

Chapter Seven: The Mórrígan And A Cuddly Cat

At the open invitation to grill her and her husband for answers, Sora's thoughts flitted to various topics, and it took her a second to process what was on her mind. From Wendy to Kari now, so many problems that needed to be solved, and [Titania](#) had dropped so many little details to be explored in her short entrance.

"Can... I have a moment?" Sora asked, trying to show a smile at the attention Oberon and Titania were giving her. "I woke up, and everything has just been..."

"A whirlwind?" the silver-haired fairy mused.

"Yeah... Hehe. That's one way to say it. Umm, let's see..."

She sucked in her lip, pondering some of the things on her mind: was it really that much to begin with?

Mom's coming home... totally powerless, which is a little scary... Heh. Then again, maybe it could come with some funny moments. How much will she know how to do? I bet she won't be able to work a computer.

Wendy wants closure with her mom, Kari needs a chance to discover who she really is, and apparently, we have this new, magical fae school we're attending. Oh, and let's not forget Eyia and Jin's issues. Yikes. Yeah, that's a whole can of worms to be opened...

No, let's first stick with the murder school I'm supposed to visit! How am I supposed to take Wendy to a dangerous place like that? Although... why would Mom even suggest that if she thought we'd get hurt? There has to be something else going on...

She breathed out her stress and glanced at each person around the table, trying to gauge everyone's mood. This was her future at stake and the future of her friends. She had to consider Wendy, Eyia, and everyone else in her life—her powerless mom.

Obviously, the two rulers were the most immediately eye-catching, and their subtle, dominating auras told Sora that the pair were far outside her current power range. In fact, looking back, she had to wonder if she'd properly assessed Sela's strength.

That being said, the husband and wife were also, without a doubt, leagues beyond the Unseelie. Perhaps the more intriguing part was the pull from their aura; they had polar opposite natures: Oberon was a sturdy mountain, and Titania an electrified, chaotic ocean.

Then there were Fen and Jian: the three-tailed Huli Jing may have looked composed, but her scent screamed anxiety, while Jian was a gentle breeze, observing the conversation and waiting to be brought into it.

Aiden's soothing vibes mixed with Oberon's to provide a welcomed peace to the atmosphere, which was more than welcomed as the blond boy offered her a supportive nod. She half wanted to strangle him for how much of a peacemaker he was, not only wanting to help Kari, but Eric, as well. Not to mention taking charge of the vicious monster communities the Fenris Wolf's tyranny had brought to manageable levels.

And lastly, her gaze rested on the two SCC Members: Diane was entirely enthralled by the fae High Royalty, clearly wanting to ask her own questions and waiting for her turn. Ferdinand, on the other hand, was considering some troubling thoughts he didn't seem to want to share, which were probably about their previous topic with Eric.

All of this was winding down and starting to sink in; this was her life now, and she had to get used to it. There were other realms, dimensional onion wars, and magic she hardly understood.

Resting her palms in her lap, feeling much calmer, she gave her full attention to the High Queen. “I know my mom came to you to enroll me in Avalon Academy, and she must have her reasons, which I’ll interrogate her on when she shows up,” Sora grumbled, getting a giggle from the magical woman.

“That being said, the first question is why *professors*, or instructors who are supposed to provide a safe space, are being murdered.” She fiddled with her thumbs as Titania’s neon-blue irises patiently waited for her to finish. “I know you said something about The Darkness and Unseelie. I’m guessing it has something to do with how Sela got corrupted, but... yeah, can you elaborate on that?”

“Hmm.” Titania tilted her head to the side to bat her eyelashes at her husband. “Would you like to start? I’d love to get into the topic of Sela, which I am most invested in, but that can wait. You know I do not enjoy this line of conversation.”

Oberon’s smooth, deep voice drew her in as he lifted a hand to create an intricate illusion. “You love to give me the hard discussions.”

“Because you’re so good at them!”

