

DEMONS 1001

chapter 1001

Zuhra and Jara were sitting behind the grill chatting. The grill wasn't on... and they'd dragged over some chairs so Kat wasn't exactly sure what was going on there... but things were probably fine? Kat wasn't in charge of the food, so it was definitely not her problem.

In the end, Kat dropped herself down beside Shizuka and Chiharu who were just sort of sitting on the edge of things. "Hey... you guys alright? Everyone else seems to be at least chatting a bit but you guys are just sitting off to the side by yourself," asked Kat.

Having massive bushy tails did limit their options when it came to outfits a bit. It did make certain styles look a bit awkward. Still, the Queen at least made it work. She had a tiny shawl that hang over her back like a small cape and a similar one-piece to Lily. Though her own covered her legs a fair bit more than Lily's did.

Shizuka on the other hand had gone really daring, and was wearing a thing swimsuit held up by strings on the side and a breast band that held those in place up top. "I'm just keeping my dear daughter company while she mopes..." said Chiharu.

"I'm not moping," snapped Shizuka.

"Darling... just because your fiancé can't be here doesn't mean she doesn't love you anymore," said Chiharu softly.

"I know that!" snapped Shizuka. "I know that..." Shizuka's voice dropped to a mumble. "I just... I planned to show off to her here. It was going to be our nice get away from everything. Stupid Beast King. Had to go and cause a bunch of problems for me..."

"You know it wasn't an intentional slight darling... though we can definitely cause him some grief over this when we get back," said Chiharu with a predatory smile.

Shizuka sighed again, "I don't want concessions, I want my girlfriend!"

Chiharu rolled her eyes, "I know dear I know," she said as she patted her daughter's head. She turned to Lily and Kat and mouthed out 'leave this one to me for now' before turning back to her daughter.

Guess we'll leave them to it. Should we go say hello to whoever is trapped in the tent with Sylvie and Callisto?

[You say that like they didn't enter of their own free will. We've talked enough about their obsessions with Clash of Gods. We didn't help when we kept giving them the expansions every year.]

But it's like Sylvie's favourite thing to do these days! How could I NOT get her the expansions when she looks at me with those adorable puppy dog eyes?

[I'm not going to pretend I'm not partially at fault for this... but we really should've seen this coming. We finally provided them with something that wasn't instantly understandable and they have studied more than I think most PHD students put into their graduation papers.]

Maybe we should just leave them?

[No. We're going to say hello.]

As they approached the tent, they found Kamiko hiding around the corner, and decided a small delay was fine. "Hey Kami. What're you up to?"

"I'm hiding from Sue, Roxanne and Sylvie. Though Sylvie for different reasons than the other two..." mumbled Kamiko.

"Kamiko... Sue's certainly got good enough hearing to keep track of your heartbeat if she wants to. The only reason she hasn't found you is because she's willing to play along with the fact you don't want to be found," pointed out Lily.

"I can dream ok!" retorted Kamiko. "I know perfectly well that this is only because she's allowing me... but I can sneak back into the tent if she grabs me and I doubt Sylvie would let her get away with her brand of teasing while they were trying to indoctrinate people into their cult,"

"It's not a cult!" came a shout from inside the tent. It was soundly ignored by the three outside of it.

"Look Kamiko... you just don't seem to have the greatest taste in men... and Sue is trying her best to help you out with it," said Kat... with a smug smile.

Kamiko glared at her friend. "Oh like you can talk, little miss perfect relationship. Well not everyone manages to find someone crazy enough to go straight to a permanent mind and soul bond and then have it actually fucking work out. Besides, the first guy I broke up with was nice... we just didn't see ourselves staying together long term,"

"Kamiko he was gay," said Kat with a deadpan.

Kamiko winced. "You don't know that..."

"Kamiko..." said Lily slowly. "Sue warned you he was gay. Kat and I warned you he was gay. Your sisters warned you he was gay... and what happened?"

"We broke up... but not because he was gay!" offered Kamiko.

"The fact you can say that and not be stopped by your demonic blood is honestly amazing," said Lily. "In fact. No, I have absolutely no idea how you could possibly say that. The fact your mouth was able to form the words is frankly astonishing. How can you say that?"

Kamiko shrugged, "We still talk. We're still friends even... sort of,"

Kat rolled her eyes. "Fine but what about the next two? The ones that were cheating on you,"

Kamiko growled, "That barely counts. Sue was seducing them and nearly slept with them both. That hardly counts as cheating. I mean, have you seen what she looks like?"

"Kamiko... as a gay woman that does admit Sue is exceptionally attractive, I have never, not once, used that as an excuse to cheat on Kat. In fact, it might be a shock to you to hear this... but I haven't slept with anyone except Kat. Ever? Strange isn't it?" grumbled Lily.

Kamiko growled back, "Well maybe if Sue could keep it in her pants..."

Kat rolled her eyes, "You're not actually mad at Sue. Especially considering she warned you about them both. She told you what she was going to try, and then updated you every step along the way. Up to and including the horrible punishments she came up with alongside her mother when they finally agreed to sleep with her. Admit it Kamiko. You have shit taste in men,"

Kamiko sighed and said, "Ok fine. Apparently I have shit taste in men... but it was hilarious what ended up happening? I mean have you seen the pictures!"

Kat's eyes narrowed. "Wait a minute... did you even kiss those two guys?"

Kamiko grinned, "Just now catching on?"

"Wait... wait have we been the ones out of the loop on this?" asked Kat with a glare. "Was the whole thing a setup between you and Sue?"

Kamiko shook her head, "No not the whole thing. First one was a genuine shock and I cried for a few days. You were there for that remember?" Kat nodded, "Second one though... well they were actually trying to get with my sister but I'd heard a few things about them. So I stuck my hat in the ring and plotted with Sue in the background. It was great fun. Honestly, it was more amusing then dating the first two guys. Even if I really shouldn't do it again... so much fun," Kamiko cackled.

"Where did our sweet innocent Kamiko go," whined Kat.

"She became best friends with a Succubus that has more energy go to one tit then her entire brain," said Kamiko with a grin.

"This cannot be entirely Sue's fault," retorted Kat.

Kamiko just shrugged. "Wait..." said Lily carefully, "If Sue was in on it the whole time... why are you out here hiding?"

Kamiko coughed, blushed and looked away, "No r-" before choking on the words.

Kat and Lily grinned but Kamiko just manifested her weapon and smacked them both with the pole sending Kat and Lily into the tent. Minor turned to greet them with a shy wave after the pair stood up... but everyone else was engaged in a heated argument. Or, more accurately, Nixilei and Enuco were arguing. Sylvie was listening, and Callisto was noting everything down.

Oh and the marquee was bigger on the inside. That was a little strange, but it did mean there was enough for five massive tables all filled with a gameboards. It was too complicated for Kat to properly take in at a glance... but it seemed like there was multiple copies of the game going on. Surely even Sylvie and Callisto weren't that crazy right?

Kat and Lily sidled up to Minor. She wasn't wearing a swimsuit at all. Instead, she had a loose white sundress on and only one tail. She was using the clone technique to make herself a body and she seemed to be somewhat concerned with everyone else in the marquee. "Are you ok?" whispered Kat.

“Um... er... not really? I... I wanted to know what was going on in here... but well... um... it seems they got a bit... heated. I... I guess it's a good board game? I... I don't really know I got a bit lost...” mumbled Minor.

Kat and Lily drew the poor girl into a hug, squishing her between the two of them. Kat wrapped her tail around the other two, and Lily threaded her tail through Minor's and rubbed Minor's ears. “There there, it's ok,” said Lily and Kat together. “We're here now to protect you from the big-bad board game freaks,”

Minor giggles and leaned into the hug the best she could when it was coming from two different directions.

Sylvie had aged... barely anything. Even as the years passed, she was still a tiny waifish girl that hadn't gotten much taller. She was wearing a silver one-piece swimsuit that was technically as indecent as Lily's... but in practice she still looked a lot like a child in a swimsuit so it was more adorable than anything else. Callisto had a rather thin bikini on... but she was wearing a damned lab coat over the top of everything.

Enuko was... apparently taking a page from Mai's book and wasn't wearing anything. Sure her tails were curled around her to prevent certain things from being seen... and she was technically the oldest person here by a long shot. Didn't look it though. Yeah but why is she naked? Kat's question would go unanswered.

Nixilei at least looked rather normally in her jet black bikini that rested above her now very visible wings. She had her glasses on though, and was glaring at down at everyone with all the authority of someone who knows that they're right and you're not. Well, mostly just at Enuko but the effect carried.

Kat and Lily grinned. It was nice to see everyone again. To have everyone in one place? Even if in their little groups for the moment? Well... it was looking to be a great vacation.

Chapter 1002 Back to Cultivation Stuff

Back to Sue.

