesced in their wake, the air thickening with power and goosebumps trailing over her flesh.

Spells applied to oneself were often stronger than when used on an enemy. With no resistance in the way, and without needing to concern herself with whether the spell might have too much charge for a human, she ramped it up.

“That’s the spot.” She huskily moaned, tweaking her nipple and marveling at how it was Rick that let out a gasp. The human writhed and began to thrash around. The touch under her finger was numbed and distant, barely registering; the human was the one suckling it all up. “You know you can give up.” Kiara leaned closer, licking his neck, biting his jawline. “Just let go, and I can take everything again.”

A burst of cinnamon flavor rushed through him as he stared into her eyes, with a flash of gold and blue within his irises. “No.” He spoke the word through gritted teeth, a challenge. “This is nothing.”

“Nothing, eh?”

Her laughter turned cruel, now certain he either couldn’t separate the pain from the pleasure, or that he was too proud to try. Whatever the case, he was trying to get her to push harder, to force herself to go further.

So she would do exactly that.

“I’ve wrestled Succubi before, you know.” She intoned, moving to straddle his hips, naked fingers caressing his chest. A tingle of excitement ran through her at the prospect of finding out how far she could push this. “Not once have I lost.”

“First time... for... everything.” The human gasped out the words, choking on them each time Kiara flickered a finger against her own nipple, mirroring the gesture on his chest.

“Succubi don’t fight each other like a normal maiden would. Even if we hated one another to our very core, we’d not draw a single drop of blood in the match. Do you know why that is?” She didn’t wait for him to answer; she twisted her nipple harshly, bringing a moan out of his lips. “Because of our pride, Rick. I told you Succubi are at their strongest during sex. Beat her in her own game, and they crumble.”

The human was trying to escape her pin, but even if Kiara wasn’t that strong for a maiden, she was well over anything he could put out. “Sounds... stupid.”

“Stupid or not, you challenged me. I’m not going to back down.” Her smirk was wicked, sharp, and full of avarice. “You can, however, admit you’ve bitten off more than you can chew.”

She kept looking into his eyes, waiting for that flicker of doubt, of hesitation, of fear. That same sign of weakness every other challenger had ever held. If he yielded, she’d go easy on him, merely take him for a ride and play along for this experiment. Maybe just give him a few more pokes, tease out and show how sharp her own claws were.

“No.” Rick’s determination flashed in that sickeningly overwhelming wave of cinnamon flavor, drowning out all else.

“Big mistake, now I’ll ruin you.” With her left hand still on his chest, she used her right to begin weaving the beginnings of a ritual, tracing the patterns as she prepared to pull them into herself. “By the time I’m done, you’ll never be able to fuck anyone ever again without wishing it were me instead.”

“You’re... going to do this to yourself?” There wasn’t fear, but there was a degree of shock.

“A Succubus’ powers are centered around turning anything and everything into pleasure. Sensations, feelings, thoughts... Once the effects have taken root, the ecstasy brands itself into your body, deep enough that even with help it can take days to burn off. And that’s if you don’t strengthen it on your own.” She flashed him a smile that was all teeth and amusement. “When Succubi fight one another, they do so fully aware they’re going to be fucked in every sense of the word for days afterward. That’s how far Succubi are willing to go just to prove the point.”

Normally, a spell would take her seconds to finish. Too many years to count polishing and practicing with her powers, using them to save herself or to live day by day. To her, casting a spell was as easy as reading a poem out loud. The patterns were ingrained and perfected.

Rituals, however, required more consideration. They took time and effort not just because of their complexity, but because she needed to tweak, nudge, and customize them to the recipient, to guarantee each piece did exactly as it ought to. In this case, it was all so it could slot perfectly into her target.

Herself.

“You’ll lose, you know,” she whispered, condensing her power, feeling the rust in her body as it struggled and fought against the surge of power, trying to hinder her progress. She knew this should be causing her excruciating pain, but her human was taking it all away, leaving her with a sense of euphoria.

Had she ever been able to cast this without needing to push through unbearable pain? Her body had a slight tremble, a shake she knew meant it was still experiencing the sensations even if they weren’t reaching her consciousness. Her breath was becoming shorter, heart rate racing.

Or maybe this was just normal excitement at the prospect of accessing her power without immediate backlash for a change.

Seeing it firsthand, experiencing it, being able to think clearly as she built it...

