

DEMONS 141

Chapter 141: Beyond the Mist

While the tense conversation was wrapping up, the sand skipper was rapidly approaching the mist wall. Practically nothing else could be seen. It took up so much of their vision that there really was nothing else to see.

The worm was still far behind and the Barbarashi was nowhere to be seen. Even still Skye and Grace braced themselves against the side of the sand skipper. Skye even taking a seat instead of her usual standing position just in case.

Kat... was still collapsed on the floor, but Skye was uninterested in helping and Grace was unsure if Kat's tail would try to stop her should she try to help. Accepting that Kat would be fine, or at least her regeneration would deal with any issues that arose held on tight to the back of the skipper.

Kat for her part couldn't actually see what was going on, but she hadn't just forgotten how close the mist wall was, and could figure it out with the few context clues she had access to that they were preparing to hit the wall.

The sand skipper shot forward into the fog. Their was a moment where the skipper hung suspended in the air as they sailed through the thick fog. An instant later though Grace and Skye had their vision clear just as the skipper crashed into the ground.

Digging into the dirt, and throwing grass and debris everywhere, the skippers slight angle threatened to flip the whole thing over. Tumbling around just as the skipper reached an almost ninety-degree angle, the edges of the mast dug into the ground preventing it from tipping over further.

And the mast was made of sturdy stuff, so instead of threatening to break it dug into the dirt hard. This in turn meant that instead of the skipper continuing forward it attempted to launch its passengers.

The Timmy's were sent flying. All three of them arcing through the air, arm in arm... somehow staying together despite the forces at play shooting of into the distance. Skye held on tight to the side and the mast. Straining her arms she managed to stay in place, with only minor muscle bruising.

Grace took a different route. She let herself fly out of the skipper. Because of her... increased height in comparison to the Timmy's she didn't fly as far, or as fast. Quickly dropping into a roll Grace dispersed her kinetic energy and managed to escape unharmed.

Kat for her part went flying wildly out of the sand skipper. She tried to move a little to correct her fall but felt her body failing to respond. She did sense that if she pushed she could get her tail to help, but the fact it didn't immediately act implied the fall wasn't going to be so bad.

Just as Kat thought that though, the top of her horns caught on the edge of the mast as she flew. Sending Kat into a spin, she continued to whirl around and landing hard on the ground and rolling a few more times. Her wings really slowly any momentum she might have had.

Now Kat lay face down in the ground. Covered in dirt, grass and whatever else might have been around. Her desire to get up or move was strong, but she held down the desire recognising she needed a bit more rest first.

Skye examined the downed people, paying particular attention to Kat. Despite what Grace had claimed Kat's tail made no effort to save her from that fall. Her eyes flicked towards the elf but seeing that she was already getting up and looking around refrained from doing anything extreme.

Lighting up two sigils on her robes, Grace started to glow a faint white light as her energy was injuries were healed. Grace was busy dusting herself off and trying to get the grass out of her hair. The Timmy's were nowhere to be seen, but nobody was too worried. They'd pop up when they felt like it.

Well, this is a really nice view Thought Kat eyes closed face buried in the dirt. *Can't wait to figure out what sort of horrible landscape we've been brought to this time.* As Kat was admiring the darkness, Grace was dusting herself off and walking over to Kat.

She wasn't certain that she'd be able to, but she felt determined to try. Reaching down towards Kat, she watched Kat's tail twitch towards her before settling down. Grace gulped but kept going and managed to get her arm under Kat.

Grace was surprised at Kat's weight. It was either much lighter or much heavier than she'd thought. In fact, it was actually pretty normal, which was strange considering Kat's strength and stranger considering she could fly.

Not minding it though Grace hefted Kat onto her shoulder and cast a glance at Skye, who just gave a shrug. Kat let her eyes open, trying to take in the situation. She immediately noticed Grace's help and tried to thank her but found her mouth still unresponsive. Instead taking a look around Kat saw a short run of grass before another giant wall.

This one however wasn't made of fog. It looked to be solid steel. Of course knowing time it was made out of wood, but that couldn't dampen the sheer presence the structure had. As high and as long as Kat could see it stretched seemingly endlessly in either direction.

Where the heck do we go then? Thought Kat till she noticed the bare edge of something on the right. She couldn't make it out properly and with no energy to enhance her sight it seemed it would remain a question.

As Kat struggled to look around, the three Timmy's popped out of the ground next to Grace. Shaking of the dust and grass attached to them they looked up and waved at Kat. In response Kat managed to do figure eights with her eyes, and the Timmy's quickly realised she couldn't move yet and nodded, before heading off to do... whatever it was they do. *novelnext.coM*

Skye for her part was watching this whole thing closely, and certainly noticed that slight twitch of Kat's tail as Grace went to pick her up.

"Well, what's the plan" asked Grace shifting Kat to a slightly more comfortable position with her arm around Grace's neck and Kat's head resting against her own arm to try and keep Kat's horns from stabbing Grace in the face.

"I'm not sure" intoned Skye "I can't see any obvious way to progress past this wall. But based on the sand skippers, there must be something we are missing"

Grace nodded "Yeah that makes sense, should we just take off in a direction then? Or would it be worth getting closer to examine the wall?"

Guys, There's a thing over on the left. Kat tried to lift her hand and point to the left but found her arm unresponsive. Checking her internal reserves she could see her energy was rapidly replenishing. *Guess I'm in like, super charge mode. Everything is shut down, but I get a bunch of energy. Should only take a few more minutes for me to walk then.*

"I mean, we could always do a bit of both" said Skye "Head diagonally right, making our way along and towards the wall to hedge our bets I suppose"

No, no go left. Whatever we need to find is on the left. Kat's thoughts went unheard though "I guess that makes as much sense as any other plan" said Grace

Skye nodded and started jogging and leading the way. Glancing back though she saw Grace with an exasperated expression "What?" asked Skye

"I can't keep up with you like that while carrying Kat. Perhaps helping me?" asked Grace

"She can fly, surely she can't be that heavy" said Skye

"She weighs about the same as I do. I don't understand it either" said Grace.

