Chapter Thirty: Week 8; Rediscovered Happiness

Sora laid in bed, staring up at the ceiling—alone—hands held behind her head as she pondered the last few days; they'd been fairly magical, in a way, with Kari being far less moody, laughing and hanging out with Emilia and Wendy.

Her new sister couldn't believe how chill the Fenris Wolf could be, which was another product of letting her Shadow run wild—almost nothing bothered her anymore; most of the Persona structure she'd built around humanity had been devastated, shifting her personality in subtle ways.

Seiōbo and Nari had done what they could to accommodate the change, magically expanding their house to make a room Kari could sleep in; Sora wasn't sure she could live on her own when her Shadow could strike at any moment. It was being shockingly patient, though.

Lifting her three tails to follow their gradual weaving motions, she blew up her cheeks before emptying her lungs.

In some ways, Kari's way cooler to hang around, and she's not so easily embarrassed, shrugging off everything, though that isn't as fun at the same time… Emilia loves her easy-going personality, however.

Her mouth tightened, worried about how this new Kari would react to Eyia's prejudices if they met. Kari was a Fenris Wolf at heart, and the barriers to that, such as the tragedy she'd felt in her past, didn't sting as much to her more 'take what comes and shrug it off' attitude.

She half wondered if that had been the reason Kari chose to do this, although there wasn't any evidence to believe anything but her own word.

Kari wants to get to know her father… I guess I didn't understand how much. It's not like I can't understand it, and maybe it's just me overthinking it since Kari doesn't have a daughter to look after and think about. It's only Kari, and she's perfectly willing to risk her life for whatever because it's just her.

Sora looked to the right as a knock came at the door.

Speak of the devil.

The edge cracked, Kari lifting two fingers with a wry smirk. "Don't tell me you didn't sleep all night, thinking about me again? Hehe. I'm not going to go off—it'll be a fight with Shadow—and my last one lasted how long again?"

Floating up to swap to her side—her red nightgown draping down—Sora returned the look. "True. I may be worrying a bit too much, but you can't blame me; it's only been four days since you caged her. How are you feeling?"

Throwing her flexible arms back with a low moan, Kari linked her fingers, pressing up. "Slept great—mmm—never felt better. Heh, how do you stand this thin stuff," she asked, plucking at her black nightgown.

"Hmm? What did you sleep with before?"

"Nude."

"Not surprised," Sora laughed. "Emilia loves seeing you use her clothes, though."

"Mmh… yeah, the sports stuff is great. We gonna go teach some basketball to some of the Vulpes in the square today?"

A grin touched Sora's lips. "Aiden's been teasing Liz about it, and she's sure it's super easy."

The gleam in her glowing brown irises showed the wolf inside. "Well, it's been a good while since I've practiced."

Sora's fingers tightened in her lap as she straightened in the air, crossing her legs. "Powers—and I get Mofupsi on my team?"

Kari shrugged. "Sure. You'll need it. I'll play with Liz—you got Aiden too?"

"No shot!" Sora waved her hand, gut squirming at Kari's confident, leaning stance; she was far too sure of herself lately. "You want me to have Aiden and Mofupsi?"

"Hey, you set the rules, and I'll play, but, heh, are we really playing basketball then? Emilia will also stop by for lunch to see you eat pavement, huh?"

"Who's going to eat pavement?" Emilia mumbled from down the hall as she sleepily opened the door, having taken her aunts' room in their absence.

Kari's tail flicked the opposite way with her shifted posture. "Yo, Emi, your mother and I decided to play some basketball today, and I'm gonna put her in the dirt!"

"Ooh! I want to play, too."

"Chu-chu!" Vix cheered, saying he was all for joining the battle, and Sora could visualize him jabbing the air with his paws and tails.

"Yeah—Vix-chu and I will own you guys!"

"You'll have to show me what you got; heh, your mom might have to cheat with her Null-Void basketball to score a shot."

"What? I can shoot a basketball!"