“You’ll snap, you’ll break the connection. I’m well aware the moment it happens I will get the full effect, it’ll hit me like Monica going on a rampage.” The grin on her lips was manic as she felt the bulge in his crotch pressing against her. Despite the pain, the effects of her first spell were still driving him wild, and she could almost feel a ghost of an impression of what she felt like through the cloth. Damp, soft, and oh so hot... “Have you ever had the very beat of your heart be orgasmic? Time to find out.”

The bond might work in ways Kiara didn’t fully understand, but she was quite certain that this feat of sensation manipulation was entirely reliant on force of will and concentration. It wasn’t too unlike a psychic link, even if it appeared to rely on a different set of nuances and foundations. Under that assumption, then having her experience what he was feeling while he felt what she was going through was not one thing, but two. To pull upon her input, and to push his own.

With the ritual flaring to life, a shiver ran through Kiara’s body. A phantom ache blossomed in her chest at the sudden and very rapid increase in how much power she was pushing out. She waited for a single breath before pulling on it, grasping it with her hand, and sinking it upon her naked chest.

Her heartbeat redoubled, and Rick’s jaw clenched shut.

Suddenly, her lips were no longer tingling.

“You had the choice, either let go of the pull or stop the push.” Kiara was panting, breathless, shallow gasps as the dichotomy between mind and body only grew. “And you stopped pushing your feelings through to me. Big mistake.” Positioning herself, she lashed with her power, breaking away his pants, exposing the hardness that had been contained within. The succubus crooned as it swelled and pressed against her smooth sex. “I think you can’t even let go now, can you? Are you even listening?” Kiara laughed as Rick kept moaning and gasping, arms grabbing hold of her thighs for dear life, fingers sinking into her thick, supple flesh. “I’m not done just yet.”

Internally, privately, Kiara couldn’t help but feel a twinge of respect as she lowered herself onto her human, allowing him to spear into her hot depths. She’d known maidens who would be begging right now, pleading with their all, just to make it stop.

“It’s been fun,” she whispered, reaching up to his lips. “But you’re only human.”

A simple caress, and the spell she’d cast upon him triggered.

Rick thrust his hips upwards, lifting her off the bed, his fingers seeking to gouge the flesh upon her ass but finding nothing but pliant, silky smooth skin. He screamed out, eyes shut tightly, unable to hurt her, his own touch reflected right back at him as Kiara could only imagine he was running through both sides of the coin at the same time. Having experimented with similar things in the past, she knew all too well he wasn't peaking; he was only climbing higher, a stream of orgasms that kept bounding on one another, looping and feeding into a crescendo that would irrevocably shatter him.

Kiara braced, all too aware that the instant his concentration broke, everything would come rushing straight back into her. The pain and the pleasure both. Most likely, she'd—

“I won't!”

Rick's voice lashed out, choked and breathless, pulling his hips back just enough to thrust back into her. His eyes snapped open as he met her gaze; there was the same gold within his irises as her own. The human twisted them both, sending the Succubus shrieking onto her back. Not even losing his rhythm, he'd pinned her down, thighs held high, leaning into her, biting, clawing at her skin, still unable to harm but unable to stop rutting like some wild beast.

Confusion was followed by a scowl. Kiara wrapped her legs around his hips, inviting him to continue if only out of habit, never turning down a good mating out of habit, but finding the experience increasingly irritating. “Are you even conscious right now?”

“Haven't... even... spent... anything,” he snarled between bites, pulling at her hair, pawing at her breasts, clutching at her ass.

Irritation turned to anger, her frown deepened. “You want me to go all out?” She glared, now, legs tightening hard enough to freeze his hips in place. “You're pushing yourself for nothing, for no one.”

He froze, entire body going rigid, irises swirling with a dozen colors before they locked back into gold, meeting her gaze. “You're losing.”

It wasn't so much the words that got to her but the way he'd spoken them. Two words, spoken without a hitch or a moan, breathless, but determined. As if everything she was going through, everything she felt, was barely a nuisance.

Anger turned to fury. “I see.”

Flapping her wings and pushing with her tail, she flipped them back over, putting him against the bed, while Kiara leaned away, giving him ample visage of her generous

chest. Her body was undergoing orgasm after orgasm, but her mind barely registered anything other than the inconvenience of the continuous spasming and lack of breath.