Gah. You guys are about to go the wrong way. Skye looked a little torn before walking over to Grace and picking up Kat's other side. "I guess we're in this together"

And so, with Kat slung over their shoulders Grace and Skye were able to set off. The main issue Grace was having with Kat was her awkward weight distribution, with her two large wings. With Skye taking the other side though, they were actually able to get a decent speed going.

As they jogged the Timmy's would appear every now and then, in front of the three to make funny faces. Grace and Skye chose to ignore them, but Kat was berating them internally. *They are doing this because YOU ARE GOING THE WRONG WAY!*

But Kat was doomed to silence. At least for a little while longer, as the group marched forward with surprising efficiency. It was only once they'd been moving for around ten minutes that Kat could start to move.

"The wrong way" said Kat "We're going the wrong way"

Chapter 142: The Other Way

"What" said the pair as they held Kat between them.

Kat tried her best to glare with her still flagging energy failed to muster anything particularly scary. Nonetheless, they seemed to at least realise what Kat was saying and stopped in their tracks.

"I guess we head back then" said Grace starting to turn around

"You're just going to listen to her?" asked Skye, stopping them in place.

"I am physically incapable of lying" said Kat

Skye gave Kat a wry look, "Well, I've certainly heard that spread around. But even if it is true it doesn't mean that you can't be wrong. Your half delirious, strung between two people. Is your judgement really sound enough?" *novelNExt.COM*

Kat felt a laugh bubbling up at that but managed to suppress it. *Laughing in someone's face while they carry you is never the best decision.* "My mind is perfectly fine. It is only my body that is tired. Sure I feel that weight somewhat but it's a bit different for demons. I'll be perfectly fine in just a few more minutes" said Kat

And Kat's eloquence of speech and ease of movement did wonders to reinforce that point. It was clear Kat was already far from the exhausted body they'd been dragging for ten minutes. "I'm just wondering if it's worth turning back on a hunch" said Skye

Grace dismissed this though "Look, we have no real idea where we are going. Even if Kat is wrong, worst is we've wasted ten minutes of walking. Let's just head back the other way"

Skye looked like she wanted to argue, but she could already see Kat starting to recover visibly before her eyes, and seeing she was outvoted agreed to turn around.

It was only a minute later that Kat gave Skye and Grace the signal to let her down. Carefully placing her feet on the ground Kat, wrung out her shoulders and tried to dust off her horns. It seemed they did not share the same grime repelling properties as the rest of her body and outfit.

Skye looked ready to take off once this was done but Kat stopped Skye "I'm fine to walk but running would take a lot of my energy. It seems I'm the main fighting force and I want to be prepared for whatever is ahead"

Skye bit her lip but nodded at this one. Grace just shrugged and fell in step behind Kat. The Timmy's for their part stayed back, hoping to let Kat rest and trying not to pressure her into picking them up. They tried to stay unnoticed, but they didn't do so well. Especially when there was nothing but short cut grass as far as the eye could see... if you ignored the walls of course.

And so the trio started their march... back the way they came. Once they approached the boat again Kat could make out something in the distance. It still wasn't entirely clear, but it was more certain. She said as much to the others, but they just shrugged.

Another two minutes passed before Grace and Skye could also make out something strange, and Kat was starting to see the details. It looked like a picket fence.

After approaching further, now five minutes of travel, all three could confirm that it was in fact a picket fence. Grace looked ready to sprint over and check it out but held herself in check. Skye seemed content to keep the current pace but would occasionally cast glances towards Kat.

Once they were just shy of the fence, Kat could see that in front of her was what appeared to be a garden path, surrounded by a picket fence and leading towards the door. Checking her energy reserves Kat found she had enough to run safely without it making too much of a dent.

"We can run the rest if you want. It won't make a big difference to me" said Kat

Skye and Grace both nodded. The area looked clear and they wanted a better idea of what was actually going on. The three sprinted up to the edge and got a further idea of what was in front of them.

The path they had seen was leading to what looked like a reinforced door in the side of the wall. It was a normal size, which meant Kat would need to collapse her wings fully to step inside, though it was about an extra half again the height of a typical door.

It carried no identifying markings and blending well into the steel grey wall that covered the rest of the area. If not for the picket fence Kat wasn't sure if she'd have been able to pick it out. There was a handle, but it was well blended into the surrounding structure.

Kat looked between Skye and Grace and waiting for someone to speak up. Grace took the initiative and asked "Welp, are we going to go in?"

"It seems we have little choice" said Skye

Kat nodded. Whatever it was, the door was at the very least a way through these steel wall. They had no better ideas and it seemed like this was their best path forward.

Grace and Skye took a big step back at Kat's nod. She turned around and hit them with a raised eyebrow.

Grace gesture towards Kat and said "Well, you're the sturdiest of the three of us. Plus Skye can heal you if you can't heal yourself"

Skye nodded along with that though Kat did wonder how willing the human would be to actually heal her should the time come. Nevertheless Kat took a deep breath and stood in front of the door.

The Timmy's appeared beside her watching her movements closely. Kat slowly reached out toward the door handle. Placing her hand onto it, she gripped it solidly. Here goes nothing.

Kat pulled at the door, with perhaps more force then necessary and it swung open easily practically flying towards Kat. She took a step back to avoid getting taken out by the door and looked into the room beyond.

It was a plain sort of room, looking something like the waiting area at the doctor's office. There was one couch against the left wall, and three single chairs on the right, with tables in between them all. At the end of the room was another door, but there really was nothing else except for a soft light in the ceiling.

Kat took a hesitant step in. The moment she did so the three Timmy's followed behind swiftly and took up residence on the couch. Kat shrugged and followed their bold lead taking the seat closest to the second door and gestured for the other two to join her.

Grace followed behind instantly and took the middle chair. Though when it came to Skye's turn, she hesitated on the threshold and looked around as if there was any other way she could go.

Eventually she managed to take a step inside. And to perhaps Skye's great surprise nothing happened. Taking a more confident step forward she took the third and final chair, only to have the heavy steel door slam shut behind them once she was fully seated.

Skye and Grace jumped at this but Kat couldn't work up the energy to be concerned. *This has Thyme's personal touch written all over it. Just wait a minute and...* Right on cue the Timmy's pulled a cassette tape out of nowhere and inserted it into the front couch cushion.