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Sue's head was spinning. She now knew more about how to make ice cream than basically every other bit of cooking knowledge she possessed combined. Now, how long it'd remain in her head was another matter but she was feeling pretty educated right now. She still didn't really understand why Bodeir took such great offense to the dishes being served but at least it was all edible. Not like those cupcakes. Sue shivered. Yeah... best not to tell Bodeir about them.

That's when Sue heard a rustling from nearby, Sue turned and saw a dart shooting straight for Bodeir, she didn't even have time to properly raise her shield when Kat slammed into the ground in front of them both, catching the dart out of the air in a single moment, before a blink later and she was gone, all Sue could see was an afterimage that seemed to indicate she'd charged after the culprit.

Bodeir had actually started to move into a defensive position in front of Sue, though he was clearly watching all angles. *Naw. That's sweet. Even if he is an idiot he at least has good instincts. I'm not sure

he's actually tougher than me. Stronger certainly, but with my shield I can probably defend better. Guess I'll just apply it to Bodeir if I see the attacker.*

That's when Kat walked back into view frown on her face and a few twigs stuck in her hair and outfit. The nearby bush had been decimated by Kat's charge. Possibly more than one nearby bush. Kat was carefully brushing everything away but it was clear she wasn't happy. Kat stopped in front of them and held out the dart, still visibly leaking a sickly green liquid that smelled like swamp water. "Poison dart. I'm afraid it was all setup beforehand though. It was just attached to a one time dart launcher and there's too many people for my hearing to pick out an attacker if they were watching from afar,"

Bodeir stepped forward and grabbed the dart carefully. Kat made no move to stop him. If he was really that stupid to get hurt after she'd disabled the trap, Kat would just lock him in a closet for the rest of the tournament or something. Bodeir, unaware of Kat's inner thoughts, moved the dart to underneath his nose and sniffed it. "Hmm... smells like crushed bog apple seeds," Sue didn't notice Kat's eye twitch at the statement, "it's not deadly but it will make someone sick after about eighteen hours. This might be just a way to reduce the competition tomorrow, not targeting me specifically,"

Kat shrugged, "I don't know enough to say Bodeir. What would you like to do with the dart?"

"Hmm... I'll put it in my ring for now. Hromdir will want to take a look when we get back to the hotel. I'll make sure to give it to him," said Bodeir.

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"Do we want the mechanism as well?" asked Sue from the side.

Bodeir gave her a confused look, though Kat was looking somewhat thoughtful. "What do you mean?" asked Bodeir.

"Well, Kat said that it was a pre-planned trap. All set up before right? That means the rest of the trap is still sitting there? Why don't we take that from Hromdir as well," explained Sue.

"Hmm... yes I think Hromdir will be happy to have that... lead the way!" said Bodeir with a grin, apparently quite happy Sue had made the suggestion.

Kat shrugged and turned around ready to lead them to the trap. They moved around the bushes instead of through them this time, until they came to a small but well-trimmed tree. It grew to only slightly above head height and all the branches were carefully pruned in such a way to keep the tree in a round shape. Kat pointed to a branch, and Lily soon jumped down to it from higher up in the tree. Sue hadn't noticed her before.

With Lily now the centre of attention, the Memphis padded along the branch until they were poking at a... bird's nest? No. Sue looked closer and she could see a large hole in the side that was clearly where the dart had been launched from. It did have three eggs inside it, and the nest itself was made up of sticks, a few stray bits of fabric and perhaps some packed ice as well. "I see. Bring it down," said Bodeir firmly.

Kat hopped lightly, plucking the nest, from the branch and examining it herself for a moment before handing it over to Bodeir. Sue leaned over his shoulder and took a look for herself. The main hole was

obvious, but as Bodeir turned the nest around, it was clear that it could shoot a number of darts in various directions. None of them seemed to have been launched though.

After Bodeir finished with his inspection, which was really just one full rotation he pulled the nest into his ring and remarked. "The eggs were fake,"

"How do you know?" asked Kat, curious.

"My ring can only handle dead things. The fact that the eggs went in as well means they were all dead, or they were never real in the first place," responded Bodeir, as if he was just repeating an explanation he'd heard before.

Kat narrowed her eyes, "What about the twigs and leaves? I'm pretty sure there was at least one leaf in that nest that was still alive,"

Bodeir answered with a confused shrug, "Because it's a plant?"

"Why?" asked Kat, still unsure of the exact mechanics.

"I have no idea," admitted Bodeir. Apparently it wasn't poor form to admit you didn't understand that particular detail about the storage rings. It was probably something most people didn't know.

I wonder... I know some demon abilities work like that but not all of them. I wonder if it's something intrinsic to the way the ring works? Or if the ring just forcibly stops living things entering as a safety measure. I doubt there's air in there for things that still need it, so it might just be to stop idiots using them to kill people. Then again... living beings with qi or some other form of higher energy expelling that energy inside an expanded pocket of space might play havoc with the structure. Perhaps a bit of both?

"Is there anything else you'd like to check on before I move away again?" asked Kat.

"You don't have to," said Sue instantly. *Where did that come from? She's my friend sure, but it's clear this party thing isn't her scene and I'm sure she's fine talking to Lily. Why did I automatically say that?*

Kat just shrugged, and looked at Bodeir who also shrugged. "I do not mind your lovely presence of course, but it is considered to be a social faux pas to be too obvious with your bodyguard standing over you. Either decision is fine with me,"

Kat shrugged again and dashed away. Not surprising really. With Kat 'gone' Sue turned to Bodeir and said, "Is it time to greet our hosts now? Hopefully you have calmed after getting your complaints off your chest,"

Bodeir nodded, "Indeed. Disparaging their efforts, even if not to their face was a comforting thing. I should be more willing to express my bad opinions, as it seemed to have helped me subdue the burning rage I was experiencing much quicker than meditation,"

Not sure that's the best thing to take away from this... but sure. You also seem remarkably unconcerned with the assassination attempt. Apparently that's not even something to get mad about? I mean, you didn't mention it... and I was trying to avoid mentioning it well. Hmm... is he just trying not to think about it? Or is it really that small of a concern?

The pair moved back inside. It didn't take long to find Bing... but Feng was missing. Bodeir didn't seem to think it important and made his way over to Bing, who was chatting with a few other women. Before Bodeir could even try to interrupt she turned to face them both. "Bodeir! It's so great to see you! Feng is actually off looking for you right now. Still, I can't say I am disappointed to talk to you first!"

I feel like the false pep is a bit much. To Sue's surprise though, Bodeir gave a slight bow and said, "This heir of the Mountain Shaker Sect greets one half of the twin heirs. I have had an interesting evening so far,"

Bing laughed and slapped Bodeir a few times on the back, "Oh, interesting evening he says. Don't worry, I'm sure you think the food was terrible or something. Don't even worry about it. I bet our lord father did that specifically just to piss you off. I can't really say though, I have not spoken to him recently,"

"I would not presume to understand the lord patriarch's feelings on this matter," said Bodeir woodenly.

"Now don't be like that, Dad can be a bit of a butthead when he wants to be, and making great food that also pisses you off? That seems like something he'd do," said Bing not a shred of familial loyalty.

What... what is this conversation?

Chapter 1003 Bing, Expert Conversationalist

Sue

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Why is Bing so aggressively familiar! Sue had been carefully trying to work out how to get away from this conversation for a while but Bing wasn't really giving her a chance. As casual as Bing was, she also made sure to include everyone in the conversation when she could. Sure Sue had just given yes or no answers so far, but that said more about Sue's lack of desire to engage with Bing then it did about Bing.

"... have you ever considered being a chef Bodeir? You always seem to take food so seriously. I mean, I've considered it a time or two and then I remember that time I managed to burn water despite coming from a family renowned for their ice powers and decide it's not a good idea..."

Sue really had no clue how to deal with Bing. *She dominates the conversation, but she's also super casual... and polit. While Bodeir's...* "I have meditate on my calling a number of times and yet my answer has no changed in a number of years. I am afraid that I do not believe the path of the chef is my calling," *Like that. I can't tell if they're getting along or not!*

Sue's attention started to wander until she heard her name, "...so what about it Sue? What's it like being a demon?" asked Bing.

Ah shit. I missed the first part of that question. Um... and like... how do I answer this anyway? It's not like being a demon is all that different to a number of other sentient races. We've just got exceptionally long lifespans and require much less training to progress in power. We're a lot like higher level dragons really... but do they even have those here? Not sure I could use them as a comparison. I mean they have mana... and qi... but do they have 'dragon god' dragons? Or the weaker versions...

“Um... it’s... well I suppose I can’t really compare, I’ve never not been a demon after all,” said Sue eventually. “Do you guys have dragons here? The really big ones that just grow forever until they can sneeze and destroy a mountain?”