Emilia hissed. "I… remember differently from the memories Aunt Inari showed me."

"Hey!" Sora growled, maneuvering a chakram into the hallway to expand and connect the spaces so she could see her down the hall from her bed. "Don't sell out your mom like that! I've got superpowers now."

Kari jabbed her thumb at her with a snicker. "What I tell ya; she'll need to cheat."

"Fine! Okay, we'll do it totally straight," she grinned, knowing her body was far stronger than it ever was as a human or Vulpes. "Loser has to wear whatever the other wants for a whole day!"

Emilia gasped, jumping to pull Wendy into the hallway as she exited her room. "Basketball bets!"

"Huh?"

Kari threw her arms high into the air, nightgown puffing up to her upper thighs as she leaned left and right, showing her purple underwear and waving them off.

Leaving to the bathroom to shower, she called out behind her, "Four, five, six people—I'll take ya all; doesn't matter. Heh, just give me Liz and some random person off the street against all of you."

"Wow—everyone against just three of you!"

"Chu!"

Vix mirrored Emilia's impressed tone; at this point, Sora couldn't back down.

Sora frowned, following her weaving puffy, black tail as it disappeared behind the door.

"Wendy!"

"Hmm?" her sister's teal-blue eyes darted to her. "Don't get me involved in your insanity; we both know Kari was playing against the Miami Hurricanes! I'm not gonna take *any* bet against a high school girl playing with the college boys!"

"Really—Auntie Kari was that good? Oh, ooh, Auntie Wendy, can we do some morning dance stuff?"

"Sure!" Wendy chimed. They'd been doing it almost daily since Nari left after the blonde suggested the pair use it to train the girl's new Null-Void body, and Emilia loved it. "Go down and get the front room cleared up, and, uh, yeah… Kari's a god at any sport."

"Because she's a Fenris Wolf!" Sora interjected, entering the hallway to glare at the bathroom door. "Of course she'd school humans, but we're not weak humans anymore."

Wendy rolled her eyes and shook her head, bringing her ultra-puffy brown tail around to brush with a comb. "Keep telling yourself that, but I think you're letting that inflated ego get to your head; this isn't throwing around Null-Void balls."

"You'll see; she'll want to swap teams around after the first five minutes! Hehe. I have a plan."

Frowning at her wink, Wendy put her big brush on the dresser beside the door before going downstairs to do their morning workout dances.

"Alright. I'll be on your team, but I'm *not* taking any bets against that monster."

"Don't sweat it! We got this," Sora urged, returning to her room to find a good sports bra, shorts, and shoes for their activity, selecting a teal-patterned set.

Releasing her body, her chakram bobbed up and down as she heard Emilia and Wendy start the dance mix Nari had crafted for them on the holographic TV she'd made by looking into an alternate, future timeline.

Reconstituting, she slipped on the items and went downstairs to cook breakfast; Mofupsi walked through the front door to join her in the kitchen after several minutes. Her ears twitched while pausing at the doorway between the hallway, kitchen, and front room.

"Your music is… very unusual."

Sora chuckled, crafting high-protein chia pudding for them, adding raspberries for the berry option; she had to make almost a gallon for Wendy—the girl could eat—and Kari was about the same.

"You haven't heard the half of it."

"I'm sure…"

She sat at the bar, watching her craft the simple breakfast with interest. "You said I was required for today?"

"Right… hehe, umm, before that, how was the overnight training?"

Mofupsi hummed, summoning her pipe to puff on it and observing the dancing, giggling girls go through the various activities the constantly changing magical workout session went through from Sora's chakram portal.

"Most of my activities have been internal, so this weaving of magic and desire was… a nice change of pace. I've never split a mountain before, and reversing the damage was far more intensive."

"Cool! Heh, I only know how to destroy stuff—well, mainly," Sora added, tilting her head to grin at the woman as she crafted gym clothes out of Null-Void in the Vulpes' size.

She lifted a copper eyebrow. "And… what are those strange clothes for, Mistress?"