“Hmm-hmm-hmm. If you say so, Tia... If you would like a comprehensive answer, Sora, then we should start with what life was like before Avalon’s creation... when Titania and I were young rulers on Earth before humanity had developed a language to communicate with one another...”

Sora sat back, observing the caveman-like packs of people trying to huddle in caverns and escape the magical creatures that lived in their unique habitats. Ordinary animals, many of which Sora had never seen, roamed freely across the land that the pre-developed humans hunted, yet barriers from the magical entities kept them well isolated in their pockets.

“In the beginning, we ruled this Earth and only went to war with each other. Over time, other realms and aliens beyond our solar system invaded... pulling us together and introducing more enemies as the ages went on.”

Titania hummed, leaning into the back of her hand while spinning her own illusions on top of her husband’s story, showing the illuminated white frame of a beautiful woman and the dark shape of a man.

“Interesting start, Husband. Hehe.” A reminiscent gleam touched her bright eyes while studying the figures. “You’d be surprised to learn that Oberon and my parents hated one another and fought *constantly*—it was exhausting.”

The man’s tilted head and slight smirk seemed to tell a different story, but Titania ignored him. “When they passed, it left a gap that we both could not fill alone, which is why we grew so close. And no, you were *not* the one to initiate, Obby!”

“You’re positive? I recall a certain lily dancing ceremony where some young, crafty elf disguised himself and wooed an impressionable ditzzy fairy.”

“False framing! Humph. Oh! I’m sure you don’t want to get into our boring origin story,” she chortled, clearly deflecting and making Sora giggle. “Obby can be so sappy; I could die!”

She shook her head and hugged her tail against her chest; the lighter subject was a fun detail. “I’m enjoying the tale. I kind of feel like this will be on the test in Avalon history class or something, and it is interesting—oh, not your love life... Maybe? No, I’d love the drama! Hehe. Anyway, humans were just kind of, what... chilling while the world was at magical war?”

Titania’s chest shook with silent laughter. “Oh, Mórrígan, no! Moving on from Oberon’s awkward teen phase, we can get into the nitty-gritty,” she chirped, flashing her perfect teeth.

The dark-haired man's expression told a lifetime of troubles with his woman.

"Due to all the magical energy and experimentation done between many creatures, humanity started to develop at an alarming rate. It was a real problem! There was so much trouble between queens and kings of various fae tribes. The disrespect was so infuriating! Just because we were young and in love, we had a target on our backs from the elders of other clans."

Oberon sighed, looking back with tired eyes; Titania always seemed to have to add a little more detail to their lives.

"With our focus elsewhere," he continued, "humanity went from little more than garden pests to actual threats as they became tools of war between factions. Their magical aptitude grew, and their tactics and technological advancements from alien forces brought a dark time for the fae... This is where your stories of Atlantis came from, and that was when *she* appeared."

"The Mórrígan, as the fae know her," Diane whispered with excitement, drawing Titania's sharp gaze, "was three fae Founders; they took many names throughout the ages, filling in the gaps of humanity. By the time I got to know of them, two had little to do with us mortals anymore, and only the one known as Badb visited us humans."

Her smile grew at the Fae Queen's displeasure. "While the fae called her Badb, we humans knew her as Morgen la Fée, one of the three Supreme Rulers of Avalon—collectively, The Mórrígan. Fae Founders, which now makes me wonder how they managed to make it into Vulpes Territory and has me believe your mother had something to do with their disappearance three centuries ago. Thoughts?"

"Also, respectfully," the Frenchwoman stated toward the two enigmatic rulers, powering right on after asking for her opinion, "the SCC has been left in the dark in such regards upon Morgen's return to Avalon. Her sudden absence caused some to believe the High Rulers or her sisters may have had something to do with it. Baseless, mind you, hehe, but what else have you given us to rely on?"