Bing nodded, “Yup we do. Or at least... my tutors have warned me that we do. Never seen one myself,”

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Sue nodded as well and said, “Yeah demons are a lot like those dragons. We just get stronger by existing and so a lot of us just use our extensive lifespans to take up hobbies. Of course, not everyone will keep going up in power forever, and some people decide combat IS a hobby. Those guys can be ridiculously strong,”

Bing frowned and asked, “What do you mean you don’t keep going up in power forever? Isn’t that how dragons work?”

Sue shrugged and said, “I don’t know enough about the specifics of dragons to say they always work that way... but demons sadly don’t. We go up in rather distinctive tiers and very rarely do we get any warning before it happens. Sure we might get little signs a few days beforehand, but considering it can be years, decades, centuries or longer... a few days warning is nothing really,”

“That doesn’t seem particularly fair. Isn’t it possible to get stronger through effort?” asked Bing, clearly not pleased with that particular aspect of how demons work.

“It is possible, but not the same way. A bit like mortals really. We can work out our muscles, well most of us,” not sure how Kat’s regen works. Would it let her work out? “and of course we can get more skills... but you could be the most powerful Rank 1 in existence and it doesn’t make you any more likely to Rank up. I’m the oldest of my three good friends, but also the weakest because I’m still Rank 1,” explained Sue.

“Does that bother you?” asked Bing, and a glance showed that Bodeir was concerned as well.

Sue winced. *I can’t lie and say it doesn’t bother me at all. Guess I’ll have to actually give a proper answer. I bet Kat will here this as well. Sorry I didn’t talk about this with you Kat, but you never asked!* “It bothers me a bit, but more for lifespan reasons then power ones. For my hobbies and goals I don’t really need to Rank up... lifespan is directly related to our Rank. Sure some abilities we get can enhance it, and we’ve got great medical care... but there’s still a limit. I’m not too worried just yet... but if I get too old without ever Ranking up? The chances that get there eventually drop,”

“Well what are your hobbies? I know enough to guess you’re a Succubus, but how much does that mean?” asked Bing.

“That is the question isn’t it?” postulated Sue. “I’m about as close to the stereotype as you can get. I love sex, and like to be pretty adventurous with how I go about it. I’m always down to fuck new people, or find a new fetish... but I don’t know how much of that is because I’m a Succubus.

“It’s an issue of numbers really. Because the first few generations of Succubi were really into sex... they had a lot more kids then other types of demons. Now, many years later, Succubi are still the demons most obsessed with sex... but is that because we’re Succubi, because we learnt it from our parents, or because we make up the largest percentage of the population?”

"Huh... I never thought of it that way..." said Bing with a grin. "I guess I just imagined there was a balance of all types of demons... but obviously you need to have sex to get little demons so whichever ones are doing that more..."

Sue nodded, "Yup. And Succubi ended up with a lot of... 'crossbreeds' essentially. It also means most people have a Succubus or two in their family trees... and if they happen to like sex... well some says maybe that's why?"

Sue was actually getting into the conversation and didn't notice that Bodeir had managed to sneak away. Bing did... but she was also enjoying the conversation and was happy to let Bodeir 'escape' if that's what he really wanted to do. "That does complicate matters I'm sure," said Bing, "I guess it's one of those, eaglet and the egg problems. Is the other demon here like you?"

Sue didn't even think anything strange of the question, "Oh no not at all. Kat's such a sweetie, powerful too but completely asexual," Bing looked a bit confused at the term, "did that not translate right? She has no sexual desire at all,"

"Yes... that is... I could tell you were saying that... but it was overlapped with another word. Very strange... and... no sexual desire at all? How would something like that work?" asked Bing.

Sue tilted her head to the side, thinking on it for a moment, as she did though she explained the translation issues, "You either don't have a word for 'asexual' in your language, or you've never heard of it before. That's why you got the impression of a word and an explanation. As for how it works... well... it's just how it is? It's not something I can really imagine properly.

"I mean, I'm normally at least a little bit horny and I find it very natural to look at a nice set of muscles and get a little hot under the collar. Still, I do know that it's... well it's quite uncommon in Succubi, but not the demon race as a whole. A lot of Shadow demons are asexual. Not sure how those guys have sex at all considering what I know of them... hmm... maybe I should try and seduce one? For science obviously!"

Bing laughed at Sue's idea, "Yes of course. I am sure you are not interested in the act for any other reason then the pursuit of knowledge,"

Bing shook her head and said after her laughter died down, "I wish I was free to explore that side of things at least a bit more. My father has forbidden me from dating, and my mother supported him. Apparently it's a big deal for me as a maiden of the Holy Icy Wind sect that I remain pure.

"Not sure if it's actually important to our cultivation technique or not though. I mean, both of my parents insist that it IS a big component of the technique I was given to study... but obviously I exist right? So how pure can my parents really be if they had me? It's not like I don't know where babies come from. You know anything about it?"

Sue shook her head, "Sorry I can't say I do. Where I grew up sex and romance was a rather well known and well studied topic, especially amongst the adults. Everyone over twenty-five would convince us just to be ourselves. Though other teenagers were annoying shits,"

Bing nodded in commiseration.

Chapter 1004 Bringin' Down the Mood

KAT! Yes, that's right! We're back to our main characters perspective! Still party night, but it's mostly over.

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Kat had to grab Sue from her conversation with Bing when Bodeir indicated his desire to leave. It was already quite late, so Kat simply nodded and grabbed Sue before they left the venue as a group. Lily was asleep in Kat's backpack, having been that way since shortly after they found that hidden blow dart in the tree. She'd been a lovely help. Making sure to watch over Kat's shoulder when the situation called for it... but staying alert for so long was apparently a bit much if Lily stuck to her Memphis form.

Bodeir once again took the cabin at the front of the carriage and Sue collapsed bonelessly into her seat. "Are you alright Sue? You seem practically exhausted..." asked Kat.

Sue waved Kat's concern off. "It's just been a long day. I tried and failed at a number of social interactions, did a great deal self-reflection was attacked, learnt more about ice-cream manufacturing than I ever wanted to know and finally, I got dragged into a surprisingly interesting conversation with Bing that might have just be an elaborate way to drag information out of me and I didn't notice until you grabbed me just now,"

"Oh... um... well... how big of a concern is that last point?" asked Kat.

Sue groaned while letting her head loll back, "That's the worst part. I don't know. I was talking about a lot of stuff really. About me, about you, not about Lily thankfully, Bing didn't even think to ask that. Which... I'd like to say I'd have known to keep that a secret considering the effort you've both used to ensure they don't realise what's going on there... but frankly? I don't know if I would've. At least, not the general stuff you'd normally admit to if asked, but considering how low key you've tried to keep things? I'm pretty sure I'd have let something slip if she asked the right questions..."

"That's fine Sue, it's not that big of a deal," said Kat. And she meant it too. *Sure it wouldn't be ideal if things got out about Lily but that was mostly just a first line of defence for her. From the sound of things, Sue didn't say anything. As worried as she seems to be of what she MIGHT have done, she doesn't have any tangible transgressions to be sorry for. I'm not the thought police.*

"Yes it IS," insisted Sue, despite Kat's words. "Not only are you my friend, certainly more of my friend than Bing is, I thought I was good at this social game. It turns out, not only am I a bit of a shitty friend, I am also horrendous at proper social interaction after interacting exclusively with people dominated by envy, jealousy and lust. I think my social skills have atrophied in a massive way, and I should know BETTER,"

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"Sue, you're clearly a bit worn down after tonight, but I don't think you're a bad friend at all," said Kat softly, trying to reassure her friend. Because that's what Sue was. Her FRIEND. A bit sex crazed, and prone to teasing everyone, but certainly a friend.

"Bah, you're too nice. I nearly gave the game away because I was able to have an enjoyable conversation tonight. If that's all it takes for me to spill the beans, I should've just spent the night chatting to you. I got SOME info about Bodeir's competitors but nothing useful. Heck, I'm lucky I don't

really know anything about how Bodeir fights because I'd probably have handed that over in a heartbeat.

"I know Bodeir Sr really wasn't looking for that kind of 'defence' from me, but I shouldn't be such a liability. Honestly, I don't know why I'm on this mission. I'm only Rank 1 and I'm not that good a fighter. Bodeir Jr could beat me in a fight, and nobody really approached Bodeir tonight. There was like, one maybe two girls who thought to try until I stared them down but that was easy. If they could be scared off by a bit of a sour look from me, they weren't going to actually approach Bodeir with proper romantic intentions," grumbled Sue.

*Is Sue drunk or something? I feel like wrapping her up in blankets and giving her a hug. Wait... can demons even get drunk considering how we eat? Wait, scratch that, how would she be drunk, Lily and I watched her most of the night and she didn't really drink much of anything. Unless it was in the ice cream or something? Hmm... I mean... it could happen I guess?