"Hello Hello, This is your friendly announcer Thyme speaking. It seems you have managed to reach my resting stop. Now, I'd congratulate you on being the first to reach the area... except I don't actually know if you are. This is pre-recorded. Everyone will hear this message.

"If you are actually first then, I do truly extend my congratulations, but I wouldn't count on it. Anyway, you're probably wondering what's going on. Well I'm here to introduce to you the rules of the rest station.

"The first one, is that nobody is allowed to attack anyone, unless it is inside the training arena with both parties' consent. This is supposed to be a safe place for you to rest for a while, and I will have nobody thinking to take advantage of that. If you even get close to striking a contestant, I will instantly come there personally and punish you myself" Thyme's voice got louder and more distorted as he said the final words.

Thyme's voice quickly reverted for the next section though "Thing is, I realised that I may have spread you all out too far. So I built this resthouse to ensure that the final race for the orb is actually intense. It'd sure suck for one scout to rush their days ahead of everyone else.

"The exact time you'll be released is shown on the wall, in the common room. You can find that as soon as you step through the second door. You can find dorm areas, food, and other activities throughout the facility. This is just one of many, and only for people who use the same door.

"You can find additional information in the relevant rooms if necessary. Thanks for your attention and have a nice break"

Chapter 143: The Unguided, Tour Part 1

Once Kat heard it was time for a break, she let herself relax. She couldn't exactly melt into the chair because it didn't allow for her wings, but she could feel the time pressure melting away.

The door to the next room swung open, and as Kat was trying to relax the Timmy's all stepped through into the next room without prompting. Kat gave a look to Skye and Grace who happened to be already getting up.

"Hup" Pulling herself to her feet Kat got up and followed the Timmy's into the next room. It was a large room with a central pillar. It had the same boring walls as the previous room, and while it had more than doubled in size with a number of chairs all around the outside, it wasn't any more interesting.

Except of course for the giant clock? If you could call it that. The whole thing looked to be mechanical, with wooden blocks for the numbers. While the girls were staring at the clock the Timmy's got to the pillar and put in another cassette.

"Hello, might be weird to say that after just saying goodbye.. especially when I can see the future. That's right! I know for a fact that you walked into this clock room straight after the introduction room.

"How's that for fortune telling? Now I'll admit it might also have something to do with the fact that there's only one door, but I doubt that's actually important here. What you are seeing is my state of the art, clock pillar.

"It has four sides, each displaying the same thing, just in case you thought one was wrong, you can now be sure that all four clocks are wrong... wait no... They should be left!

"Anyway, enough jokes. You should see my standard set up. The first block measures the number of days, the second two are the hours, and the final two are the minutes. I did try to get seconds working, but I just don't have the skill to set up a device to change the blocks so fast.

"Anyway, all in all this rooms pretty simple, so just move on to the second part of the tour!"

Thyme's cassette finished and Kat couldn't help but think. So, we're on a tour now. Couldn't you have just set the whole thing up as a proper tour then if you wanted one? Kat rolled her shoulders and looked at the clock. On it, it read, 1 day, 14 hours, and 20 mins. Guess I'll have a lot of time to kill then.

Kat had a peek at the other's reactions, but Skye was intentionally keeping her face blank and Grace was still somewhat taken aback that they got to rest at all. The Timmy's though once again instantly took off towards the next room.

Skye motioned to follow them, and so Grace and Kat did, it wasn't as though there was much to see in the room. Once they left, they were led down a long corridor. As they approached the end, the door swung open automatically and revealed another open space.

This area seemed more like a lounge. It had similar couches to the other rooms, but it also had a coffee table in the middle, decorated with ornate flowers and vines.

Once again, the Timmy's led the charge with another cassette.

"Good, you're back. This room is rather simple, just a lounging area. What's actually important are the doors that branch off of it. That one on your left... assuming you are facing the same way you were if you walked in, leads to the dorms and the showers. Each person gets a room... hopefully? I prepared 6 just in case, but if not the sofa's in the lounge will have to do.

"The door on your right is the kitchen area, as well as some other recreational things like the training hall, and a board game storage cupboard. The kitchen has ingredients or prepared meals, whatever floats your sand skipper. The rest is fairly self-explanatory.

"The final door should be locked at the moment. It's your exit. Once the clock ticks down in the clock room that door will unlock and you can leave the resting site. If I find anyone trying to circumvent the door or pick the lock, I will find you and turn you into a lockpick...

"Any questions? No of course not, because I can't answer them. Goodbye"

And with that the cassette clicked of, and Grace let out a yawn, prompting both Kat and Skye to look her way.

"Well, what are you looking at? It's been a huge day. I want to grab something that barely counts for food and then go to sleep" said Grace

I'm not exactly tired, but it's as good an idea as any "Lead the way Grace" said Kat. Skye just nodded along as well.

Timmy's taking the lead, they headed right into another corridor. At the edge it split into two, and the Timmy's took the left path. Coming up on two double doors, the Timmy's stacked on top of each other and jumped.

This opened the door to reveal a 'kitchen'. To Kat's eyes it looked more like a massive pantry with a small kitchen attached. Once you were through the doors the room expanded massively. It was split in two halves, and then further into quarters. Right at the far end of the room was likely where the cooking and preparing area was, but the massive amount of shelving obscured it heavily.

On the right was shelves and shelves of ingredients. The first three rows were just open to the elements, but the next three were split up. The first one had heating... lamps? They were flowers beaming light down onto. The two over from that had a different flower that was blue instead of red. The area around those last two rows seemed to be iced over.

On the left was shelves of prepared dishes. The first three all had those same heating flowers. Then a break containing open air dishes with nothing keeping them fresh, then a final two that were covered with cooling flowers.

The sheer quantity and variety completely dwarfed any spread of food Kat had ever seen. There was so much food she could feed everyone in the orphanage for a month and still have food left over.

While the three girls were still taking in the sight of so much food the Timmy's were getting the cassette prepared. They opened up the 'oven' at the back of the room and threw the cassette in before shutting it closed and turning it on. *novelnext.com*

"AHHHHHH IT BURNS!!!" screamed the Thyme on the cassette shaking everyone out of their stupor "Nah, just messing with you. I wonder if anyone was actually worried for a moment. I'm touched if you did, but just know that even if you were to throw me into the oven it wouldn't hurt, let alone a cassette with my voice on it.

