

Tales of Zenathia #8: Secrets Sought

The vibration of the husky woman's leg rattled the frame of Tochi's hover car. The feline could feel waves of anxiety wafting from Nikita. Heart shaped pupils rolled with slight ridicule, and set on the lane of traffic ahead. Soft rattles followed the steadfast rumble of the LevEngine propelling the car.

"Relax... no one will even know or notice," Tochi said confidently, reaching over to nuzzle her fist affectionately against Nikita's shoulder, "I mean you cut your hair, you're wearing baggier clothes. No one's gonna know."

"They're going to know." Nikita scoffed and shook her head. *Still, it is nice to get out.*

Her heterochromatic eyes danced across the cityscape sheened in pink light. She could feel the warmth of the cosmic rays upon her fur, and it allayed some of her worries. Her fingers, however, continued to fidget at the rattling door panel.

"Will you stop it, you're going to break that," Tochi said. Her hands flexed on the control yoke. Her thin body pressed into the seat in an attempt to alleviate the irritation building along her spine.

"That would imply it wasn't already broken."

Nikita's sarcastic tone pitched Tochi's ear to the side and the feline let out a low growl. Leaning over, she put her hand on Nikita's shoulder.

"Listen, Nikki, if you're so worried, I'll go in for you," Tochi said, her cream furred hand giving a small squeeze to the monochromatic woman beside her.

"I don't know, Tochi..." Nikita sighed and leaned her head on the seat rest, "I mean, do you even know what you're looking for?"

Tochi's hand withdrew and she gripped the yoke once more.

"Give me some credit, okay," Tochi rolled her eyes and piloted their hovercar upwards, rising from the traffic lane with shuddering coughs, "I mean I might not have all the fancy toys like you. But I at least know what they look like."

Nikita fell silent, focusing her mind on the turmoil within. As great the light of day was, she felt naked. A sense of exposure crawled across every strand of her furred frame. She sighed and looked down at her hands. *I should have chains on my wrist after what we did...*

"So you want me to get your shit for you?"

Tochi's question rang in Nikita's ear like a distant siren's song. Her shoulders tensed as she crossed her arms. With a shrug, the husky-woman acquiesced. "Fine, Tochi. But please don't take too long."

The feline shook her head and flashed a toothy grin, "Since when have I done anything slow?"

"Welcome Home... Tochi."

"Awww cute, she programmed my name into her suite mainframe," Tochi commented as the door slid shut behind her. She looked around the relatively clean studio apartment. *Well this brings back memories...*

Hand sliding into her jacket pocket, the cream colored cat lurked around Nikita's empty apartment with cool indifference. The lingering scent of their last passionate rendezvous here still remained. *Wow... and It's been weeks since I been here.*

Tochi moved over to Nikita's entertainment center and traced her fingers along the dusty surface. *Not that she kept it all that clean when i was coming through.*

Flicking the dust from her digit, she leaned down and grabbed Nikita's headset and slipped it into her satchel bags. Next to join the advanced VR tech was the husky woman's haptic gloves.

"Don't forget my haptic booties!~"

Tochi's ear rang as Nikita's voice bellowed out from the subcutaneous speaker implanted at the base of the feline's ear. Tochi cowered over, rubbing at the small rise beneath her furred skin.

"Did you really splice into my implant just to tell me that," Tochi growled softly and pulled out her PDA. Nikita's face projected upwards from the glass surface. The husky woman's face scrunched up, bringing the glimmer of a smile to Tochi's cream cheeks.

"I can't turn if I can't interact with the pedals, Yume. You know that!"

"Yeah yeah, don't blow a gasket. I think I replaced enough of those this week to last a lifetime," The feline commented. Striding over to Nikki's closet, she reached down and scooped up the wired haptic blue loafers. She hung them up for Nikita to see through the hologram call.

"See... here they are. They are going into my bag," She carefully lowered them down into her satchel, "See... here they go. I am dropping them in. Aaaaaaand... there. They are got."

Nikita little pink muscle stuck out between fuzzy muzzle. “You don’t have to be such a bitch about it, Tochi.”

Smirking, Yumeto shook her head and her toothy grin widened. “I think we both know that isn’t true.”