But I ate the food, and even shared some with Lily and I'm perfectly fine. Then again my regeneration would probably counter anything... but it would still work on Lily right? But she seemed fine. Definitely not drunk or depressed before she went so sleep. Is it just timed delayed?

Or am I just paranoid? I'm guessing Sue is normally sent on easier missions when she's all by herself. Missions are tailored to the demon's skill level after all. The fact that I am here might be really skewing the perceived difficulty with her. I mean, even though she hasn't done much, her words not mine, Bodeir isn't coming home with a random girl on his arm so she succeeded in her part of this Contract.

I could also probably bring up the fact that she gets to sleep with Bodeir now maybe? Would that cheer her up? I mean... it was her idea to wait this long though... and she seems tired. Is she too tired for sex? I don't really have any idea of how awake someone should be for something like that, and Lily would be too embarrassed to tell me if she did know... but she probably doesn't either truth be told.

So would bringing that up be good? I certainly don't want to... and if Sue really is too tired perhaps it's best not to bring that fact up to her? Honestly I have no clue how to deal with this at all. I'm used to literal children, and terribly insecure teenagers. I have no idea how to deal with a normally confident person in their twenties. I mean... granted, I tend to forget about that part fairly often, but it's a great excuse here!*

"Sue... just because you're worried about things you MIGHT do doesn't make you a bad friend," said Kat going for the easier topics to disprove. "I can't hear your thoughts and I don't expect you to be perfect all the time. We're friends Sue not... well I don't even expect that level of care in Lily, and I CAN hear her thoughts. I don't know why you're letting this worry you,"

Kat could see that her words weren't really getting through so she considered what other angles she could use. A recent, and particularly powerful example came to mind, "What about the day we spent together before the Contract huh? You went out of your way to help find my little sister a good present. You haven't even met her before, and you weren't even invited to the party. Granted, it would've been hard to have you on Earth, and you're certainly more my friend then here's, but you helped me with that no questions asked! Is that something a bad friend would do?"

"But it's not like I had anything else to do that day!" retorted Sue trying to downplay her assistance with that matter. "I was just going to laze around doing nothing, maybe look at some porn if I could be bothered to do anything noteworthy at all! Spending time with friends isn't something I should be praised for!"

Kat carefully massaged her temples. *Why is it so hard to convince Sue she's not suddenly some horrible person. Does she think I didn't know what she was like when we starting being friends? And it's not like any of her questionable traits were even on proper display today! Heck, she woke me up so that I could cuddle with Lily in my sleep! Why is she making this so difficult! I just want you not to be sad Sue. Is that something that's hard to comprehend?*

"What do you want me to do Sue? I literally can't lie and all I've been doing is giving you my opinions. You are not a bad friend. Full stop. See, I can say it. It wasn't hard. I'll say it again. You are a good friend. Is that enough proof that it's the truth? I can repeat it a few times if you want," said Kat, perhaps a little heatedly.

"Bah, it just means you THINK it's the truth. I can say I'm a bad friend. See, I've countered your point. I said it. I'm a bad friend!" 'affirmed' Sue.

Kat rolled her eyes. "Ok, I think you're just really tired at this point and are saying things you don't mind. Plus, isn't it my opinion as your friend that matters more when it comes to considering if you are a good friend or not?"

"Bah, don't bring logic into this!" insisted Sue.

"Sue, I brought logic into this a long time ago. You are a good friend and I don't like the fact that you are so down on yourself for seemingly no reason. Maybe you should avoid sleeping with Bodeir tonight and get some real rest," said Kat without thinking too much. It's what she wanted to say... probably.

"Cutting me off from sex? Shame on you! I'm perfectly coherent. How could you even suggest such a cruel thing? I must be a bad friend if that's your solution! I'm not tired at all" said Sue with such grand conviction Kat was almost willing to believe it. Well... until...

Sue promptly fell face first into Kat's legs and started snoring.

Chapter 1005 Late Night Pranks

When they returned to their lodgings, and Kat stepped out of the carriage, sleeping Sue in hand. She saw Hromdir doing the same thing with a sleeping Bodeir and got a fantastic idea. Walking over to Hromdir she said, "Hey Hromdir... I have an idea that I'd like to run by you. See it's like this why don't we put them both in bed, take most of their clothes... and act like we all know they slept together? They'd never admit that they don't remember it. I bet. Especially if we play them off each other,"

Hromdir listened to the plan, nodding in the appropriate places, a smile growing on his face. "You think that will work?"

"They'd never admit to not remembering what happened, I'm certain it'll work," returned Kat.

Hromdir, "Ok, I'm in," said Hromdir with a nod, and a light chuckle.

With that, they got started on the plan. Kat and Hromdir carried their charges upstairs to the master bedroom and lay them both out. They were stripped down to their underwear and Sue's hands scrabbled around the bed looking for warmth. Instead of Bodeir though, she found the sheets, wrapping them around herself in a big cocoon. Bodeir was similarly looking for warmth and found his way to Sue's cocoon with a bit of effort before wedging himself under the side so that he was partially hidden.

"You know what... this is already better than I imagined," said Kat as she looked at the bizarre sight. "Did you want to take a picture of this or something? Not sure if that's something you guys can do,"

Hromdir paused mid laugh. "Hmm... on the one hand, that's awfully disrespectful to my lord. Pranking him is one thing, especially something harmless like this that will not effect his public reputation, and might can be funny for all involved. Gathering evidence might be a step too far..."

"On the other hand though," Hromdir grinned as he continued, "I've known Bodeir Jr since he was a boy, and Bodeir Sr would pay handsomely for an information jade with this image stamped on it. I might even be able to use it to reduce some of Bodeir Jr's harsher punishments. It could be argued, that by using the picture as a preventative measure from the consequences of Bodeir Jr's actions, I am in fact doing him a favour by making copies. Do you want one?"

Kat shrugged and said, "I've got perfect recall. It takes a bit to find information sometimes, but it's always there so I won't be forgetting this scene... ever. So I don't really need one... then again it might be nice," Kat paused. "Hang on... do I need qi for it to work though?" Hromdir nodded, "Ok, never mind it then, I wouldn't be able to use it. None of my good friends likely can either,"

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Hromdir shrugged and pulled a small white rock from his sleeve. It didn't look like he was doing anything, but a moment later he nodded and then made to leave the room. Kat just shrugged and followed him out. Before pausing, "Wait... where should we leave the clothes?"

Hromdir just kept walking as he spoke, "They shall be washed as is proper. Even if they were left on the floor of the bed in fits of passion as we are trying to imply they still need to be washed and Bodeir has a full team of servants. The only difference is that I personally would not have come to collect them,"

"Oh... right..." mumbled Kat, realising it was a bit of a silly point. Nothing stayed dirty or untidy here for long. Bodeir DID have a lot of servants. The idea to leave the clothes strewn on the floor or something similar didn't take into account the realities of the situation.

The pair walked down the hall, Kat feeling somewhat awkward for her thoughtless comment. This continued until they passed by one of the larger windows and Kat turned to it, opening the window and letting herself out. No better way to escape an uncomfortable situation than to literally leave the situation behind.

Once outside, Kat hopped up onto the roof and made her way to the same spot she'd been in the previous nights... and was able to instantly spot a few people watching the building. None of them were approaching... but it was quite clear that they were watching the mansion. Kat pursed her lips, glaring at two of them but neither reacted to her looks.

*Hmm... I don't know if I should be scary these people off. They aren't actually within the property line and they aren't moving. Do I have jurisdiction here? I don't think so? Maybe? I can't say I have much experience with this sort of thing. I'm not the police either... I'm just a bodyguard. I'm like a magical bouncer. I could throw them out of 'the club' but if they're just doing dumb shit across the road? Really not my job. Which... no that's not the best analogy...

Eh, it's good enough. Lily would understand. Yup. Totally. Kat sighed. The question is still, what am I supposed to do about it? Do I scare them off a bit? I'm sure if I hurt them without due cause Bodeir's enemies would use that as a chance to censure me. Perhaps even prevent me from watching over him. That'd be pretty dangerous... and not all that unlikely right? Could I send my fire over them?

Hmm... no, not enough range. Or at least, I wouldn't have control at that range. I could throw it towards them slowly and it would get there eventually... but I don't actually want to hit people. Though, it'd be amusing if all the 'hidden' watchers were marked with a big floating fireball, announcing their presence for anyone looking. Hmm... but perhaps...*

Kat got to work, summoning up a cluster of flames equal to the number of people and then summoning one more to represent herself, making it about half the size of the others. From there, she started to spread the individual ones out. Flexing her control to make sure they were all accurately placed in comparison to the others. Soon she had a 3D map of the relative positions of all of her watchers.

Said watchers didn't seem to know what to make of her little fire show. That is, until a new one popped up. Dashing over the rooftops and settling in to watch. Kat summoned up a new bit of demonic energy for them and let move to the correct place. One of the watchers, a woman, went wide eyed at the sight and moved spots slowly. Kat of course, moved the relevant bit of fire as she did so.