Ferdinand cleared his throat. "As tactful as ever, Diane. That said, there are a great many... inquiries from the Ethics Bureau that have been met with hostility from Avalon. I am thankful for this chance for all of us to clear the air..."

"Oh?" Titania showed a sweet smile that didn't reflect her cold words, making the well-dressed man gulp. "Clear the air? And why would we need to provide the SCC any explanation when they have shown us nothing but blatant disrespect and withheld key information that we requested? Oh, but you would know nothing about that, Witch. Perhaps you should appeal to your Lord Raven or mysterious President for answers."

"My apologies, High Queen," Diane smoothly responded, "I was merely expressing the opinion of my colleagues within the Foundation when you closed off Avalon, and such an important figure to us was taken away; now, you only allow refugee monster groups inside. It is not my belief, of course."

"Naturally," the fairy mused, illuminated eyes narrowing slightly, "wherewith you *specifically* planted multiple spies in order to find another way into our realm. Surely, you do not have ulterior motives for regaining access to our land. You may be surprised to see how different it is from what you remember."

"Okay, okay," Sora nodded, ignoring Diane's question and feeling the tension rising. "I can taste the bitter history! So, The Mórrígan—three Founder sisters—came in, power blazing, stopped all the attacks against the fae, and made Avalon. And *one* was... somewhat benevolent to humans? She vanished, leaving questions on... both sides, I think? Are the other two still around? I'm a little confused at what happened to them?"

“You and me both, Sora!” Diane said with a grin at the Fae High Queen. “No spy I send in can get a thread of information; it is as if they are too scared or the fae Founders’ names have been erased from fae history, which is odd, considering your nigh immortality.”

Oberon shifted in his chair, maintaining his dignified tone. “It is more than bitter history, Lady Sora. Tia...”

“Fine...” The woman looked away, not wanting to engage with the subject, and her husband seemed to be warning her that he was going to dip his toes into it. “I cannot deny Lady Mia’s demand. Tell them all of the secrets I’ve kept tightly knotted away. I suppose it is a part of Lady Sora’s question, in any case.”

Ferdinand and Diane sat straighter as Oberon leaned forward, bridging his fingers on the table. “Upon returning from her meeting with the SCC Foundation, Lady Badb was infected by a disease of Negative Force... The Darkness. It latched onto Lady Macha and Lady Anu, after which, our entire realm was beset by the virus; they were swallowed within the void.”

“What?!” Diane stood up, chair scooting back and looking truly stunned by the news. “Lady Morgen could not have been the root cause! Are you insinuating our Lady Morgen became an Unseelie?! An Unseelie that *then* force-infected her sisters?! Why would Lady Mia allow such a thing? All of them would be ostracized from her family, would she not? Who could have even done such a thing to a Founder of her power within our universe?!”

Titania’s lips became a line while showing a vast, magical land, the edges being consumed by creeping shadows; now that the cat was out of the bag, it seemed she wasn’t so averse to talking about it.

“You, and many other humans she taught are proof of her affinity to the Unseelie Arts. She instituted the very practice within the Academy curriculum—against her sister’s wishes. We cannot be sure what happened since the SCC has been mute on the subject, but what I do know is that Oberon and I knew her far, *far* longer than you, and her personality began to change the longer she spent with humanity. All of Avalon was growing concerned about her behavior.”

“Yes,” Diane defended, French accent thick, “but what is your point? None of that means that she took that step into Unseelie *or* turned her sisters. She dabbled in the Unseelie Arts, as you said, and set up the curriculum within your realm, but a fae can use Unseelie practices without becoming corrupted. It is proof within your very school, or have you rid yourself of my favorite course that *your* mistress set up?”

“And why would I indulge your questions?” Titania dryly chuckled.

The dark-haired elf rubbed between his eyes. “We have maintained the rules and courses The Mórrígan instituted... to popular unease from the kings and queens after The Darkness.”