A blinking light in the corner of the room drew Tochi’s attention. “Oh hey... you got a message here.”

“Ewww, Yume don’t.”

The aggravated embarrassment in Nikita’s voice was too much to resist. She strolled over to Nikita’s smart desk. “Let’s see... what was that clever pin of yours... oh yeah... 1-2-3-4... Real smooth.”

Be-deep... the desk whirred to life and Tochi’s fingers danced on the holographic interface. “Oh shit.. You got like, twenty messages, bitch. Your family’s been blowing you up. Let’s see...”

“Tochi please... just get my shit and let’s go.”

Nikita’s voice had taken on an almost painful plea. The feline’s ear twitched and her brow furrowed. *Well now I’m curious.*

Tochi let out a short cackle, her whiskers twitching. “Naw, here’s one from ‘dad’... let’s see what your pops has to say about trade tables and shit.”

“Tochi, Stop!”

It was too late, her finger was already pressing the play button. The screen flicked black before being replaced with a symbol. The Fang, Claw and Gear of MilGov, laid over a nondescript globe. Tochi’s brow furrowed further as the screen flicked to life.

She took in the video recording. A man was in the center, turned away in a large cushioned chair. Beside him, someone was hunched over, talking into his ear. *Who the fuck is this...*

Tochi leaned forward, taking in the details. The room was carpeted, with wood paneling on the lower walls giving way to ornate floral wallpaper. *Wood... where do you even get that shit now*

Behind the turned away man, there was a large window. Zenathia’s cityscape was only a faint glow at the bottom of the window. *Shit.. that’s way up the spire...*

“Tochi... Tochi I’m coming up...”

Nikita's voice sounded so far away now; Tochi's attention entirely sucked into this curious recording. Another man rushed into view and leaned down. Their words were mumbled but the feline swore she heard 'minister' and 'growlers' somewhere in there. Her chest tightened as a sinking realization began to take root. *She lied about who she is... she played you, Tochi.*

Tochi's fists balled as wobbly knees gave way, her body buckling to kneel before the glowing screen. She gazed up as the man in the center stiffened suddenly and turned. As though suddenly aware he was being recorded he reached up to disconnect the call. Before he did, Tochi got a clear look at his face.

Her breath seized in her chest as reached out and swiftly paused the recording. Purple hued eyes flicked across his features. From the intensity of his brow to the short muzzle, and the resolute iciness in his eyes there was no mistaken who this was. Her breath fled her in a shudder. Her eyes widened before squeezing shut. *I've been sleeping with the daughter of the... the...*

The door opened and Tochi was upon her feet in an instant. Wheeling around, her hands clutched the satchel, freeing it. With the motion of a seasoned slinger, she let fly the rough fabric bag directly into the husky woman's face. Watching Nikita stumble and tumble onto the couch, the purple haired catwoman crossed her arms.

"When were you going to tell me!?"

"Mmmfwha-at do you mean," Nikita braced against the couch and pulled away the satchel. Her face stung but thankfully the VR equipment wasn't very heavy. No, it was the sting of humiliation that hurt the most. Her brow furrowed and she propped herself against the back of the couch. Her tail stiff as ears folded back, the huskywoman glared at Tochi.

"I mean, when were you going to tell me that I was fucking the Minister of Interior Defense's daughter?"

"Like... how am I even supposed to answer that," Nikita threw the satchel down and stormed over to her closet. *I may as well get the rest of my shit while I'm here...*

"I don't know," Tochi exclaimed. Her tail snapped from left to right as her gaze narrowed. She let out a scoffing snarl and stepped over to the bed, "Maybe the dozens of times I grilled you about your childhood. Like, fuck... so your last name isn't Tirvsky it's Tortsy, huh? Did you even come down to the base looking for some VR dick or was that a lie too?"

Nikita gripped the edges of her folded clothes, her hands trembling. Pain racked her soul and her fur rippled in response. "Yeah... yeah I made that up. I... I had to get away from my dad."

“We all have to get away from your dad, Nikita. He’s fucking insane,” Tochi’s voice took a shrillness that hurt Nikita’s ears. The husky woman folded them back further and turned around, looking at the feline.