The woman glared at Kat before using the map Kat had supplied to find one of the other watchers, taking them out. Kat raised an eyebrow in surprise and dropped the flame representing the now unconscious watcher and decided to have a little fun. She fluffed up the size of the fire representing the aggressive watcher, who noticed this and made rude gesture in Kat's direction.

This was when laughter started to break out. A different watcher, a man this time, was sitting on one of the roofs laughing. When he saw Kat glance over, he smiled. Then, in a flash he'd changed from a full black bodysuit into a casual shirt and pants. Though he kept the mask. Next, he summoned up a few planks of wood. Kat looked at him confused, until he started to construct some kind of platform using the gutters to brace the support pillars, and letting it lean against the roof at an angle.

After checking the platform was stable, he then pulled out a small table and a lounge chair, a number of finger foods, and a book. Kat's jaw dropped as he relaxed into the chair and grabbed a handful of what looked to be salted nuts of some kind. He then sent a thumbs up in Kat's direction and cracked open his book. Kat shot a grin and her own thumbs up back. Why not?

That man has too much chill. Kat glanced around slowly, taking in the scene. Despite the distraction the relaxed watcher provided, it looked like nobody had used it to get any closer. *Hmm... could've sworn that was supposed to be a distraction.* Little did Kat know that the watcher in question had used a rather powerful illusion to try and disguise his activities. Kat's complete disregard of them let him know with certainty that she could see through them. Nobody else even realised he was doing anything strange, a tribute to his skill.

While Kat was looking for people abusing the lapse in attention the man provided, the rest were trying to work out why Kat was suddenly on high alert. Assuming that somebody had tried to sneak in or made some aggressive movements. Most still not realising that Kat was pointing them all out to their competitors.

Chapter 1006 I am Once Again, Asking for your Support

Kat rolled her shoulders as she got ready to leave her position. Nobody tried attacking this night, and shockingly few people realised what she was doing with the flames, but those who did normally used that information in amusing ways. Though the guy with the book was still the most amusing to Kat personally. Kat felt a little worn out, but rather relaxed. Kat was pretty sure she'd be fine for a day or two longer if needed.

Lily was still asleep in the backpack, though it was resting on her stomach instead of hanging from her back. The Memphis didn't so much as stir throughout the entire night. A bit of a shame, but not a surprise. Kat didn't get much training in during the night either... but she was worried about her long term stamina if she wasn't going to sleep at all so the choice not to practice at all was a realistic one.

Kat made her way back inside and decided to have a shower. She didn't need it, but felt that it might help her relax further. The water here was lukewarm at best at best, at least to her senses, and didn't help as she'd hoped. Turning the shower off, Kat let the water drop off her as she headed to the dining room.

The servants were moving about, preparing plates for three people and cleaning the room before use. No food was there just yet, but that was fine. Kat simply sat back and let the moments tick by. It was Bodeir that entered the room first, she was expecting Sue to be first, but perhaps that wasn't a good guess anyway. Bodeir was used to training regularly. Something he was clearly skipping in favour of participating in the tournament later today.

As Bodeir took a seat he said, "Please wait a short time on the meals, if that is possible without damaging the quality. I wish to speak with Kat, and do not wish to be talking during a meal,"

"Of course sir," said one of the nearby maids who went off to inform the chef. The food prepared for this morning was a porridge that could be left sitting for quite some time without issue.

Once the maid was on her way, Bodeir turned back to Kat. "I'd like to discuss my protection during the tournament today. It is a martial contest, and people get injured. I do not know what my father said to you, but I want no help at all during my matches. The ring will have protections inscribed on it to prevent death, and it has been decades since the last one. I expect you to let me fight, and bring no dishonour to my household,"

Well Bodeir, I'm afraid I have to disappoint you. Not only is decades a pitiful amount of time for something like this, but your father was pretty clear that I was to prevent any blows that could be deadly. While the rings might be inscribed with all sorts of defences, the whole reason I'm here is because the sect is potentially going to turn from an ally to an enemy and Bodeir Sr wants you to live through any assassination attempts.

“Bodeir, I hope you realise that regardless of what you may desire I am bound by Contract. We talked about this before on the journey over. I cannot simply change the terms of the Contract, and you cannot either. It is not a matter of money or desire, it is simply not how it works.”

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Bodeir tapped his finger on the table a few times before signalling to the servants he wanted the dish brought it. Kat thought it was a rather juvenile way of avoiding the conversation but she didn't say anything. When the meal came, and Sue had not come down, likely as she was still asleep, Kat remained quiet. Both in her thoughts and her words. There was nothing to say really, and nothing to think.

It was of course, quite clear that Bodeir wanted the chance to fight without having to worry she'd interfere. Kat didn't know what he expected from her though. She might not think too fondly of Bodeir, but she didn't hate him, and she at least respected his father. So she would keep him alive, despite any complaints he might level at her. Kat knew she would not regret this course of action, and so did not have any reason to muse on it. Nor did she have much to say about the porridge.

As someone who'd had porridge before, this one was nothing special. There was a hint of cinnamon in it, but that was all they'd used to spice it up. Which was fine, it wasn't bad... but it was just a competent breakfast porridge. The only noteworthy thing about it really was that if Lily had been awake it would've been difficult to let the Memphis eat some without transforming. It would've gotten all over her whiskers and maybe face. An amusing thought, perhaps, and that adorable image was what Kat spent her breakfast thinking of.

When the meal was cleared away Kat made to leave when Bodeir spoke again, “Isn't there anything I can do to convince you? I'm not a child, I can take care of myself. I am entering a series of duals. It IS going to be dangerous, and you can't stop me,”

Kat sighed and sat back down, “Stopping you isn't the point Bodeir. I'm not going to be attempting to bring you or your family shame. I am going to be watching for lethal blows, and defending you from them if push comes to shove. I don't understand why you're taking this so hard,”

“Because I'll never live it down,” said Bodeir harshly. “This isn't just about face, or reputation, even if it is a big part of it. If you save my life, I'll forever be known as that little kid who needed his dad to hire a bodyguard for him. It will haunt me, possibly for centuries in the wider community and I'll become a joke to so many people,” Bodeir let out a hiss of air as he slammed his hand into the table. “That's not even taking into consideration what my father will do.

“My father will take this as justification for every stifling action he's ever thought up. I'll exist in a nice bubble of safety protected from the world forever. I'll have more bodyguards than servants, and I'll never go anywhere without at least three teams of spies on the lookout for poison and assassins. I will never be free to live my own dreams. I will be escorted from place to place as my father dictates.

“That's not even taking into account the political ramifications. If you act, it'll mean that we didn't trust the protections the Holy Wind Sect have applied. Not only that, but it will be just as good as declaring the Mountain Shaker sect thinks I was about to be assassinated. Father will have to retaliate in some manner, even if it can be blunted by surviving through it, the horror that would follow is too much,”

When Bodeir finished he was breathing heavily. There was also one thing, that was made clear but not said. This was something Bodeir felt was a major risk of becoming a heart demon. Kat might save his life... but just as easily destroy his future in the same blow.

*I'm surprised Bodeir put this much thought into it... and it seems that his father is worrying a bit much...But I am still bound by Contract. No matter how many good points Bodeir Jr makes I can't just ignore a threat to his life. I was charged to protect him to the best of my abilities and I can do no less than that. *

Kat sighed once again. "I'm sorry Bodeir, even if you made at least one good point, which I'm still not certain you did, even if it gave me something to think about... I just can't do anything about it,"

"You said you respect my father," returned Bodeir, "Why don't you respect me and my own strength? Respect the fact that I can live through this,"

"Can you though? I've seen you act incredibly stubbornly. I don't know if I could trust you to yield if you're up against a tough opponent. And that's what you'd need to do. The instant there is a risk of losing, you'd need to forfeit. That's the only way I could promise not to interfere. You'd be safe... and likely look like a coward. But perhaps that's better than me interfering?" offered Kat.

Bodeir grimaced at Kat's answer and got up, throwing back his chair and stomping out of the room. Kat just sighed, again. *I've been doing that a lot this morning. And things had been going so well.* Kat finished off the water in her glass and looked at the mostly eaten porridge. She hadn't really been hungry she sat down. She certainly wasn't anymore.

Chapter 1007 In the Carraige, Chillin'

Kat had seen a few glimpses of Sue before they got into the carriage that was going down the mountain but they hadn't spoken yet. Apparently the big arena they were using was further down the mountain for more easy access. It was actually a series of arenas so that they could run multiple fights at the same time. Sue slid into the carriage with grace that didn't hold a single hint of the exhaustion from yesterday, dressed in her demonic attire this time.