“Oberon!” Titania huffed, sitting back in a rage, her dress and flowers flashing a reddish tint. “You know how active I’ve been at clipping her little informants’ wings... I am not thrilled about communicating with these... these childish whelps who care nothing for our tribulations and losses. Power and destruction are *always* their motivation.”

Diane calmed down and sat back to input a few things into a notepad, and Ferdinand rubbed his chin, deep in thought. “The Foundation infecting a *Founder* seems unlikely, and with this Negative Force? It had to be someone of Mia’s strength, no?”

“As I said, ask your President,” the fairy snapped back, shivering a little in her crimson-hued emotion and causing the room to be tinted in her fiery indignation, her charged aura radiating. “We suffered the loss of our goddesses. After her meeting with *your* leaders three centuries ago, our realm was split in two! The Unseelie—corrupted fae that Oberon and I knew very well—and those of us who were left untainted to fight back the scourge.

“It takes much of our united power to keep it at bay. We were able to halt its progress through our efforts in creating the Millennial Star Ruby, which is where we loop back to your question, Sora... There, I said it, Oberon, happy? If not for Lady Mia’s promise of safe passage, I would have refused to venture outside Avalon,” she seethed, flaring eyes darting to her tired husband.

“I didn’t want to force you, and no, I am not pleased,” he whispered. “Sora, you must understand how vulnerable we have made ourselves at your mother’s demand while the SCC remains clouded in secrecy. She expects much of us to attract you to our school... to have the support of your family, in contrast to the Foundation.”

Aiden was the one to interject, pulling their gaze as the blond boy breathed a long sigh and smiled. “Well, then I can put my trust in you, High King Oberon, High Queen Titania. You’ve given me even more of a reason to go to your school and realm. I’d like to help. It sounds like a horrible situation for your people.”

Sora giggled as Titania’s red colors returned to their bluish vibrance, and the woman showed a dazzling countenance; she felt the same way.

“Well, what a charming young firebird you are,” the fairy studied him with intrigue. “Your powers and empathy are most certainly welcomed in Avalon. I apologize for my behavior, Lady Sora. It pains me to think that my time is so thin that I will rarely have the pleasure of visiting the Academy.”

“Umm. Can I say one thing?” Sora tentatively asked, tail bristling a little at their sudden attention. “It’s about Negative Energy. Uh, Aiden?”

“Ahhh.” The firebird tucked under his bottom lip and nodded. “Sora did channel Hell Force, and it *did* have an effect on her with how she did it. I had to purify it, but not even Founders are immune to its effects, and it could have changed her spiritual affinities if prolonged.”

Diane snorted, shaking her head. “Entirely different situations, Sora! If I am understanding the *lacking* explanation, then you *converted* your Core Essence to Hell Force, presumably to counter the Succubus that I read about in the reports. You basically wanted to become a Devil at that point.”

“Well, geez, just slap a stupid sticker on my head,” Sora snapped back with a huff. “I didn’t know what I was doing; I just knew it would work because I wanted it to, and that’s how my power operates.”

“Which,” Titania softly butted in with a brilliant half-smile, “is why Avalon Academy’s instruction would do you well. Thank you for sharing, Sora. Now, Obby, won’t you finish up the tale as to why there are troubles at night?”

Sora sucked in her cheek and directed a light glare at the exasperated witch, acting as if she’d wasted everyone’s time. *She’s such a bitch. I was just trying to help.*

The dark-haired elf maintained his poise as his radiant wife’s grace returned. “In short, The Darkness leaks into our side of the realm during the nights, which is why all citizens must be within their houses, and patrols are made by our military and the school staff, who police their own grounds. Some nights are... worse than others, and it is the Millennial Star Ruby that keeps it in check.”

A thought instantly popped into Sora’s mind, helping to mitigate the bitter taste in her mouth as she scooted forward, glancing at Fen and Jian before returning her focus to the High King. “So... I have some friends that will be joining me—maybe—but a friend named Jin could

probably fill a teaching position? She may also skip out on this universe, too... so... yeah. Just a thought!”