"For you!" Kari walked into the kitchen with her thick hair wrapped in a towel. "We've got some sports planned for today, which should help some of you guys train your control, among other things."

Magically tugging the items from her hands to examine the articles, Mofupsi's lips parted for a second, closed, and then opened again while considering her response. "I'm not trying to be rude, Mistress… but are you sure this small piece of fabric will… fit my proportions?"

Kari laughed as she sat beside the woman, eyeing her oversized chest, half-exposed by her typical revealing kimono-style garments. "If you plan to play basketball, you'll need a sports bra—without a doubt—and I'm guessing Sora's got the size down; she's a pervert like that."

"Excuse you!" Sora barked; Wendy and Emilia giggled at the comment from the other room. "Why am I a pervert?"

Wendy spoke up from her back and forth moves, smirking at her from the linked piece of space. "I mean, you can make me a set of clothes with a snap of your finger—and that's after my change—so… how do you know *everyone's* proportions, huh?"

Emilia flipped her tails to link hands with Wendy, doing a combination set. "Haha—I have to measure people whenever I make clothes—kind of suspicious, Mom!"

"No!" Sora squawked, begrudgingly sliding Kari her big gallon jug of food. "Out of everyone, Emi, I thought you'd be on my side in this—you can find out their measurements from the Outer Body Technique."

Kari's brow lifted with amusement. "Do you often use that *advanced technique* to spy on people's naked bodies and *meticulously* examine their curves?"

Mofupsi tilted her pipe and head in mild agreement. "It is a rather… unusual hobby, Mistress."

"It's not a hobby! When did I get labeled a pervert?"

Kari swallowed, seemingly almost choking. "Hah—haha! You're a Vulpes Founder—have you met your Aunt Nari—I assumed it since I first met you."

Cheeks coloring a tad, Sora shook her head. "Pfft. Nuh-uh. My Aunt Inari and Seiōbo aren't like that; Nari is an exception, I guess."

"Mhmm…" Kari leaned forward, pointing her spoon in Sora's direction. "Why don't we go through your *Outer Body Technique* and search for every moment you mentioned something perverted?"

"I… I'm joking most—all the time!" Sora corrected, seeing Kari's unconvinced stare. This new Kari borderline had returned to being a bully; Sora would swear it!

"Riiight. So, Mofupsi, ever heard of basketball?"

"Should I have?"

Sora wanted to curse; it might have been something to do with unlocking her father's side and that part being more active, but her typical witty comments failed her, and it was so frustrating; to make matters worse, Vix-chu looked her way with everyone else distracted and smirked.

What was that for?! You stupid fox!

She followed one of his puffy tail gestures at the clothes in Mofupsi's hands as a second gestured at the lower v-cut on it, shaking his head.

No! That's not on purpose—she has a much larger cup—I don't need to explain myself! You wouldn't understand bras; you're a fox!

He sighed and spread his arms as Emilia looked at him in her rapid footwork, but the second her attention left, he held a paw to his mouth and snickered at her.

I'm not a pervert! I had to clothe everyone when we first came to this Realm; naturally, I'd know everyone's sizes, and good ventilation is needed in sports bras…

Wendy, Vix-chu, and Emilia finished their workout after fifteen more minutes and went upstairs to use the split shower Nari customized to allow two people to use the room. Sora put their food in the fridge before joining Mofupsi and Kari.

Some banter later, time flew by until Tola showed up to grab Emilia for their daily practice with White; to their surprise, the woman had been building a solid resolve these last few weeks, fighting the male Vulpes' natural draw to prove he wasn't beyond love.

Waving her daughter off, Mofupsi dressed in her new clothes, exiting Sora's bedroom and plucking at the front. "Is it… supposed to be so tight?"

"It's supposed to be snug," Kari mused, sharp eyes drifting to her. "Don't tell me the pervert got the wrong size?"

"Shut up! It's the right size; you're just used to wearing totally loose clothes, Moppy. You'll get used to it, but we don't need your boobs jumping out."