“You don’t get it. And it’s not like I ever talk to him. You’re making a bigger deal out of this than needs to be made.”

“Don’t...,” Tochi stabbed a finger at Nikita, rising up. Fury colored the purple of her eyes in shades of rage. Her whiskers twitched as she stormed around the end of the bed, standing only a few feet from the husky. Heat wafted off the catwoman.

“Don’t tell me I’m making a big deal out of this. You’re father is Ivan Tortsky... the man who personally oversaw the torture of MY father and who knows how many thousands of other innocent people”

Nikita’s eyes slid shut as the words echoed in her ears. Her breath seized and she lowered her head. *That’s right... my father did that...* “You’re right...”

“Yeah...,” Tochi let out a hiss and stormed to the couch. Her body was racked with violent energy. She panted softly, trying desperately to breathe the weight from her chest. It was to no avail. Turning, her hand wiped pink bangs from her face, “What’d you guys have for dinner, huh? What did you guys eat while he was ripping my dad to pieces?”

Tears hung in Tochi’s eyes and pain rang in her voice. Nikita could see it plainly. Her tail lowered further and she sat on the bed. Her face buried into her hands.

“It wasn’t like that... I... he didn’t talk about work much with us,” The husky woman replied, her voice low with misery. “I... didn’t know it would be an issue.”

Her ear followed Tochi’s pacing. *We just got good again...*

“I can’t believe this...,” Tochi exclaimed. Nikita hazarded a glance, watching the feline try to process.

“I had to hide who I was... you understand that, right? I mean, you were doing the same thing when we met.”

Tochi wagged her finger at Nikita, her hip popping out to meet her opposite hand. Tail batted the air as she shook her head. “No... no I just didn’t tell you who I was. And you went with it. You never asked. Fuck...”

Nikita sighed softly and the tension in her shoulders released. Her back arched and she returned her face to her hands. *I didn’t want to know... I didn’t know things would turn out like this.* “I’m sorry... I’m sorry I didn’t tell you, Yumeto.”

The feline's eyes rolled and she crossed her arms. Leaning against the back of the couch, she glared at Nikita from across the room. Her orange spotted cream fur bristled. "What else don't I know about you?"

"Can we do this somewhere else," Nikita asked, her voice fracturing. She turned and looked at Tochi. Through her vision blurred by salty tears, the husky woman saw the hatred in Tochi's eyes. A hollowness gouged at her being from an intangible place, deep inside. "It probably isn't safe for us here."

Tochi stared into Nikita's sorrow filled gaze. Her eyes watered as anger gave way to hurt. Brow furrowing, she looked away and nodded her head. "Yeah... you're right."

Fuck this sucks... Tochi thought as she turned and grabbed the satchel. She walked toward the door, each step bringing a heavier weight. The silence only intensified the dread that crawled through the felines thin figure. She paused and looked to Nikita, the light fur around her muzzle twitching.

"I'll be in the car... don't take too long, okay?"

Nikita only nodded, her eyes closed. She shuddered as the door slid shut. The shudders spread from her shoulders, down her spine and across her arms. Shivering, the husky woman rolled onto her bed and curled up. Her face pressed into the bedspread, where Tochi's scent had mixed with hers over the course of many nights. Clawed digits clutched the bedding tight as sobs tugged from her monochromatic form. *I should never have come down to the base.*

Tochi's fingers drummed on the yoke, desperate to alleviate the tension coiled in her chest. That pressure stifled her breath, and weighed on her mind. Purple hues looked out toward the Spire. Only a few miles away, it loomed far into the sky. Glistening with light and glass, she wondered how many MilGov workers shuffled around within the elitist structure.

Somewhere in that ugly tower, Nikita's dad is probably killing people. Torturing them... the feline thought. Her heart ached against her mind's fixation and her gaze flicked down to her hands. They'd done far worse than hidden secrets. *Who am I to judge this girl... I'd be pretty fucked up too if that monster was my father.*

The door hissed open and Tochi's head turned, ears bobbing upward. In spite of the husky woman's clear displeasure, a buzz of warmth relaxed the feline's shoulders. She watched Nikita, silently grateful for Nikita's presence. Her words were already thought up, at the tip of her tongue and ready to our free.