“Don’t blame me for what comes next.”

Spreading her wings and lashing her tail, Kiara pushed into herself, grasping at her power and thrusting it out of every pore in her body.

Instantly, the air became thick with miasma, the aberrant nature of her power twisting and turning as every breath became heavy. It carried with it a scent of lilacs, and a promise of sin. Rick screamed beneath her as the pain going through her body was surely overwhelmingly more powerful than even her own ritual.

This was her presence in full, her aura blasted out with such intensity that the human was surely to become ill from its presence in short order.

But Kiara was not done.

Reaching deeper, she pooled power onto her hands, leading her fingertips as she reached up to her throat. Her work was not as brutish and forceful as her aura, it was delicate, soft, and wickedly sharp. First came her throat, turning every breath into a blizzard of soft feathery touches. The roots of her hair became so vividly sensitive that the very weight of each blue filament was like a firework, and Rick’s desperate yanking was like a flood. Her breasts, bountiful and heavy, turned into cores of rich molasses, sickeningly sweet with their sensation. Her wings turned to membranes of ecstatic vibrations. Her tail into a limb wrapped in electricity.

Everything she could think of, she invoked and cast upon herself, ready and prepared, apprehension for backlash long gone. She was now merely awaiting the blast, for the instant Rick could not hold on anymore and she’d get caught up in everything she’d made.

But the fool would not give.

He howled, he thrashed, he pumped into her furiously, but he would not give. “Not. Yet.” His face was red from exertion, his breaths irregular, his skin aflame, his whole body as tense as a statue.

And he held on.

For the first time since the start of the encounter, Kiara felt a twinge of apprehension. Her own body was caught within the storm, but she could feel his presence all around her, within her, wrapping her up from everything as he took the beating she was unleashing on her own flesh.

“Let. Go.” He spoke between coughs.

“Of what?” She realized tears were running down her eyes, her body was shaking, it was barely containable.

“Everything.”

Kiara’s breath hitched as his hold faltered ever so slightly, a rush of sensation overwhelming her and leaving her head spinning right before he clamped down once more. In that moment, she saw not just herself from his eyes, but saw a hundred different scenes playing out at the same time.

Maidens all over the city, thrashing and whimpering, screaming and pawing at their own bodies in desperation. Each and every one going through waves of agony and delicious pleasure in equal measure. Mousegirls, Doggirls, Dark Elves, the healer, the cat, the Vampire, the Orc. Everyone had been prepared and ready.

A wave of exhilaration passed through her at the realization of what he’d done, of what he was doing. Rick on his own would have never stood a chance, would have never been able to retain his sanity from holding this much.

So he wasn’t doing this alone.

Everyone was getting a piece.

The Succubus stopped bouncing on his lap, looking down at the madman.

He’d been cheating from the start!

If she were to describe the fluttering within her chest, she might have claimed it was an infuriating mix between awe and respect. “Fine,” Kiara breathlessly proclaimed. “You want everything?” Claspings the sides of his face, she held her breath. “You’ll have everything.”

Mashing her mouth against his, she let it all out.

They screamed into each other, the air flared with vibrant red and purple power, the containment rods heated up, shrieking as the elemental stones within exploded one by one. Metal flared red-hot, twisting and collapsing in on itself, and Kiara’s aura broke free to explode harmlessly past every wall, hammering directly against every maiden within range.

A hundred voices broke out in a chorus of ecstasy.

Kiara sat there, feeling the pulse of her lover deep within her, kissing him just as he kissed her. For a perfect moment, there was nothing but them and their bodies joined together in a way that she couldn't put into words.

The moment lasted but for a moment, perfect, in that same way one could feel weightless right at the cusp of an arch, right before the drop.

Then everything came rushing back. At first a trickle, and then a storm. Sensation came back to her all too quickly, a single beat of her heart exploded in orgasmic bliss, the hitch of her breath sent thunder through her veins, the ache in her chest exploded into white-hot pleasure. Every follicle in her body sang a symphony of joy that made her whole body vibrate all the way down to her bones.

Kiara's whole body spasmed once, then twice.

Then blackness came in a wave of violent delight.

Noah opened her eyes abruptly as her ears picked up the sound of dozens of squeaking mice, each one screeching out in unbound ecstasy. The Tigermouse abruptly sat up, staring wide-eyed at the bunker's wall, entirely certain that the direction she was looking at could only be Sinco.