"I will say though, so glad I decided to put it in the oven. I can't wait to see your reactions. Anyway, this is the kitchen. Ingredients on the right, prepped dishes on the left. Please be careful handling some of those ingredients. The ones closer to the exit door are harder to prepare and potentially deadly

"If you kill yourself in the rest area, I'm not coming to save you. Well, that's a lie, I will save you, but you'll be out of the contest... Anyway, just be careful. The dishes on the prepared side are mostly safe except for the first two dishes in each row once again closest to the exit

"If you try to pick up any of these, a dome will show up and you will need to force your way through. It isn't exactly hard, but it's just a bit of a reminder so you don't mindlessly pick one of them up.

"Below each ingredient or dish will be its name and any major warnings you might want to keep note of, like it's super poisonous, or perhaps it will try to boil you alive. Personally I love the ones with a bit of poison, really adds to the flavour.

"You can find all the kitchen utensils in the far right corner, and under the counter on the left has ovens, while the right has chillers. You can ask the little one's if you need to hear about the room's details again."

"Well, Grace, grab what you want" said Skye sarcastically

Grace let her eyes roam the unbelievable array of foods before her. "Well, you know what. I think I'll have a shower first. This looks like effort"

Kat shrugged. *I wonder how immune to poison I am. Actually, maybe I should look for something reprepared that's extremely warm. I can imagine like a dragon soup that's just on fire. Then again... I wonder if my regeneration does work on poisons...

Nope no bad Kat. That's a really silly line of thinking. Stick to the boiling hot soup. At least you know you're immune to that.*

Chapter 144: The Unguided, Tour Part 2

Grace led the way out of the kitchen and headed back towards the intersection. As they approached Skye spoke up "Shall we look at the other facilities first?"

Grace gave Skye the most, dead eyed stare possible "Go ahead, but I won't follow"

Kat shrugged "I'm sure the Timmy's will happily play the cassettes as many times as we want. So it doesn't matter too much"

The Timmy's all nodded vigorously to confirm this fact. As they were doing so Grace continued her march for the showers. They tracked back through the common room and opened the next door which lead to a hallway with six offshoots.

The Timmy's quickly go to the cassette system, which involved pushing it into one of the doors. "Hello, hello. Or is it Good evening? I suppose time has no bearing on when you're first hear this. It's entirely possible that you won't even have the time to use the bedding facilities, but I must always be prepared.

"Behind each door is your own self-contained room. It has a bed, a table, and a shower. Inside on the wall, you will find a glowing card. If you place that on your wrist it will stick itself there and tune to your mana. Once attuned only the holder of the card can interact with the doors

"The doors are automatic, and if you want to let someone else in you will have to leave your hand on them and hold them open for the others. I do not encourage any illicit behaviour, because I am watching everything.

"Brr, yeah, I do wish I wasn't but once again, the dumb rules for the final round and all that. If for whatever reason you want to change rooms just slap the card back into its holder and it will no longer be linked to you.

"Keep in mind, for any of you trying to be tricky, yes it has to be the correct card, and yes the person who owns the card has to put it in the holder. Now onto a few other things, you will probably want to have a shower and change into other clothes *novelnext.com*

"These have been provided, but they are just standard materials. You do not want to be taking them outside the resting area, but I mean I won't stop you. Oh and do be careful with the showers. I've made them cater to a wide range of races, so they have both extremely low, and extremely high temperatures. I am not liable for any injuries caused by showers.

"In the case of extreme burns, you will be removed from the round and healed. Do be aware, if you managed to injure yourself in such a stupid way I will tell all my friends about it and we will laugh.

"In fact, I'll duplicate myself a few times so you have a whole crowd. Now then, that should be all in regard to the rooms. Oh the light switch is on the left side of the door"

This was already enough information for Grace. As soon as Thyme's recording ended, she opened the first door on the left and it shut behind her. The Timmy's seemed to disperse during the cassette recording and Kat couldn't see them anywhere leaving just her and Skye

"Soo... what now?" asked Kat

"Might as well get some rest" said Skye walking to the end of the hall and taking the last door on the left.

"Huh" Kat now found herself alone in the hall. Shrugging she pushed open the door on the right and walked inside.

The room was small but practical. There was attached to the wall on the left with multiple extra blankets folded up at the end. On the right was the card Thyme had mentioned above a table with two chairs. At the back of the room was another door that presumably lead to the shower.

There was plenty of space between everything, and none of it was cramped. Kat found it was a rather nice size, perhaps a bit bigger than her old room at the orphanage. Walking over to the wall Kat picked up the card for the room.

As she did so it started glowing red and flashing. *Is this normal? What do I do with this?* As if summoned by her command a Timmy appeared with a cassette in hand. Slipping under the bed the Timmy put the cassette into the wall and Thyme's voice run out again.

"Bother... if your hearing this it means that something has gone wrong with the identity cards. I knew I couldn't trust the dwarven enchanter I learned those runes from. I mean, the man was an excellent smith, but practical enchantments were never his strong suite.

"While this is playing your small Thyme should be grabbing the replacement key. It will open the door and keep it locked, but you mustn't lose it. This one has no way of telling who is who.

"If you lose the card for your room, honestly that's tough luck. I can't be making endless redundancies."

And sure enough, once the announcement was over the Timmy came over and presented Kat with another card. It looked almost exactly the same at first glance which Kat supposed was the point. Looking closer she did however find that the flower design that made up the centre was different

Kat didn't exactly recognise what this other flower was, but her eyes certainly picked up the difference. Shrugging Kat slipped it into the sash on her outfit with the fans and sat down at the table.

System, I'd like to send a message for Lily Sylvie, and Vivian if that's alright

Please input the message you want broadcast at location of User Kat's transportation.

Um, hmm, wait no don't put that... actually can you cancel that for just a second?

Message system cancelled.

What do I actually want to tell them? System is there a word limit?

D.E.M.O.N.S can display any number of words, however after a certain point the words will fill the area and start displaying in objects once a threshold is reached. User Kat is recommended to keep the message short.