“Tochi... We need to talk,” Nikita said, her voice choked by apprehension. Nikita swallowed and reached out, placing her hand on the feline’s knee, “Let’s get somewhere less conspicuous and I’ll tell you everything. Exactly why I left... why I’m hiding from my father.”

Tochi’s eyes gazed into Nikita’s orbs and she could see a fear lurking within the brown and blue hues. Her fur rippled as a shiver tugged at the nape of her neck. Nodding, the feline brought the hovercar to life with a press of a button and took command of the throttle yokes.

“It’s okay..., Nikki... I mean I get it,” Tochi said, her mind focusing on the road rather than the pain that gouged at her heart. *It sucks you lied but we all tell lies sometimes...*

“I mean, it’s kinda scary... but... you make me happy.”

Nikita’s heart stirred and her shoulders relaxed. Her tail thumped against the seat with a slight cadence. Gazing out the window, she instantly recognized their destination as Tochi’s home district of Port Aster.

Smart... MilGov doesn’t have integrated infrastructure out here in the outer city...

Heterochromia eyes danced over the vibrant green acid sea lapping at the quayside. The hovercar settled down with an audible clunk and Nikita felt the weight of tension once more.

“So what did you want to talk about, Nikita,” Tochi asked, her voice distant as her gaze looked out at the end of the stone dock. *We need to talk really only means we need to break up...*

Nikita swallowed and reached into her satchel. Producing her PDA, she quickly plugged in her credentials and remote accessed her family’s servers. The jailbroken device couldn’t be traced any longer, but she knew better than to tarry too long on the familial net.

“So... when I was born... the doctors found out I had this condition,” Nikita’s words started slow, but as she started speaking she felt a pressure in her chest. She couldn’t hold the words back now, kept secret for so long.

“I had powers. Sort of... i don’t know how to explain it. It’s not like... something I could control but something that would just... manifest. I don’t know... it happened a lot when i was a kid. Things would go missing, or people. They didn’t believe me until they caught it on feed. My dad tried everything to try and get me to control it. Everything...”

Nikita swallowed and closed her eyes. She felt the coldness of the isolation rooms she was once locked away in. The tingles of needles trying to stimulate a response. Her body shuddered and she shook away the haunting memories.

“Eventually he realized it wasn’t something I knew how to control. It was just a part of me... not me. I thought that was the end of it. But when I turned eighteen, my father revealed a new plan for me.”

Nikita's fists tightened into balls and she looked out the window.

Tochi waited with bated breath, her eyes watering as she felt Nikita's pain. Reaching out, her hand rested on the husky woman's shoulder. "It's okay... you don't have to talk about it if..."

"No," Nikita shook her head, turning to gaze into purple heart eyes. Her heart pounded in her chest.

You deserve the truth... Nikita thought before summoning the strength to continue, "He wanted me to give him children... like... like a breeding program type thing. He tried to pass it off as like... the next evolution of our people. I... I barely made it off the Spire."

"Fuck... Nikita... I'm so sorry," Tochi said and she was. All the anger at her now boiled into a rage against the government.

Another reason this shit has to go... has to change. Her eyes looked over Nikita. For all those riches and connections, the huskywoman was as much a pawn in MilGov's schemes as the rest of Zenathia. Her heart ached. Leaning across the car, Tochi did her best to awkwardly hug her beloved friend. *Friend... we aren't friends anymore. Something more... She's something more.*

Nikita pressed against Tochi, releasing a shuddering breath. Her hands pressed to the catwoman's textured hoody. She tilted her head back and looked into Tochi's eyes.

"I'm sorry I lied to you, Yumeto... I..."

"Shut up, puppy dog," Tochi answered, smiling through mist laden purple hearts. She stroked the edge of Nikita's snout and planted a warm kiss on the husky's wet nose. "Let's get back to the hide out... we can talk about this more there. Sound good?"

Nikita looked over, her brow arched in relief. Relief gave way to affection and admiration as her friend started the car. Nodding, the husky settled into the seat beside her girlfriend, looking forward with a sense of hope.

"Yeah, honey... that sounds good."

Tochi's ears bobbed to the pet name, and a smirk tugged at her muzzle. "I love you, Nikita..."