Titania’s eye creased in an interested manner. “Teacher aides are one thing, but instructor positions are quite challenging to fill due to the knowledge and power required. I would need to meet your friend to be sure I can recommend her.”

“Of course!” Sora chirped, feeling better knowing about this ‘Darkness’ that was overtaking Avalon; it sounded like a cool quest that she could go on with friends—maybe she was getting a little more frisky than she should, but it sounded fun on paper. “She should be here sleeping—”

“One of these two ladies?” Sora almost bit her tongue as an illusion of the medical bay appeared, and she zoomed in right on the sleeping Korean girl and blonde Valkyrie. “I suspect it is the oriental human since the name follows the cultural pattern. Hehe. You cannot be too sure these days with human names, though.”

“Yeah, that’s her,” Sora confirmed. She was impressed at the fairy’s invisible magic, and supposedly, she was severely weakened due to maintaining the defense of her realm. “Umm. You can... sense her from here? What do you think?”

A secretive gleam lit in the woman’s blue eyes, flowers, hair, and dress tinting gold. “I would say she fits the role perfectly—actually, quite overqualified if I’m being frank. I will make the necessary recommendations, including a position for Fen and Jian.”

“You aren’t... yanking my tails?” Fen whispered in disbelief, nose turning red as emotion crawled up her throat. “You... are offering me sanctuary from the... from the SCC?”

Sora felt bad at the raven-haired woman’s rush of emotion at no longer being caged, and Titania’s face softened.

“Indeed, young vultures. As can be expected, a certain decorum is expected of an instructor at Avalon Academy. We have many types of monsters and students. Our curriculum is very tough in some regards, including the culling of Shadow Pockets. You will be given an orientation.”

Jian agreed without a word, respect on his stern face as he nodded at the High Queen, and Titania turned her illustrious vision back to her. “Are there any more questions you have for us?”

Oberon answered before she could pose her subsequent inquiry, smoothly rising to his feet, leaving the food untouched. “We have worked out a proposal with the SCC in regard to your living arrangements, Sora, and your mother has wanted both of us to be... cordial with one another. You will have the option to stay within Avalon or return home whenever desired.”

Mom... you could have solved all of this with the snap of your fingers. I guess you’ve got a plan. I’m supposed to learn how to use my powers in this school and overcome this darkness! Actually... pretty cool, Mom. What will mortal Mom know, though... Hmm.

“Wow,” she said with a strained laugh, catching Aiden’s smirk that said this seemed like trouble, “I really feel like a princess now. I’d love to join your school. When does it start? Oh, Sela! I also wanted to—”

Sora’s tongue lodged in her throat at the sharp chime of a bell, and without even realizing when the chair had been slid back, kid Nilly was sitting cross-legged beside Aiden. Everyone froze at the Nekomata’s spontaneous entrance, the dead Cat Mother bobbing left and right excitedly.

“School?! Nilly wants to go to school; Nilly’s never been!”

Diane’s voice turned to ice. “Situation Scan: Omega-Alpha!”

The feminine AI responded instantly. "Access Denied."

"What?!" Silence took the entire room as the eight-year-old cat girl bobbed left and right on her chair, tails swaying behind her. In the next second, Diane snapped, "White, Delta-Max Five. Protocol-442!"

The AI's voice responded instantly. "I am unable to comply. ECC Override: Gray-Omega: Abaddon Threat present. An unknown entity registered as uncontainable. Current status, non-hostile."

"Abaddon..." Ferdinand mumbled in shock, face ashen. "White, what is the Foundation's first interaction with this creature?"

"Irrelevant," the computer returned.