Kat wasn't sure what to say when Sue cracked a cheeky grin. Kat continued to stare at her friend until the carriage started moving. "What's with the smile?" asked Kat hesitantly, not wanting to give the game away.

Alas, Kat would have to be disappointed because Sue replied with, "Oh I'm just so proud of you. Playing a prank on me like that. The faces Bodeir made when getting up were adorable, and I played along in case you're wondering. He has no idea at all and was much to flustered to try and think it through properly,"

Kat couldn't help but pout at that, "How did you figure it out?" asked Kat not quite wanting to admit to the prank if Sue was just bluffing. She probably wasn't, but Kat didn't want to give the game away quite so easily if Sue hadn't worked it out.

"Kat, honey, I have been fucked on Sundays, Saturdays, Monday's and Tuesday's. I have been fucked in the morning, I have been fucked in the evening. I have been fucked while I was sleeping, and fucked while awake. If I did not know what it felt like to wake up after a night of sex at this point then my

memory would have to be catastrophically bad. I'm sure you hoped I'd make assumptions about doing things before falling asleep but you made a few mistakes.

"Firstly, you tried to keep some of my modesty by leaving my panties on. If I'd actually had sex, the last thing I'd be worrying about was if I was flashing my vagina at the guy in bed with me. The dude would've just been buried inside me Kat. The idea of covering up after that is just ludicrous. I wear clothes because they can be more titillating than walking around naked... but I'm not going to care if someone sees me naked. Honestly, most days the clothes are more for other people than me. Plus look at what I'm wearing right now. This is my 'casual attire'" said Sue as she gestured to herself wearing basically nothing, same as the day Kat met her.

*Ok fair. I do kinda want to ask about that 'fucked when asleep' thing. Seems a bit questionable if you ask me... but I'm scared of the answers. I'll probably still ask... *

Sue continued speaking, likely guessing at Kat's thoughts but not feeling the need to comment, "The second mistake you made was that I was too clean. I suppose you wouldn't know it Kat, but sex is messy, and you wake up pretty gross if you pass out during the act. Unless I just assumed the servants cleaned us both up, the fact that I wasn't covered in all sorts of fluids was a pretty good indicator I'd just fallen asleep...

"Finally, the biggest mistake was assuming I just wouldn't notice. Well, as I said before Kat, I've been thoroughly fucked, and not-so-thoroughly fucked a number of times. I know what it feels like the hours after that pretty damn well. I was always going to notice... but good on you for the attempt. I had to try rather hard to prevent myself from laughing at Bodeir's reactions, and the fact you felt comfortable enough with our friendship to know I'd find it funny as well? It gives me the warm fuzzies, and does more to reassure me of our friendship than that whole conversation we had in the carriage last night,"

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Kat winced at that reminder. "Sorry... um... I still don't think you're a bad friend? If that helps?"

Sue shrugged, "Nothing you can do about it. I was rather sleepy apparently and not in my best frame of mind. Just because it was true then though, doesn't mean I still think it's true now. I mean... sleepy me did have a point, but I can recognise she was being quite stupid. I don't really know where all these issues of mine are suddenly coming from but if I had to guess I took sexual repression to another level,"

"I don't follow," responded Kat.

Sue nodded, "Right well... usually sexual repression is when you're repressing certain sexual desires. It's not great and tends to leave a person miserable if kept up for an extended period of time. I, instead, decided to use sex to repress all the other problems in my life. Which... I don't think I realised I was doing it before. I thought I was happy... and maybe for a time I was. Not to say I'm suddenly super depressed or anything just... hmm... how do I explain this..."

Sue ran her finger along the underside of her chin, then let it rise up to her lips where she pulled at them for a while before continuing. "Ok, so Stone did me a huge favour hooking me up with you two. I had to trust you to keep me alive during that whole thing, and it was pretty intense. What it forced though, was a small friendship forged in battle that might not have lasted long at all.

"From there though... you and Kamiko were sweet and innocent and just nice to be around, so I stuck to you both as a chance just to tease you... and then real friendship. I think... I've been saying my old 'friends' were just acquaintances but I'm wondering more and more if they even qualify for that role. They enabled me, and probably didn't help with my 'just have more sex' attitude to dealing with my more complex emotions.

"I still love it of course, and I'm not trying to change completely... but I've been thinking about things more now and I think a lot of it is hitting me. Perhaps it'll come in waves, but I at least see where sleepy me was coming from. I think I'm benefiting a lot more from this relationship than you, Kamiko, and I guess Lily are. Which... is silly. As a demon that's awake and not sleep deprived, I know that friendship isn't a transaction. I shouldn't be judging it that way. I'm still not the best friend to any of you three... but that's fine. We haven't known each other that long, and we can build on it,"

That's good. I had no idea what I was doing. "That's good Sue. I... honestly I don't really know how to deal with that sort of thing but it wasn't great to see you having a breakdown and not know how to help. Now, unless you want to go over it more... I do feel like I have to ask... having sex while asleep?"

Sue smiled, "Ah, that was a good night. You see, I wanted to know if having sex while I was asleep would affect my dreams at all. Of course, that being said, I couldn't trust that I'd be able to sleep through the act if I wasn't exhausted... so there was an orgy first, with the testing later..."

Kat held up a hand, "You know what. I don't think I want to know. As long as you were on-board with the whole thing from the beginning and nobody forced you to do anything, I think I'm fine with not knowing about the intimate details,"

Sue smiled and nodded, "That's fine. It's part of what I like about spending time with you. You CARE. My old 'friends' just asked about my results, but your first and only real thought about the matter was making sure it was something I agreed to. Which I did. Also, no it doesn't really seem to effect my dreams... but that might just be because I dream of sex pretty often anyway,"

Kat rolled her eyes. "Of course you do. Why would I expect anything else? Actually, if you dream of sex so often, why did you think it'd change your dreams?"

Sue shrugged and said, "I mean truth be told I mostly wanted an excuse to see if I enjoyed having sex while I was asleep and found it was basically meaningless from my perspective. I mean, I didn't enjoy it, but I didn't not enjoy it? If that makes sense. I slept through the whole thing and felt a bit unfulfilled so I probably wouldn't go out of my way to try it again, but eh, if someone asked I'd be ok with it,"

Kat shook her head and grumbled, "I don't think I'll ever understand how your mind works Sue. It is clearly beyond me,"

"Ah, we have something in common then! I have no idea either!" said Sue with a smile

Chapter 1008 Tournament Arc?

Before they even got close their destination was clear. To some people, a place to hold a martial arts tournament might be a niche activity. Here, it was a large part of the sects wellbeing. Additionally, looking at the sheer size of the complex, it became clear why they were so willing to have a tournament for seemingly no reason.

There was a town near the stadium... and upon close inspection? It revealed that to totality of the tournament area was actually larger then the town itself. There were of course other nearby towns, but the closest one to the stadium was dwarfed by its presence. Not only did it have a large central fighting arena to soak up attention, but a number of smaller ones nearby as well.

Starting with the auxiliary stadiums, they were situated in such a way to radiate outwards and away from the main complex from each of the four cardinal directions. They got progressively smaller as you got further away from the centre. That's not to say they didn't make use of that space though. In between the arenas, the bulk of the space was taken up by large walls that stretched to stand as high as the largest stadium itself. Across from them was rows, and rows of seating.

Kat could guess, and would later confirm, that the walls were for projecting the fights, either as highlights or entire fights. Kat was starting to think this 'small tournament' was only small relative to the numbers this stadium normally drew. There was easily space for a million people, possibly more. There was seating everywhere, and the central arena really was that large.

The smaller domes were made out of the same icy architecture they'd seen throughout the sect, even if the large walls were black stone. The stadiums were all clear ice with a layer of cloudiness only in the centre. It was quite beautiful to see... even if the seats that looked to also be made of ice was a reason for some concern. Not for kat of course, but for others. How they regulated that would be interesting.

The main stadium though, it was something else. The entire thing was made not of ice, but of glass with rivers of gold running through it. Not stationary, and frozen in place, but actually running. The slow churning of the gold river as it passed around the largest stadium drew the eye even from kilometres away. It seemed to suck in the sunlight and trap it within itself, producing a bright, but not unbearable level of light to look at for mortals. Kat barely noticed the increased brightness, but the whole structure was breathtaking.

The town nearby was... less impressive. It was clear that instead of the sect building something nice nearby it was more a collection of staff and merchants that put together something ramshackle that worked well enough. The buildings were all different sizes, some looked sturdy enough to survive through a blizzard and a cyclone at the same time while others looked like they could be destroyed by a sneeze. The roads were scraped clean of snow... but where just as clearly packed dirt. Very well packed perhaps, but that didn't change the fact that minimal work went into keeping them straight or upgrading them properly.