Ok.

Kat thought about what she wanted for a while. She let her hand tap on the table as she thought about all the things she'd seen and done over the last few days. Even though it had been just three days or thereabouts since she had seen everyone else... it almost felt like 74 for some odd reason.

Ignoring that strange feeling Kat began to compose her thoughts and eventually settled on the following message.

*Hi guys, it's been a while since you've heard from me. I thought this would be a quick two-day trip, but things really escalated in the afternoon on the second. I didn't really have time to explain but I'm just now resting up. Things have been really interesting, and I know I'll be away for at least two more days, but I want you to know I'm doing fine.

The mission isn't taking long because it's hard, just because there are a lot of steps. I'm participating in a tournament, and the host has done some rather extreme things, especially the final round.

D.E.M.O.N.S said I can't send too much or else the message will start going through the floor. Hopefully you guys are well.

Kat.*

Message received and projected.

Thanks system.*

With that Kat decided to take a quick shower. The others had probably already eaten, or at least finished with their showers as Kat had spent quite a while figuring out her message.

As she dismissed her kimono, she heard a clack, and instantly realised what she had done. Picking up the fans and the card, Kat placed them on a bench next to the clothing Thyme had provided.

Utilising the hottest setting on the shower Kat was able to relax properly. The warmth was great, and she didn't have to feel bad about wasting anything because Thyme could conjure it all out of thin air.

Once out of the shower Kat took a look at the clothes Thyme had provided. They were just your standard affair, with a set of robes, or a set of trousers and shirt. All simple, and a slight off green. There were actually more like five sets of varying sizes, but they all seemed to be the same just larger

Sadly though they didn't have anywhere for Kat to put her wings, though one set of robes did in fact have a spot for her tail. Welp back to the kimono it is. Kat shrugged. She was really getting used to the thing.

Would I even want to wear anything else. Kat rubbed the edges of the sleeves and felt the soft material under her fingers. *Probably not really. I've been spoiled by this. Perpetually clean, never needs washing, feels great on the skin, plus it looks really nice.*

Shrugging Kat made her way out of the room, making sure to pick up her things as she left.

Chapter 145: Soup of the Sun

novelnext.com

Kat exited her room and nearly jumped in fright as she felt it start to close while her tail was still there. Then Kat thought about it for another second. *The door was shutting, and I was walking at a decent pace. I'd have probably left the area but... hmm.*

Deciding that the doors needed testing Kat opened it once again and walked slowly out. Watching her tail as the door slid shut, just as she was about to pull her tail out of the way the door stopped.

Swishing her tail from side to side she found the door followed it. Never leaving more than a few centimetres between the door and her tail, but never once did it come in contact with her. Even when she tried to quickly flick her tail towards the door.

Satisfied that she wasn't ever going to actually injure her tail because of the automatic doors Kat headed towards the kitchen to pick up some food. As she entered the dining room though she found Skye hunched over writing something.

"Hi" said Kat as she walked past.

Skye practically flew out of her chair. If Kat didn't know any better she'd think Skye was the one who actually had wings. Returning to the chair and slamming the book shut Skye whirled around to face Kat.

"Ahh hi?" said Kat again not quite sure what else to do.

Skye pretended to cough and met Kat's eyes "Sorry, I didn't hear you come in. I'd thought you went to sleep like Grace. I was just writing in my diary. Please understand I was just a bit surprised"

Kat shrugged "I'm just going to get something to eat" and left the healer to her strange hobbies. Kat rubbed her eyes as she left the room but after that they stopped irritating her.

The hallway was the same familiar boring scene, but the kitchen had a few interesting things to note. The Timmy's were on the kitchen counter with a pile of ingredients and several knives.

As Kat walked in all three turned at once and waved.

"Hello, I'm just picking something else, feel free to use the ingredients" said Kat

The Timmy's all nodded and went back to work on their cooking... whatever it was they were trying to make. Ignoring the frequent cutting sounds Kat walked over to the section Thyme had designated as dangerous.

She had a quick glance at the poisonous section which was the one right next to the entranceway. Perhaps not the safest design but Kat just ignored that fact.

Going one shelf deeper she found the two dishes for extreme heat. The first was a thick set of ribs, not with the meat on either, just a series of rib bones that looked cracked and charred but with wisps of flame that snuck out occasionally.

There was a plaque, but also a button that said press for explanation, and Kat couldn't resist. Just as she was about to press the button a Timmy appeared next to her and pressed it first before sprinting off back to the prep area.

"Ooh, the Hellflame boar ribs. Do note, this animal has never been to hell, and isn't actually related to boars at all. They are much closer to another family of steam aspected wolves much to my surprise. It seems to have been a rare mutation for a few generations that then split off.

"I was actually tasked with finding out what had happened, but I never did. I had a few good guesses but I never did confirm... Aw well, that's not what you're here for. Before I tell you any more, please know two things. First touch the plate lightly, if that burns you in anyway choose a different dish

"Second, the fork sticking out of the middle is the second test. If it burns you, you're probably not safe either, but if you have high regeneration you might be fine. Wouldn't recommend but at least it won't kill you.

"Despite the fact that these look like charred bones they actually taste a lot like a good bit of bacon... perhaps that contributed to them still being called boars. Huh now I think of it that way it makes a lot of sense. Hold on I need to go..."

The tape abruptly cut of Kat looked to the Timmy's for help. They took this as their queue and threw another tape in the oven.

"Woopsies, if you are hearing this tape it means, I in my infinite wisdom... provided a bit too much wisdom. Look I only made a limited number of these things and I burn through them fast. If your hearing this tape it means the information wasn't important so shoo, go back to adventuring or something"

Well, at least that explains that reaction. Still, Kat wasn't the keenest on the first dish. It was just ribs, nothing else, and even if they tasted like bacon, there was a lot of them and she just didn't enjoy eating so much bacon at once.

Looking over to the next dish, it was even stranger looking. It had three large bright red flowers that radiated heat floating in a bowl of liquid that was a cool blue colour, in direct contrast to the flowers, as well as the other ingredients she could see floating in the soup.