Nilly giggled, big, feline eyes centered on Sora. "Nilly's friends with White. White and Nilly talk lots about the Sardine War. White and Nilly play games, and Nilly wins. Everybody knows Nilly! Nilly's a *big* kitty. Shhh! Shhh! No one knows!" she winked, looking left and right at Titania and Oberon, who calmly observed the Nekomata. "...Foxy fluffy friend! Nilly's back!"

Diane's fingers skidded across the hologram keyboard as Aiden sighed and slid over a plate of food for Nilly to excitedly devour, using her bare hands.

Titania leaned forward, resting her chin on her bridged fingers. "Now, who is this delightful girl, Sora? Are you acquainted?"

"Nilly's Nilly," she casually responded, making the cat's tails lock up.

"Nilly is Nilly!" the cat said through a mouth full of food. "Hehe. Sora remembers Nilly; Nilly's happy! Fox Friend!" Sora didn't even bristle her tail as the Nekomata spontaneously teleported to the spot to nuzzle her fur, face now totally clean.

"Nilly... hehe. How was your trip with Ylva? Is she safe in my mom's territory?"

"Mhm! Mhm!" Nilly danced back, tails swinging with her movements. "Nilly's trip was fun—Ylva made fun of Nilly's clothes, though," she huffed with puffed-out cheeks. "Nilly needs new ones, and school has clothes! Did Fox Friend know Nilly ate an army of sardines?! Nilly's good at school because Nilly eats schools!"

"Mmm. Not the same, Nilly," Sora chuckled. "Does the school have a dress code?"

Titania's eyes sparkled with interest as she leaned forward to study the hyperactive cat. "It does. What a smart kitty."

"Huh?! Nilly is a smart kitty!" The cat teleported onto the table to sit in front of the fairy queen. "Nilly found Nilly a new friend! Nilly likes friends who are nice to Nilly! Nilly likes fancy uniforms, too! Nilly looks good in uniforms; uniforms just don't fit Nilly because Nilly's too scary! Hiss! Hiss! Nilly's clothes are the best uniform! Sora should get Nilly uniforms!"

"Hehe. Schools have tests, too!" Sora reminded, making the girl pause.

"B-But Nilly's the best at tests! Nilly's the bestest; everyone knows Nilly's the best!" she shot back, hopping to her feet, now on her chair to lean across the table to stare her down; this was more in her ballpark as the SCC members panicked. "Sora can't eat Nilly's test because Nilly eats them all first! Hah!"

"Oooh! Impressive. Impressive," she clapped, making the girl's lips peel back to display her monstrous teeth. "Why are you here now, Nilly?"

"Hmm?" Nilly's head cocked to the side with her ears. "Why is Nilly here? Hmm. Nilly forgets. Oh! Nilly likes Fen-Fen's kids. Nilly wants to play with wolfies and foxies! Can Nilly go to school? Please! Please, Sora!" she pleaded, now lying on her back on the table to look up at her with big cat eyes. "Nilly will be a good kitty!"

Sora crossed her legs and knew it was a great idea to have someone as powerful as Nilly by her side; the only concern was getting worn out, and her mom was scared of this enigmatic cat, but it wasn't like any of them could do anything about her.

"Only if Nilly is Sora's secret pet kitty that gives Sora and her friends cuddles at night because Sora and her friends are nice to Nilly, and Nilly needs snuggle buddies!"

Nilly's tails fell to the table, her face going red as she teared up. "Nilly does need snuggle buddies! Nilly's lonely. Githa's mad at Nilly, so Nilly doesn't have anyone to eat sardines with. Nilly didn't mean to bite Githa's tail when Nilly was sleeping."

"Eh-hehe. I'm sure you didn't. Is Wendy okay?"

"Mhm! Wendy is eating sweets to help her bitter tongue. Nilly hugged Wendy, and Wendy said Nilly could be Wendy's friend! Nilly has so many friends now! Hehe. Nilly's popular—the most popular—everyone knows it!"

"Good kitty!" Sora chimed, rubbing the girl's ears and making her purr. "Nilly needs to play a kitty and keep Sora company. Okay?"