"What was THAT?" She couldn't help but ask, wondering whether she'd imagined it.

For a moment, she could've sworn she'd heard the voices not by sound, but by thought.

As if a group of psychics had combined forces to send a singular message in every direction. But that couldn't be possible; as far as Noah knew, the only psychic in Sinco was the Puppeteer bonded to the merchant.

What was going on?

Eli groaned as she flopped onto the bed, stars dancing in her vision as she stared at the ceiling above. To call the experience otherworldly would've been an understatement; her

skin still tingled, and her bones still ached. The communal room stank of sex, adrenaline, and satisfaction, every other maiden therein having found their own means to satisfy that which their Lord and Lady had granted them through the bond.

Supremely exhausted, her tongue lolled as her chest heaved.

“Hey, anyone got water?” She called out.

One of the younger maidens nodded, a Doggirl. She grunted and reached out for the clay vase. And everyone in the room saw as the vase moved towards the Doggirl’s touch until the maiden grasped at it.

“What was that?” Eli asked first.

“Whaz-wha-what?” The Doggirl groggily asked, taking a long gulp from the vase before trying to hand it over to the next in line.

Camila fought back the goosebumps running through her body as she leaned back into her chair. Her body was flushed and tingling in very pleasant ways, ways that she’d seen fit to satisfy with the very skilled tongue of her most loyal attendant.

“To think the effects were this strong, even when we’re so far away I can barely feel the bond.” She spoke amusedly, caressing C8’s hair as the Golden Elf dutifully began cleaning them both. “I’d call this a success, wouldn’t you?”

“I wouldn’t know, my General, not without knowing the results,” C8 intoned as she weaved spells to wash away all traces of the Queen’s indiscretions.

“True enough, I suppose,” Camila sighed, weaving her power to turn the throne into a recliner, leaning back into it, sinking into the soft comfort of the willow-wood. “By my guess, a tenth of the Mousegirls will have begun their ascension into becoming Tigermice, and roughly twice as many Doggirls will be on their way into becoming Terrielles.”

“Why not tell him of this potential result?”

“If I presented myself as knowing of the potential side-effects, then it would be all too easy for blame to fall on me if something bad happened.” She replied. “I merely told the truth. This has never happened before, no one would be able to guess at all the potential

consequences.” Her lips curled into half a smirk. “Whatever the case may be, if the maidens ascended as I suspect they have, then this is a great boon to him. One of particular importance when he’s at the verge of a battle.”

“Power that is not within your grasp, my General.”

“Nor does it need to be,” Camila waved the concerns off. “Let us call it a gift. It is better to gain favor from this young prince while he is yet to sit on a proper throne.” The Elf Queen sighed, idly wondering how much she’d be able to leverage. “At least better now than once he fully comprehends his potential.”

Sooner or later, the kingdom would rightfully brand her a menace that needed to be dealt with. A nation built out of hate and slavery could not and would not tolerate anyone that stood in defiance of that belief. Even if she did nothing at all, it would only be a matter of time before the “King” of this pitiful chunk of land would come to see Camila’s faction as an existential threat.

And the same thing applied to the Succubus.

As long as she lived and remained at Rick’s side, then Camila had all she needed to guarantee he would come to her aid rather than strike an alliance with the kingdom. Saving Kiara’s life had been a gamble, but one that was already starting to pay off.

Granted, it would’ve been better if she’d managed to merge their two “nations” and leave them under a singular inexorably unified banner. But that was a project that would need to be progressed more carefully.

Far, far north of the tiny city of Sinco stood one of the largest cities in the world. It stood as a monument to the power and prestige of the empire it was a capital of. Spires of murisium steel mingled and twisted around chimneys that spewed tall columns of smoke. The streets were busy with the sound of hard wheels powered by contraptions of elemental stones and steam.

There was a room within this city, a room unlike any other. It stood far underground, deep enough it might have gone undetected if not because a singular elevator shaft connected it to the very palace the Emperor called home.

It wasn't very large, and its nature unknown to all but a handful of people. The walls of the room were as if obsidian, black and inscrutable glass, its construction alien, its way of operation based upon technologies none in this world comprehended.

One of the walls within this room flickered, and a two word hovered over its surface in plain green text.

"Candidate found."