Once again a Timmy pressed the button for the dish. "So, first things first, if you can't touch the bowl don't eat the dish. It will melt you from the inside out and I'm not sure I'm fast enough to save you... nah just kidding I could, but I will record it and show everyone"

"This dish has a really posh sounding name that is like a paragraph long. I hate that name because it's too long though perhaps also because Earlen came up with it and that guy is a right bellend.

"I much prefer the name 'Soup of the Sun' on account of the fact it uses blazing sun lilies as the main ingredient to provide the heat and seep into the broth made of crystal mountain hot spring's water"

The Thyme on the cassette dropped his voice a bit "Just between you and me those aren't real hot springs, though I guess that's good you won't have to worry about a funny taste"

Reverting to the standard voice Thyme continued "It has a bunch of other ingredients but nobody really cares about them. It just enhances the taste. Let's leave it about that. I may or may not have stolen them from various elven enclaves, but those guys started it so I have no remorse.

"Wait should I be putting that on tape... Well whoever you are, hopefully you aren't an elf, otherwise..." And that was the end of the tap

Thyme... did you seriously rob someone just to make good soup? Thought Kat as she picked up the soup and carried it back to the lounge room. Skye had vanished from her seat, so Kat set herself up.

Kat tried to eat one of the lilies first and found that was clearly not the right way to eat the soup. It didn't even taste like anything; it was just a rubbery texture. Sure it was pleasantly warm when you swallowed, but it was hard to chew and rather unpleasant to swallow at first.

Instead Kat tried to mix the next Lily with a few of whatever else was floating around in the soup. Trying that yielded sadly similar results. The rest of the ingredients were a burst on flavour but the Lily was practically impossible to chew.

I'm getting the feeling you aren't actually meant to eat the flowers. Which, in hindsight may have been really obvious. They did look more like decorations than something you eat but considering the name of the dish Kat had assumed otherwise.

Kat happily ate the rest of the various ingredients. Once she did this though she was met with a surprise. Just as she finished the last piece, of... blue looking celery or something the final lily seemed to melt into the clear blue soup.

It turned from a light blue to a dark red and a tantalising scent started to rise from the bowl. *Ok clearly I wasn't meant to eat the lilies first.* Taking her time to sip the rest soup it was rather pleasant.

There was quite a lot of it, but the strong heat felt warm and comforting, and the soup itself was such an explosion of flavours that it didn't really bother Kat at all.

Once that was finished Kat was going to take the dish back to the kitchen but one of the Timmy's literally flew past, as if thrown at great speed and grabbed the dish before rolling into a perfectly landing and sprinting back down the hallway.

Staring after the absurd sight Kat decided it was time for bed. *Yup, whatever that was, and no matter how cool it was. I also feel like it was a signal I should just sleep and not worry about it.*

Chapter 146: Elder Root Tea

Kat stretched trying to wake herself up. Her right wing bent at what should be an uncomfortable angle but she felt no stiffness. *You know, I do wish these beds were a bit larger. Especially because I think I'll need to sleep in them once more.*

Shaking her head Kat headed out the door to go grab some breakfast of some kind. As she stepped out of the door she saw a very tired Grace do the same.

The elf was in the basic white robes provided and they hung loosely around her frame. Her hair was extremely messy and was just left to hang freely. Grace's ears drooped low, which Kat found odd considering they never really seemed to move.

As Grace heard the door opening beside her, she looked up, bleary eyes with bags underneath then. As soon as she locked eyes with Kat though Grace jerked back as if someone had shot her.

Kat tilted her head "What?"

Grace struggled to form words and just gestured generally in the direction of Kat instead.

Kat tilted her head further to the side indicating her further confusion.

Grace gestured more frantically at Kat and had an exasperated look in her eyes. *Sorry Grace this just isn't translating.*

Flapping her wings and leaning even further sideways Kat let her body follow as she tilted her head and the rest of her body around.

Grace growled at Kat "Lynn is right your powers are dumb"

Kat tried to fly upside down at this and found that while she could do it, it was actually rather painful on her wings and it took a lot of energy. It was worth it for the gag though as her hair hung down, though her kimono seemed capable of supporting itself and stayed up around her knees.

"What about my powers? I mean sure I'm using them for a joke but I don't see how that surprised you at the start" said Kat

Grace rubbed her eyes. Looked away and then back to confirm she was actually awake before asking, "Well, how can you be so cheery in the morning? And how did you manage to dry your hair so fast?"

"I haven't showered yet what are you talking about?" replied Kat

Grace looked like she'd been stabbed "Did you just get up?" she asked as though she'd just asked if she was about to die and already knew the answer.

"Uh... for some reason I feel like it would be kinder not to answer you" said Kat

Grace fell forward at this. Kat's tail snaked around and held the elf in place. Kat flipped herself back around and then grasped Grace with her hands. "Grace, Grace? You with me?" said Kat

"End me" said Grace

"Excuse me could you repeat that?" asked Kat

"End me please" said Grace putting more pressure into her forward leaning.

Further reinforcing her hold on Grace and adding her tail into the mix "Now now Grace, surely it isn't that bad"

Grace just gave Kat a tired look. Not willing to put up with this sort of attitude Kat firmly wrapped her tail around Grace and lead her to the kitchen. Once again, the Timmy's were set up already. Somehow, they'd gotten ahold of chef's hats and Kat chose to simply accept this fact.

"What can I get you for breakfast Grace?" asked Kat

"Suffering" said the elf.

"Timmy's can you point me to the suffering?" asked Kat, and to her surprise they all turned around and pointed to the poison section of the dishes.

Confused Kat walked over and read the plaque on the first one and then nodded assuming it made sense. The dish was called "The walk of suffering" and was a salad with a leafy green as the base and a number of strange purple fruits carved to look like trees with sprinklings of a red berry to look like a path.

"Is this really what you want? It's poisonous you know" asked Kat

Grace did not look pleased at Kat and the Timmy's antics. "Ah, just give me some elder root tea and be done with it" said Grace

"Timmy's elder root tea?" asked Kat. They pointed Kat towards the chilled ingredients shelf. Following their directions she found a plate with a number of mugs on it all filled with tea.