"Hehehe. Silly Fox; Nilly is a kitty!" Nilly snickered, tail swaying and knocking off dishes. "Sora's such a bad fox! Where would Sora be without Nilly? Oh! Oh! Nilly can be Sora's test tutor! Nilly's the best test eater!"

"I bet Nilly is!" Sora giggled, spotting Aiden practically having a hernia as he gasped for air; only the SCC people seemed upset by the cat's presence. "Umm. Okay, High Queen Titania, High King Oberon, should we go get everything ready to go?"

Titania twirled her finger, creating an intricate cat comb that began stroking the happy human kitty's ears. "She's precious! Hmm. You can remove the titles if I can do the same for you." She winked. "Think of it as my attempt to bridge the gap from mere acquaintance to more friendly relations. Also, you're in luck; this semester begins at the start of fall within your world."

"Done!" Sora laughed. "Thank you, Titania, Oberon, and that's convenient for me to get things settled. Oh..." Her tone gained a hint of annoyance while shooting a glare over at Diane, still engaged in going over documents and making notes. "Anything else you guys want from me?"

Ferdinand rose to his feet and responded, showing a forced grin; they really were shady compared to the fae rulers. "Nothing that can't be discussed along the way. Kari and Eric should be... close to being relocated to the transportation gateway. I understand you want to return to Earth and familiar ground. Right this way..."

Sora released a laugh through her nose upon spotting Nilly in cat form, looking up at her like an empress, waiting to be showered with attention. She picked up the cat and passively stroked her as the comb hovered nearby, waiting for its turn.

"What about me and Jian?" Fen mumbled, fingers flexing against her belly, where she'd already destroyed part of her dress from stress and showed light blood stains. "Do you... want us to come with you?"

"Obviously! Well, until you score your job. Heh. I still need you to give me some vulpes lessons on culture! Cool?"

It was as if Fen's spiteful and jaded aura completely vanished as a smile lifted her lips. "I... would not be opposed to that."

"Wonderful!"

Diane's distracted voice followed their exit. "I will be checking up on you in the coming days, Sora. The SCC will be making sure the fae are keeping their end of the deal while the fae

will be keeping tabs on us. If you have a need or want, then let it be known, and we will try to accommodate it..."

Pausing at the door, she turned around to make her command known. "Good. I want Jane brought to me; I don't care if Wendy's mom made a deal. Period. No discussion. Make. It. Happen."

Ferdinand grimaced, but Diane showed a smirk.

"I expected as much; teenagers are too predictable. To be young, emotional, and foolish again. You owe me five mana crystals, Ferdinand. I look forward to the experiment, Sora. I hope you don't break her. Hehe."

"Humph."

"Hissss!"

Nilly glared at the witch as they left, and Sora almost stumbled and fell when the cat's tails made a flicking motion, sending a bowl full of fruit cocktails into the woman's face.

"Pfft!"

"How naughty, Nilly," Titania snickered.

"...Lovely," the witch grumbled, wiping a clump of it out of her dripping hair.

"Mrrow!"

Aiden shrugged on his way out with Oberon, the only one not wearing a smirk, but Sora was sure he was hiding it. "Hey, you act like a witch, you get treated like one."

Shutting the door behind them, Sora waited a second before motioning to the door at the end of the hall. "Wait outside, I'll get Mary and Wendy." She bumped her tail into Aiden as he passed. "And thanks for having my back."

He lifted his arms defensively with Titania's lingering, curious neon-blue eyes on them. "I know I suck for bringing up Eric, I know it's going to be rough for Kari, and I know you'll probably be the only one to get her to go through with it, so... I owe you a date?"

She held a testing half-smile while giving him a lifted eyebrow.

"Two dates—flowers?" He walked backward, rolling his fingers in parallel. "Chocolates and a nighttime flight on a magic carpet? Haha! Tell me where to stop."