"Unless that's what you really want?" Wendy teased, likey drawing from her Vulpes side and further agitating Sora.

"Grrah! Why am I now labeled the pervert?!"

"You have to ask?" Wendy snickered. "Did you forget what you gave me when I first made this body—a sweater—yeah, a freaking sweater, pervert!"

"It was funny," Sora helplessly shrugged.

Kari raised a hand with a grin. "Don't forget about *both* bath incidents."

"What are you talking about?" Sora grumbled. "Me saying you're cute and teasing you doesn't make me a pervert."

"When I'm naked—mmmh?"

"She has a point," Wendy nodded. "You do it at some suspect times, Sora."

"Not a pervert!"

Mofupsi cleared her throat, tentatively leaning forward to glance between them. "What's a pervert?"

"Hahaha!"

They couldn't respond, stomachs shaking as they got ready to leave.

"What bliss," Wendy wheezed, patting the confused woman on the back. "Don't change. We heading over there to practice?"

"Yup!"

Sora crafted a Null-Void basketball, using her connection to it to effortlessly spin it on her finger. "Let's g—"

"Nope!" Kari laughed, snatching it off her fingers to toss it behind her back for Mofupsi to catch.

"W-What do I do with this?"

"Make one out of leather, filled with air; can ya do it?"

"C'mon," Sora groaned, running her fingers through her hair before repositioning her chakram to act as a band. "I'm not gonna cheat."

Wendy smirked. "You totally just did; you could *never* balance a basketball on your fingers."

"Don't rat me out! C'mon…"

Kari caught the item Mofupsi made, spinning it into the air to land on her pinky. "Like this?"

"Oh, shut up—really!"

Kari sent the ball into the air as she tried to smack it away, catching it on her other hand's middle finger to continue the rotation, increasing the spin with a few swipes. "Sucks to suck! Man, it feels so good having a basketball in my hands again. Let's go!"

Not liking how things were already turning out as they left the house, Sora's confidence in her new powers having changed her life started to dwindle with the show of skill in Kari's movements.

"It feels so nice slowing down and controlling my strength," Kari laughed, spinning in circles while dribbling the ball between her legs, around her back, and performing tricks. "Yo, Sora, can you throw up some music, too?"

"Well… I could before awakening my father's side, but… Mofupsi can probably teleport Nari's music box she gave Emilia over. We'll probably need to ask first, though."

"Sweet! Getting lost in the beat—this takes me back to when I first discovered human sports—it was such a change of pace and a good way to get rid of all my stress. A team is like a pack, and leading it to victory every time felt so great—a way of winning without killing your prey so you could play over and over."

Wendy forced a chuckle. "Uh-heh… I think I remember a lot of the seniors complaining how you never stopped… for hours and hours."

Kari did a few fakes before spinning and tossing the ball high into the air, but it was nothing compared to what she could have, yet the smile on her face gave Sora's internal inferiority complex a pause.

"Sports was what I lived for in Miami! Heh-ha; it was such a change of pace with every activity, and the challenge of beating the humans at their own game was so thrilling. I worked so hard… and playing at their level was the most difficult thing I'd ever done, and it felt amazing!"

Seeing a basketball in Kari's hands and the pure joy on her face shifted Sora's thoughts; ever since she'd reconciled with her former bully, she'd seen a struggling girl trying to find her purpose in life, but in Miami, she'd found one.

She didn't doubt that Kari would have grown more and more into the life of a normal human—maybe not so normal—and she would have been the first woman in the MBA.

Mofupsi watched Kari's movements in awe, which drew more than just her focus on their path to the Blue District's main square; Wendy's expression said they were dead before they even started.

Sora's mouth gradually fell into a frown as her servant went to ask her daughter if they could use her precious music box, housing what was basically a musical streaming service.

I thought my Null-Void abilities would even the playing field, and I could beat Kari like I do in battles, but… skill is essential, as well… and I guess Kari didn't just use her brute strength to overpower all the humans in their sports, she learned proper form and technique.