The plaque just read elder root tea and to Kat's disappointment had no button next to it. Wrapping her tail carefully around her uncooperative elf Kat took two cups, one for each of them.

Eventually she dragged Grace back to the lounge room and set her down carefully. Grace nodded and took a sip of tea. Kat nearly thought her mind was playing tricks on her when she saw what happened next.

Before her eyes Grace's hair straightened itself out. The bag under her eyes disappeared. Her ears stopped drooping and a small smile had crept onto her face.

Kat let her mouth hang wide. "What... what on Earth just happened?"

"Elder root tea happened" said Grace

Kat looked at this magical liquid and took a tentative sip... she wasn't impressed. "It just tastes like normal green tea?" "Um... I think I need more clarification"

"Well elder root tea has minor restorative properties, especially potent for fatigue and the effects are almost three times as potent in elves" said Grace "It's one of our most essential exports. So many elves are addicted to the stuff despite it not actually having any addictive properties. Just the ability to help with fatigue in such a major way is very highly treasured"

Kat looked at the tea and back at Grace "Should I be drinking this then? Kind of a waste isn't it?"

Grace shook her head "Not at all. Well, you see, we grow a near endless amount in the elven lands, as well as anywhere outside of them that we can manage it. Elder root isn't a particularly fickle plant and there is no way we'd settle for anything less than an infinite supply"

"So it's like coffee or something?" asked Kat

Grace looked like Kat had just offered to stab her mother. "How could you even compare such a vastly inferior drink that merely masks the signs of fatigue instead of truly restoring them?"

"Ahh???" Kat didn't really know how to respond to that. She'd never really been a coffee drinker herself and the effects seemed to really closely align with what Grace was explaining... though if it worked on Earth Kat could only guess it was in fact worse

"So what exactly are you planning to do today?" asked Kat redirecting the conversation with all the social grace of a charging elephant.

Grace smiled at Kat's choice and responded "I'm not sure. Sitting on this couch is very tempting. It isn't often I can take such a total break from everything. Sure we have days off adventuring, but real relaxation is rare"

Kat nodded but didn't really understand "Perhaps you can give me some tips on how to use my fans?"

Grace's expression became unreadable. It was a strange mix of joy and annoyance and Kat didn't know what to make of it. "Well, Kat, honestly, as much as I'd love to, and I do sincerely mean that, I also fear that I'd ruin your foundation. The first lesson of any combat art is extremely important and I just don't know enough about fans. Bows? Sure always, Daggers? Easy, swords even I could do... but not fans"

"That's fine" said Kat reassuring the elf "Should I perhaps practice by myself?"

The elf practically jumped at Kat before pulling herself back into her seat and returning to a serene expression "If you do something so stupid, I will strangle you myself. You need a teacher Kat, and if you even think about practicing your fans and I find out I will do horrible things"

"Horrible things?" asked Kat

"Horrible things" Grace nodded

"Horrible things" Kat also nodded.

"Well, now that that's established" said Kat "I'm going to get myself some real food. You want anything?"

Grace shook her head and Kat walked off. Entering the kitchen the 'walk of suffering' tempted her greatly but she did what she hoped was the wiser thing and headed away from it.

"Timmy's got a spare plate?" asked Kat

The Timmy's looked up from whatever they were doing and pointed behind Kat. Turning around she found the wall was actually covered in plates of varying size. *How did I not notice that.* Grabbing one of the wall, Kat saw that a new plate had appeared when she took the first off.

Shrugging Kat went around and grabbed various nice-looking berries from around the isles. *I only want a light breakfast after all.* Once her plate was half filled with berries she headed back out to greet the not so tired elf. ***NOVELnext.coM***

Kat sat down quietly and ate her breakfast in silence with Grace. She may have tried to sneak a few berries into the elf's mouth as she was yawning. But she never succeeded and she was never caught, so nobody can say it's true

Chapter 147: Some Practice

Kat finished up her berries and looked over at Grace who was still sitting nearby with her eyes closed and tea mostly finished. "What would you recommend then Grace? If I shouldn't practice with my fans"

Grace opened one eye to look at Kat "Well, sparring is an option but you'd need Skye for that. Alternatively you should probably practice with your fire more. Isn't that why you were unconscious when I first met you?"

"I was perfect lucid thank you very much" said Kat

Grace just shrugged and took another sip of her tea. *Grace is right though. I should probably take this as a chance to practice with my flame a bit more. Maybe I can figure some things out.*

"Is there any advice you can give me for handling my flame? It doesn't exactly like to listen to me" said Kat

Grace shrugged again "Well, I'm not really a wizard, and from everything I've seen neither are you. Not really. You're going to have to test things out I'm afraid"

Kat nodded and stood up, heading for the training wing. She hadn't seen it herself yet and she was a bit curious as to what strange cassette Thyme will have left for her. *Wait on that note.* Stopping at the intersection Kat went to the kitchen to grab the Timmy's

As she opened the door she did find the Timmy's... but they were surrounded by living plants that were attacking them. The Timmy's were easily winning and beating them back with knives and other random utensils.

Kat decided to slowly close the door and ignore that but as the Timmy's noticed her entrance they clapped twice and the previously fighting plants stopped and went back to the ingredient shelf.

I'm not even going to ask. "I'm off to the training area want to come with me?" asked Kat

The Timmy's nodded and followed behind Kat. Once down the hallway Kat carefully opened the door. On her left was another set of doors, and on her right was a number of things she didn't recognise. They all had colourful designs with strange caricatures of Thyme on them.

The Timmy's took one off the shelf and inserted a cassette and Thyme's voice boomed out. "Welcome to the training area. On your left is a bunch of plain rooms for practice. There is a control panel to summon a new target dummy and move it around if you want

"The rooms should be sturdy enough for anything you contestants can throw at them. In fact I'd be impressed if you managed to so much as scratch my walls. A word of warning though"

Thyme's voice dropped to a deep base "Injuring yourself for training is not something I can support. Unlike other injuries, I will NOT heal them. I will do what I am required to, to keep you alive but no more. Fools who think they can use this as a chance to truly test their limits are sorely mistaken"

Thyme's voice then returned to its normal chipper tone "Plus on the right I have a bunch of board games I've made or "borrowed" from around the place. Honestly, I think just taking a deck of cards is your best bet though, sorting through the trash on the wall is hardly worth it

"I know I know, my face is on most of those boxes, but the games take too long to learn and just aren't fun. I've put them here mostly for people who recognise a few of them, but even then... never mind. I'll leave you to your training, be it mental or physical"

"Thanks Thyme" said Kat "Thanks Timmy"

The Timmy's nodded and then went back down the hall. Presumably to the kitchen to continue... whatever it was they were doing. Kat opened the door to the training area and looked inside.