"Mmm. I'll let you surprise me," she said with an impish grin that even got a smile out of Oberon, his wife now eyeing him mischievously.

"Yikes! Throwing me in the fire from the go, huh?"

Sora laughed, trying to ignore Nilly's tails playing with her bangs. "You are a firebird, so is it too much to ask for a little fire dancing?"

"Touché! Haha. I'll make the reservation. You do have an outfit to join me, right?"

Her mind blanked, images of bikini-clad fire dancers prancing around.

"Huh? Wait, huh?! Aiden?!"

He shut the door with a toothy grin, leaving a pout on her face.

Good one, bud. One point to you, but the war isn't over!

Feeling better as much of the weight she'd felt slid off, Sora opened Wendy's door with a desire, dispelling the magic in the room. Wendy and Mary were sitting across from each other, eating food and chatting; her best friend looked to be in a better place.

"I'm... not interrupting, I hope!"

Wendy huffed upon spotting Nilly in her arms. "Traitor! You said you were going to fight off the super boss sardine queen."

"Mrrow!" Nilly hid her face in Sora's bust.

"Hehe. I bet she did before applying to be our pet cat and official homework eater."

“Aww. I can’t stay mad at you then!” Wendy giggled, breathing out a long sigh and looking at Mary observing them with a smile. “Thank you for letting me talk... I hate that I can’t pay you cause, you know... broke teen girl that... probably doesn’t have a part-time job anymore. Yikes...”

Sora’s head pulled back as if slapped. “Excuse you! Mary is a hired family psychiatrist, which means you fall into that category; she’ll just bill my dad.”

“Haha. I love the enthusiasm, girls,” Mary said, rising to her feet and fixing her blue dress. “I am happy enough to have visited the moon and seen such a spectacular sight,” she said, looking to the side where a massive spaceship was passing by. “It warms my heart to know that we’re actually at this stage in technology... You’ve opened up a whole new world to me. Now, is it time to return to Miami?”

“Mhm!” She sighed as they moved to join her, letting Wendy steal Nilly from her while mirroring her stuck-out tongue. “So, apparently, they bought my hotel and... I think they basically gave it to me with a bunch of creepy SCC bodyguards or something. Oh, okay, just take my cuddle kitty!”

“Meeow!”

“Jacked! My cuddle kitty now! Hehe. I’m going to dress Nilly up in the cutest kitty fashion and get her a hot guy cat.”

“Meow?!”

“Kidding! Kidding! Maybe...” Nilly now looked at her with big eyes as they entered the hallway. “And does that mean I get my own room in your house? Cool.” She stopped dead in her tracks, focus darting to her. “Wait, wait, wait... Is *Kari* getting her own room?!”

Sora’s eyes narrowed, looking off to the side. “Don’t... know yet. Maybe I could give her a room in a suite below us? We’ll see! Haaa. I’ve got a lot to talk to her about. For now, I need to make sure Eyia doesn’t try to kill Jin, but... I think she’s just super hurt right now since Jin lied to her...”

“Poor Eyia; she’s so innocent and naive,” Wendy mumbled, looking up at Mary with her and making the brown-haired woman force a laugh.

“I... suppose I could talk to them... if they wanted. Let’s do things one step at a... And who are these beautiful... fairies?” Mary choked, almost stumbling in her heels upon spotting the graceful rulers.

Wendy leaned over to whisper in her ear, big eyes centered on Oberon. “He’s gorgeous.”

Titania swept forward to greet them, literal sparkles following her movements. “It is a pleasure to meet you ladies. I am High Queen Titania of Avalon, and this is my husband, High King Oberon. No need for formalities, though!”

Sora’s mouth twitched. *Way to stake your claim; I don’t see a ring on his finger, though! Oh, shut up, mind! Why is Aiden looking at me like that... What’s he plotting? Hmm. I think this is going to be fun!*