Looking down at her open left palm, she sighed. *Kari and Eyia have that in common, I guess, but… this skill portion of Kari is her Persona—what she learned from being among the humans.*

"C'mon, Wendy, try to get the ball from me!" Kari laughed, dribbling backward.

"Ugh—can I, uh, use my tail?"

"Yeah! This is all about training our bodies—control—see?" she added, tossing it over her head to begin dribbling with her own tail. "Oh… yeah, actually—good call—I haven't… oof, haha, fumbled the ball…"

Sora couldn't believe Kari laughed off her mistake as her tail hit a bit too hard, shooting it to the side.

"Got it!" Wendy yelled, running after it rather than flying, and some random elderly human walking on the street caught it to return it to the puffy-tailed, brown-furred girl. "Thanks!"

"Yeah… what are you doing?"

"Hehe. Come to the main square to find out," Kari called back, holding up her hands. "Here! Haha…"

"Sorry!" Wendy cried, misjudging her strength and throwing it dozens of meters ahead of them.

"No sweat! Sora—what are you doing, spacing out?"

"Yeah, sorry. Coming!"

Jogging after them, she smiled; even if Kari did something incredibly dangerous, seeing her friend move beyond her tragic past to wear a free and happy grin was something she should celebrate. She could be angry with her and still enjoy the positive things that came from the reckless decision.

Mofupsi returned soon after they reached the town center, and Sora asked the Realm to change the environment to create a full basketball court in an appropriate area out of the main flow of traffic.

Seeing the advanced-looking holographic device in the woman's hands, Kari cheered. "Nice!"

"Mmm-hmm. Mistress Emilia has asked me to relay a message. Ahem: Don't break it, Mom!"

"Why is she singling me out?"

Wendy smirked. "You have a bad track record with breaking phones in the past—clumsy Sora—remember?"

"Ugh… Everyone's making me a pincushion today! I've only broken three phones, and one shouldn't have blown up in the water…"

Kari didn't seem to be listening as she took the box from Mofupsi to place it on the pedestal the woman summoned for it to be placed on. After searching for a song, the Wolf cheered. "Yes! Saint-Tropez… I loved listening to this radio on the school speakers."

Playing it, the meandering citizens and tourists of the capital paused as the music spontaneously filled the air with magical crystal clarity, and Kari spun to the left, jumping to send the ball into the air, kissing the net.

"Still got it!"

She dashed forward to scoop up the ball and move between both sides, catching sight of the lovebirds as they made it to the site. "Yo, Aiden! Get over here—you can't tell me you didn't play basketball once in three years."

"Haha!" He lifted Liz's hand—held in his—and kissed it, nudging his head to the ring. "Time to go hard in the paint, girl! Just as we practiced."

Kari shook her head as Sora moved to the edge of the paint, crossing her arms under her bust. "Nuh-uh—Liz is on my team—we're gonna do a two-v-four to start. Hehe. I need to warm up anyway. You know how to pass the ball, Liz?"

"Wait—we're on a team?" her pink ponytail whipped to the side with her two tails as she looked at her boyfriend. "I didn't know…"

He nudged her side, Sora's ears twitching as he lowered his voice for no reason—all of them, excluding him, had phenomenal hearing—mumbling, "Yo, you'll like this lineup."

"Mmh… okay."

A sly grin split Kari's face, showing her pointed canines. "Hehe. You want to stomp Aiden—show him who's boss—huh? I got ya!"

Liz's ears showed her piqued interest. "Ooh. I like the sound of that!"

"Alright—let's go!"

Sora stepped up to the eager Fenris Wolf at center court, Mofupsi creating a magical drop mechanic at the location to toss the ball into the air at random in a five to ten-second period.

Glaring at the dark-haired girl's toothy grin, Sora huffed. "Don't get too cocky; I'm not some weak human anymore!"

"Hehe. No, but you are short!" Kari cackled, jumping high into the air as the ball shot up between them to bat the sphere to Liz; Sora couldn't even get a foot away from it before it was jetted away.