The carriage would naturally completely bypass the town. The main road they were on went straight to the stadium and didn't stop by the town. Unless you count the packed road clearly added after the fact. Kat did wonder why they hadn't built the town along the road... until she noticed a series of flat sections beside the road that were clearly broken housing foundations. Apparently the sect had decided they didn't want anyone building right on the main road.

Not sure how I feel about that. I can't imagine the sect actually talked about anything here, just strolled in and destroyed however many houses were necessary before moving on. On the other hand... does the sect own the whole mountain? I mean... probably. And if they don't, well... bigger army diplomacy is a strong way to enforce your beliefs. So even if technically they don't, they might as well.

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Sue and Kat made some light small-talk as the carriage continued to trundle along. The scenery sadly wasn't much to chat about. Other than the arena, the place was pretty barren. Any trees that were once here had been crushed, and a few shrubs were hardly worth commenting on, especially when half of them are dead, and most of the rest were barely peaking out of the snow.

It was remarkably crowded when they reached the arena, people were everywhere. Nobody was too keen to start pushing and shoving of course, but they were close to it. It was hard to tell where the lines began and ended. Bodeir just walked around them, heading for somewhere else. Kat and Sue followed, with Hromdir taking up the rear. Eventually they made their way to one of the arena entrances with a much smaller line. It was just three people and the person at the desk was making his way through the paperwork pretty quickly.

In practically no time at all, it was Bodeir's turn. The man simply held up a sphere that lit up when it was near Bodeir, before nodding and rustling through his paperwork for a bit, finding what he was looking for and stamping it. The paper vanished as soon as the stamp was applied and Bodeir started walking away. When Kat made to follow though, the man at the desk said, "I'm sorry, that way is one of the contestant holding areas. I'm afraid unless you're competing, you can't go down there. Though, as guests of the sect heir there is premium seating set aside for you,"

Well. Damn. Hmm... am I about to do something stupid? Is it really worth it? Kat waited, and considered not going through with her plan, expecting the Contract she had to twinge slightly, telling her she'd need to go through with it... only for the Contract to not complain at all. *Oh? So I could just not?*

Kat was correct, she could just go up into the stands with Sue and watch. It would not be a dereliction of duty. The arena had security and there was far too many references for most assassins to bother with. Especially when the arena was an 'acceptable' place for an 'accident' to happen. Of course... that wasn't necessarily good enough for Kat.

"Hey desk-man, what are the entire requirements for the tournament?" asked Kat. Sue's eyes shot towards Kat in surprise, but Kat just shrugged back.

The man nodded and said, "Under-50 for short lived races and Under-100 for long lived ones. Make sure you know and are willing to obey the rules. While multiple contestants from a sect may enter, only one person can receive a bi to avoid the free-for-all round,"

"That's it?" asked Kat, just to double check.

"That's it," confirmed the man.

Hmm... do I really want to enter a fighting tournament and essentially bully a bunch of people so that I can protect Bodeir in the waiting rooms? I mean... I'm not totally against it... but would it be considered a shameful thing? No wait, why isn't there any rules against demons entering? Has it just not come up? Or are they assuming that any demons worthy of competing are too old to do so? I wish Lily was awake for a second opinion.

"Sue... if I was to enter a tournament would you be able to look after Lily for a bit?" asked Kat 'innocently'.

Sue glared back, "Kat. You don't have to enter the tournament. I can tell because if you DID need to, my part of the Contract would be trying to get my attention so I could convince you one way or the other. It really isn't necessary,"

"True... I did test that myself... but at the same time Sue... it would technically be safer for Bodeir..." offered Kat.

"No. No Kat, it would not. If you're stuck in the waiting area when Bodeir is fighting it'd be much harder to save him from something. At least if you're in the stands you'll be closer and within eyeshot during the most dangerous moments. Heck, it might be safer for Bodeir if you're visible in the stands instead of the ridiculous plan you're trying to go for," explained Sue.

"It's not like I'd be in any danger though..." offered Kat with a smile.

"Kat," said Sue slowly. "You're just making more work for yourself. Sure, you're not at risk here, this is a tournament for people much weaker than you. That doesn't mean there's a reason for you to jump in the thick of it. I mean, what would you do if you had to fight Bodeir?"

"Um... forfeit? I just need to get into the rooms and I don't care if I win," said Kat.

"Then you'd be brought up on charges of match fixing, with Bodeir under the same scrutiny," said the desk guy. "Also you're holding up the line,"

You know... I sort of forgot about him.

"Come on Kat... don't be silly about this," said Sue slightly pleadingly.

Chapter 1009 Free-For-All

I guess I was being silly about things. Kat thought despondently as she watched the free for all melee without any passion. It didn't take long for Sue to convince Kat that she didn't need to fight, even if Kat went along with it at first more because Sue was asking nicely then Kat believed what was being said at first. Now though, watching just how behind many of the competitors were strength wise? Kat had no worries at all.

Nobody was Rank 3, not as far as she'd seen. Heck, most of them weren't even Rank 2. Watching this all play out in real time was dreadfully slow to her demonic senses and trusting the Holy Icy Wind Sect to, at the very least, keep mischief from happening in the waiting rooms with tonnes of witnesses wasn't that big of an ask. Kat and Sue were watching this nonsense because apparently Bodeir's fight would be in this arena at some point. They hadn't properly looked at the brackets, just where Bodeir's first fight would take place.

The pair had been assigned to one of the private boxes. It came complete with a fridge stocked full of food, a second for alcohol, and a third for anything drinkable but non-alcoholic. Sue decided to go for the alcohol despite how early it was in the morning. Kat raised a bit of an eyebrow at that, but chose not to say anything at this time. She had her own thoughts to ponder for now, no sense trying to debate that with Sue just yet. Perhaps when things got even duller Kat could bring the topic back up.

*Why was I so set on entering anyway? I don't care about being seen as a skilled fighter, and bullying people with my Rank 3 strength doesn't seem like any fun. I certainly don't want to turn into anything

like those bitches from high-school. I'd rather die I think. Well... no that would make Lily sad... but I'd rather do something drastic before becoming like that. Combat isn't really in my blood. The call of a good fight doesn't sing to me...

It's just a simple, straightforward solution most of the time. I can respect that now. I'm just not sure why I tried to twist things so that it also seemed like a solution to a problem that barely existed here. What was pushing me into it? That's the part I can't understand. I can't really think of anything. Nobody insulted me or Lily. Sue was... a bit of a mess yesterday but nobody did anything too bad... most of it was Sue realising things about herself and not being happy about it.

So why was I so set on joining the fight? Am I just used to playing that role now? I could perhaps see myself intentionally taking that line of thought to get Lily to argue with me because it's nice hearing her voice... but she's asleep right now. No sense playing devil's advocate when the other person can't even respond to you. So what reason could I have for seeking out conflict?*

While Kat was trying to ask herself philosophical questions as a way to work out what caused her to choose violence earlier, Sue was starting to have a good time. It wasn't just one thing, but it was like a whole group of people started up a comedy routine partway through the free-for-all. She was currently trying to suppress her laughter. It didn't have anything to do with the alcohol either. Sue had only taken a few sips of that, and it wasn't particularly strong either.

You see, the 'comedy routine' all started when this one guy with a club was fighting a guy with a staff. The club guy was going for a big overheard strike, likely trying to break the staff the other guy was using in half. Instead though, he smacked into somebody passing by behind him. Shocking club guy into turning around to view his unknown 'attacker', that was trying not to fall over after being hit in the head.

Staff guy thought this was a good chance to take out club guy and had lashed out, trying to smack their staff into club guy's temple... but then suddenly from out of nowhere a new guy was thrown into staff guy taking him out, letting the staff fall to the ground. So club guy, he's seeing this new guy, disorientated and ready for easy pickings.

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So he goes for a basic side swing... but as he's getting his feet into position he stands on the dropped staff, falling on his ass and letting his weapon go flying. As he did so though, he kicked that poor guy he'd already hit with his club right in the chin, knocking him out for good. Club guy collapsed into the growing pile of three bodies. All the while his club goes on to land in the middle of two other guys fighting with swords.

They weren't hit by it, but both glared at each other, then the new weapon, then turned to look just as a guy who happened to be using his fists as weapons was sneaking up on one of the sword guys. They both turn to spot him, and thought he threw the weapon. That was both a great sign of disrespect for their little duel, and the weapon. So they both turn on him as one, and started smacking him around. The chain of events was just getting a little silly, and Sue was trying so hard not to look like she was laughing. Fancy box they may have, but it was clearly open to the public. She'd likely be seen.

Kat, unaware of Sue's predicament, was still lost in thought. *I just wonder when this sort of thing changed? Unless... is it not that I'm used to fighting... but that I'm used to putting myself INTO the fight to protect someone else? A intercepted a lot of shit that was aimed at Lily over the years. Is that where this tendency comes from? Man I'm glad Lily isn't awake to hear these thoughts. She would NOT be happy with me if that was the case.