It would be three days before someone would descend into the room and find the simple line of text. Four more before the capital shuddered awake, factories screaming and belching thrice as much smoke as ever before, covering the city sky in a dark mantle.

Five days, and the courts of the Northern Empire would stir into a frenzy. Rumors would fly out of control, a singular command issued loud and clear through every noble house and every peasant home.

The Northern Empire was going to war.

And it would be pushing its borders south.

Kiara groaned awake, blinking her eyes, flinching at the light. She felt like she was made out of painful soup, poured into a duvet of Harpy feathers, and allowed to sink until all that remained was the aches deep within her soul.

She understood, on some level, that it'd been two weeks since her "loss" to Rick, even if she wasn't entirely sure how. The Succubus also realized she was on an exceedingly comfortable chair, leaning back, seated under a rooftop, and staring out into a forest blanketed in snow.

All but her face was buried beneath layers of cloth and warmth.

Much how she knew how long it'd been, she knew she was alone and well away from Sinco currently. Near one of her less well-hidden hide-aways she'd ordered built not long after becoming the Lady of Sinco.

"How did I get here?" She asked no one in particular.

Any attempt to think back brought with it waves of half-thoughts and intense pleasure. And a voice, a soft chittering voice, echoed dozens of times as her body was carried gently but hurriedly in the middle of the night.

“Your aura was unregulated, we had to get you out of Sinco before you recovered enough strength for it to become a threat.” Rick’s voice called out, a door gently closing behind him as he sat down. The man was covered in nearly as many layers as Kiara was, a cup of hot steaming tea in his hands. “To preempt your concerns, to my understanding you’ve gone through the equivalent of having every bone in your body shattered and set into the proper position. According to Dia, it could take several years to fully recover. But according to Camila, you’ll likely reach the point where you’ll be able to ascend before that, which will rush the process to its conclusion. So just take things carefully, and don’t push yourself.”

“I...” Kiara’s first instinct was to stamp down on the flutter of hope. “Even if it does not work as the Empress claims it might, I owe you one.” A part of her felt far too certain that she owed him more than just that, but even in loss, a Succubus still held their pride.

The lack of hesitation or doubt was... odd, but not unwelcome.

Golden eyes lingered on him, catching the way his aura flickered and twitched. It was stronger than she remembered it, or perhaps she was merely more sensitive to its presence. He too had come out injured, Kiara could only fathom the panic of the healer and the vampire over everything that had transpired.

“You can pay it back, actually, while you still recover.”

It was the mix of amusement and irritation in his voice that caught peaked her curiosity,

Her eyes followed the motion of his hand, and she frowned as she noticed two lines of maidens trudging through the snow. Eli and Embla, the two were at the lead, breaking through and creating a path for others to follow. Behind Embla there were at least sixty odd Dark Elves, each of them covered from head to toe in coats, hats, and mittens.

But it was the group following Eli that caught Kiara’s attention.

Thirty-odd canines, and twenty-odd mice. At first she couldn’t recognize the exact breeds, suspecting them to be Doggirls and Mousegirls, but as they approached, the Succubus caught a taste in the air. From the canines came a taste of dirt, soil, and earthy warmth. From the mice came the taste of a psychic touch, of gentle emotional caresses and boundless curiosity.

The group following Eli recognized Kiara right away, excitedly hurrying past their leader to approach, wide smiles and eager eyes looking upon her as they rushed closer.

“Did you know that there are some maiden breeds that can ascend if they manage to feel the right kind of euphoria? And I mean truly and meaningfully feel it, all the way deep into their soul. I sure didn’t.” Rick spoke out with a sigh as he stood up. “These are the maidens that resonated with you. They know... well, everything.”

“What?” Kiara asked.

“Mother!” One of the mice proclaimed, a voice that rang with both words and thoughts. She knelt in the snow in front of the bundled-up Kiara, a gesture the other mice and canines were quick to replicate. “We eagerly await your teachings.”

“What?” She repeated, voice coming out a hoarse croak.

“You’ll be staying out here until winter comes to a close, no visiting the city,” Rick said, taking a long sip of his drink. “No need to thank me, these are the doctor’s orders. Wouldn’t want you spraining anything by pushing yourself to shapeshift or somesuch.”

The Succubus stared up at him with a blank expression.

“In the meantime, I’d like you to do your best to train these maidens, show them what you can.” He gestured at Embla. “Same goes for her team.”

She blinked twice.

“What?”