"Gah! Wha—move!"

She tried to dart after it when the towering wolf got in her way, bound locks swaying as Sora tried to fake herself around her without effect. "Aiden, get…"

Mofupsi jogged behind Wendy and Aiden, rushing the determined pink-haired girl; it soon became apparent by the several thousand-year-old woman's pants and red face that she was by no means accustomed to physical exertion.

"Sorry, Peach—"

"What was that, Birdbrain?!" Liz snickered, hopping in the air to use both hands to toss it to Kari, shifting in a jump to snatch the ball out of the air, and blitzing past Sora in a whirlwind.

"Nice!" Kari shouted. "Keep up, Sora!"

Recovering, she sprinted after her, but Kari was already in the air from the free-throw line, ball in her extended left hand to slam through the net.

"Wooh! Two points down!" she laughed, smacking Sora's shoulder with the back of her hand before giving her the ball. "Check it!"

"Dunked!" Liz cheered, jumping in the air and causing her t-shirt to show her belly. "I wasn't even able to touch the net when I was practicing with Aiden."

Sora groaned, looking up at the scoreboard above the hoop. "This is gonna be a long day…"

Citizens stopped to watch, clapping and shouting out whenever Kari performed another feat, whether it be stealing the ball, swishing at center court, or spin dunking, yet it was hard not to get caught up in the girl's vibes, and after a while, they stopped keeping score.

Emilia showed up at lunch, getting Kari to help her with her free throws, and they played Around the World with the Fenris Wolf coaching the kids that wanted to join as Sora took a break. She didn't know why, but reducing her power was more complex and challenging than going full force.

The hours of the day went by, and a new thought came to Sora. Kari had unified with the most important pieces of her Persona to protect it from her Shadow, and this was a part of that. Obviously, she hadn't taken off to do her own thing; showing her friendship with her was also precious to her.

Even if it was the worst way to go about it, Kari had actually made progress by shedding the failed order in Persona that she'd built like deadwood in the fight with her Shadow, allowing for new growth and also giving more leniency to her darker half.

Seeing Emilia take a leadership role—using Kari's instruction—made Sora giggle as she attempted to help the young city children learn WINNER, which was basically PIG with more letters. Vix-chu showed off to the kids' excitement, spinning the ball on his tails, trying to annoy her by reminding Sora of her earlier failure, trying to copy Kari.

Kari finally left the court for the first time as the skies grew deep orange. "Wow… what a day. Huh, Sora? Man, this takes me back to way better times… well, I know it wasn't so good for you."

Sora exited the game and floated to the bench Mofupsi made to lay on and shook her head; the overheated woman tapped out early, and after resting, she now enjoyed the much calmer game with Emilia.

"I'm over all that… I'm happy you're feeling better. Why don't we make this a staple at the last hour of our days? Teach me to at least not get totally creamed, haha!"

"I'm cool with that. Heh… Emi looks like she's having fun. We could swap it up every once and a while."

"I'm better at tennis," Wendy sighed, sitting next to them. "Holy… Yo, why is White good at *everything*?"

They turned their focus to the man, faces going red at his shirtless frame, tempting more than just Tola—the woman stumbling around the court—with all the women watching; the humans and Vulpes couldn't keep their eyes off the tanned Kitsune.

Kari seemed to be the only one unaffected by the sight of the tall, muscular man, eagerly jumping to her feet while observing his finesse with the basketball as he taunted Tola's flustered determination.

"Yo! Okay! Yo, White—half-court?"

"Eh-hehe… sure."

Sora hung her head as Tola joined them, and Mofupsi extended the bench again for her to lay down, nine tails utterly in her heavy breathing and sprawled posture.

"Ugh…"

The citizens were more than a little shocked at seeing the two councilwomen they worshiped all their lives down and out as the Fenris Wolf and Kitsune became a whirlwind on the court—Kari found her match, and, by her beaming smile, she loved it.