I mean, I'm not sure it's true... but it does make a certain weird sort of sense. Still not totally sold it's the reason behind my behaviour but I could believe it if someone else told me that was why. I could just be used to getting into the thick of things when someone else's safety is on the line. The idea of watching from the sidelines might not have occurred to me...

Except it obviously did. When Bodeir asked I said I'd be watching him from the stands making sure he was safe. So clearly somewhere between that conversation and the sign-up booth things changed. Well, no, it was when I heard we couldn't hang out with him in the waiting area that plans changed. So I know what shifted my thinking... but was it ever that big of a deal?

I don't watch Bodeir constantly back the manor either. I certainly don't stand around awkwardly in his bedroom, but it's not like I watch him hang out around the place either. I see him occasionally at meals, and whenever we leave. Bodeir isn't five. He's not going to get a boo-boo doing something stupid if I leave him alone for five seconds. Wait. Is that it?*

Kat paused, thinking back on her years at the orphanage. *Is that why I didn't want to let him out of my sight? I'm treating him like a child under my care that basically said 'I'm going to go wrestle with some other kids don't stop me' and I while I wasn't willing to stop them totally, I would want to watch the entire thing to make sure it wouldn't go to far. And that's just one example, I'm sure there are others if I took the time to look back on things. Still... Bodeir obviously isn't a child...*

Might have the intelligence of one though. Kat thought with no shortage of snark. *Perhaps that's unfair. He isn't as bad as he first seemed... but I really have to wonder how much of that is preplanning to not look like a fool in public. Then again, hard work can be it's own kind of genius. If he really works that hard to maintain a moderately competent public persona then that's something commendable. He does seem to know his food though.*

Kat looked down at the melee and saw that things were starting to wrap up. There was only a handful of fights still going on, and the winner was pretty clear already. At least from her perspective. Most of the people that were still standing were struggling at least a little bit. One person though, stood out because they were only pretending to have a limp. The reason Kat was certain of that fact is that the blood they'd clearly smeared on their leg... was the wrong leg. Well that and they didn't have a drop of sweat on them.

Chapter 1010 "Random" Encounter!

Nothing particularly amusing happened during the next two bouts. Kat wasn't really paying attention... but now she was starting to wonder where all the people were coming from. This was the 3rd free-for-all of the day, and each arena had their own. The central arena was running FOUR of them at a time. That meant there had been twenty-four free-for-all matches already and at least one-hundred people were entered into each one so far. That was a lot of people, and Kat really wasn't sure where they were all coming from.

Based on the schedule, there was at least one more round of free-for-alls to go. They'd be getting 32 competitors from the free-for-all round, and then another 32 that were given a pass straight to the duel section. Kat hadn't really reached a concrete conclusion as to what was running through her mind before, but at the very least Lily was awake now. Sadly, she didn't really have much to suggest that would help shed light on the situation.

Luckily, before Sue started raiding the fridges just for something to pass the time with, a knock sounded from the door to their box. Kat and Sue shared a confused glance at each other. "You're not expecting anyone right?" asked Kat.

"Nope. You're not expecting anyone either... right?" returned Sue.

"Nope. Do we open it?" said Kat.

"I... guess so?" said Sue with a shrug.

Nodding, Kat got up and opened the door to reveal Bing, who was decked out in combat leathers as opposed to the more traditional robes that most martial artists here wore. "Hey Sue, Sue's friend Kat, oh and Lily! Can't forget the little kitten! It's good to see you three. I've been looking around for you guys to come chat, so I'm really glad I find you. I've been looking for like an hour!"

"Um... Bing..." said Sue hesitantly, "We haven't exactly moved around... and didn't you assign us this room? I just sort of assumed so when we were directed here. How... how did you struggle to find us so much?"

Bing's eyes turned hollow as she looked at Sue with much pain and suffering, "My sense of direction really is that bad. I cannot fix it. Normally I have a guide, but I was actually meant to be in the competitors area by now. I gave up on that an hour back and started looking for you instead,"

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"Oh... oh no?" said Sue trying to keep the pity and confusion out of her voice.

Bing brightened up quickly though, even as Kat asked her a question, "What exactly does it mean that you're here instead of over there?"

"Eh... technically? Technically it means I forfeit my match because I'm not present and ready to fight at the designated time... but in practice this is my sect's tournament and they already know how bad I am at directions. They should've had someone to direct me around. I can follow other people just fine," Bing said, ignorant of the fact that they DID have someone assigned to lead her around. They just didn't announce themselves properly, and once they were out of sight Bing never saw them again.

"... So whenever my fight actually comes up," Bing continued, "They'll probably come get me. I think I still have a tracking formation on me? Normally they're used to prevent kidnappings but they're super unreliable and easily blocked. Doesn't really matter to me, because it's well known I have like a whole bunch on me that work in different ways to make it a real pain in the ass to block, and nobody thinks my parents are overly paranoid because I've gotten lost following a straight corridor a few times.

"Quite a few people think it's actually a curse, but if it is, it's much too powerful for any of the healers to detect. I always come up clean! Well... there was that one time I was cursed to speak in rhyme but that's a separate matter really and hardly counts,"

"That sounds like a story!" said Sue with a bit of forced cheer. She didn't want to get drawn into Bing's pace again, still somewhat afraid of what she might reveal... but it just sounded so interesting, and Bing was fun to talk to.

"Eh, it's less interesting then you might think," Bing said with a dismissive wave, "A friend of mine happens to be a curse-maker. They have incredibly strong 'curse' affinity. It's quite rare too. Now, normally in a sect like ours it'd make them an outcast, if they were even allowed to remain here at all. Curses are sort of the opposite of what the sect likes to be about..."

"But she was my playmate growing up. She's still my best friend to this day. When they tried to kick her out... oh the tantrum I threw. It was legendary. Anyway, that's not the story you wanted to hear about. See, my best friend, her name is Lian, was trying to come up with a curse to force people to shout their technique names, and explain them. She thought that some people would be dumb enough not to notice the curse, and that it'd let her find out how a bunch of interesting and rare techniques worked..."

"Obviously I offered to be her guinea pig and the whole rhyming thing was the result. We really aren't sure how it ended up that way, but turns out it's actually pretty useful. It forces people to keep talking, makes them speak in rhyme, and they don't get any help with the rhymes either. They're forced to put mental energy into figuring out rhymes constantly. There is a bit of a weakness because you can just repeat yourself, but most people don't figure that out," explained Bing.

"Should you really be telling us that?" asked Sue, mostly just out of politeness.

Bing just waved away the concern though, "Eh, it doesn't really matter. Lian isn't even in Bodeir's bracket, so unless they make it all the way to the finals it won't matter. Plus, it's not a big secret because the servants gossiped a tonne about it before we could decide if it was worth keeping quiet. Oh, and if Lian actually does make it to the finals, which I doubt, then a rhyming curse really isn't what's going to win it for her,"

"Shouldn't you have some confidence in your friend?" asked Kat.

Bing just shrugged, "I mean... maybe? If she actually cared about the tournament I suppose... she was just one of the people we got to enter the free-for-alls to bully the weaklings a bit. Lian doesn't care about winning... basically at all. As my best friend, and as a rather rare affinity, she gets first pick of basically anything she needs here in the sect so winning is more danger then it's worth in her mind. Not that I think she'd be able to win anyway. She only just recently made it to Rank 2,"

"Once again. Should you really be telling us that?" asked Sue

"Don't worry, don't worry," said Bing patting Sue on the head. "This is all stuff you could find out if you asked, plus she's my friend and I know she wouldn't mind sharing this sort of thing with people. She's very proud of her work... even if she is very quiet. I have to spread the word of her awesome curses for her! Now, my question. Kat, what do Lily's horns mean? I get that she's adorable, but I've never seen a feline quite like that,"

Hmm... Still, Kat answered easily. It wasn't important information after all, "It means that my Lily,"
Yes MINE. "...is a Memphis. They're a special type of demonic feline that can deal with demonic energy much better than other animals."

"Why is that important?" asked Bing with a tilt of her head.

"Ah well... a lot of demons live in places filled with demonic energy. They're essentially empty dimensions because the demonic energy would cause any other sentient a tonne of problems so we colonise them, essentially. A lot of weaker animals just don't have the constitution to deal with a bit of demonic energy over a long period of time. Memphis however, don't have that issue. And if you initial a bond, a bit like a familiar bond, then they'll never have problems with it" explained Kat.

Lily was of course mentally blushing at Kat's declaration. Sure they were dating, so she already knew that... but it was just nice to hear even if it was mentally where nobody else could hear. Perhaps better? Lily struggled to suppress her purring at the thought but Kat noticed and started to scratch around her ears. Both destroying her hold on the purr, and giving an excuse for it.

"Naw, well that's pretty neat, and Lily is pretty cute. I wonder if I should get a spirit beast partner?" mused Bing.