It was even planer than the hallway if that was possible. The room was large, about the size of two tennis courts. There was just nothing. The walls and floor were completely blank. They looked smooth but Kat could confirm there was at least some grip for her feet.

Other than the console on the side of the door presumably the one for training dummies. Kat poked it once to see if it responded but, like the enchantments for the rooms nothing happened. *Guess I'll just have to enjoy the space.*

Kat decided to start of with a bit of running. No sense playing around with your supernatural powers if you still don't have a good grasp on your more basic attributes. As Kat started running, she rather quickly had a stray thought. *Can I run fast enough to run on walls?*

Kat first completed one full lap to build up a bit of speed then, at the start of the second lap Kat sprinted as fast as she could at along the wall. As she approached the corner she started angling herself to turn slightly.

At the corner Kat took a step up onto the wall. Feeling her feet grip Kat took a second step and tried to keep running forward. What actually happened though was that Kat slid straight down.

Kicking off the wall and flapping her wings to prevent falling onto the ground Kat righted herself once again. *Ok, note to self I can't run on walls.*

Undeterred though Kat started eyeing the wall once again. *Hmmm... But can I run up walls?*

Shrugging and deciding she might as well test it Kat performed the same one lap before sprint.

This time she didn't bank at the turn and just kept ploughing forward. Kat was able to take around three steps up the wall before gravity asserted its dominance and threatened to pull her back down.

Once again using her wings to prevent a fall Kat glided back down to the floor. *You know. This has really made me realise something.*

Thought Kat as she rubbed the ends of her wings. *I have wings, why am I trying to run up walls?*

This signaled a new segment for Kat's training. Instead of focusing on her legs she used her wings. Flying around the edges Kat attempted to take the corners as tightly as possible giving herself as little room to move as she could while still avoiding just slamming straight into the wall.

It actually wasn't that hard. *I can turn on a dime. These 90-degree corners are nothing. Granted I can't exactly get up to my full speed with such little room, but at this is a comfortable travel speed and I'm able to turn whenever I want. It's just a little straining on my wings.*

Kat flapped her wings but stayed on the ground stretching them out just to feel the difference. *Hmm, can't feel any strain. I guess whatever damage I might be doing taking such sharp turns is negated by my regeneration.*

Not sure it's exactly healthy for me but at the very least I don't seem to be negatively affected. Actually, hey system, how does my regeneration work? I don't think I've even got any scars

User Kat likely has what is dubbed 'Succubus Regeneration' regeneration is a common trait shared by many demons, but Succubus Regeneration is notable in that it does not leave scarring. Additionally, while Succubus Regeneration is incapable of regrowing lost limbs at power levels similar to User Kat's it can reattach the limbs if retrieved.

Well, I certainly don't want to be cutting into myself any time soon but at least I know that if I lose my arm as long as I can find it again there's no problems.

Actually while I'm asking. What exactly do I need to do to get to rank 2.

D.E.M.O.N.S is actually unsure. Normal path of progression would see a demon form their demonic flame into a vague shape, to be later refined. User Kat's demonic flame is already in a unique shape, though it does not possess the necessary power for rank 2.

So, what do I do then?

D.E.M.O.N.S is unsure. Greater mastery of abilities, or taking in excess demonic energy from the environment might cause Kat's abilities to increase.

Well, how will I know?

Upon reaching Rank 2 User Kat will receive at least one additional ability. It will be exceptionally clear once User Kat increases to Rank 2

Welp, I guess I'll do some more messing around with my demonic flame then. Kat summoned a small wisp of flame to her hand. *Now, it's time for the more serious stuff.*

Kat tried to let the world fall away as she concentrated on the small flame in her hand. She wanted to try and get it to respond more accurately to her commands, or at least get a better handle on controlling it in general. *nOveLNext.com*

Sending the small flame a mental command to go left, it shot off into the wall at great speed, splashing out but surprisingly leaving the material unharmed. Kat looked down at her hand and sighed. *Welp, guess I really do need some practice.*

Chapter 148: Some More Practice

And so that is what Kat did practice. Though to use the word practice implies there was some consistencies to Kat's attempts. Kat's little piece of fire was clearly not willing to listen to her commands.

Of course Kat managed to try a few other things. Increasing the size of her flame? Check, it even was willing to shrink as long as it wasn't touching anything. Throwing it out in a line like a flamethrower, super easy, just keep the energy going as long as you wanted. Summoning the flame from different areas of Kat's body? Some minor success, but success, nonetheless.

What she couldn't do, was control a single small bit of flame. Her slight orders to move one way or another quickly became flames shooting off into the distance, only stopped by the walls.

Which held up remarkably well in Kat's estimations. Even with all her failed attempts they had nary a mark upon them. The temperature in the room may have dropped a little, but that was harder to measure. If it did change, it was hardly enough for Kat to even recognise.

The most Kat was able to manage after a few hours was to keep the flame hovering around the edge of her finger and leading it around. This might not sound impressive, but after failing to even get her flame to do the simplest of tasks this was something Kat considered a grand achievement.

She could even manage to let it trail behind with some effort desyncing the flame and her hands. *I bet that will be pretty useful once I learn how to use my fans. I can have my fire come in and attack along the same path after I've attacked once. If I can mix up the timing it would be pretty hard to react to, I think.*

Kat was munching on some... salad? Maybe? She wasn't really sure what it was that the Timmy's had brought in sometime while she was practicing. It looked like a steak at first glance with various fruits for garnish. But the steak tasted a bit like plums. Whether it was actually meat or not would be up for debate

I suppose it depends on where it comes from. I mean, it could just be a funny looking fruit, or it could be a funny tasting steak. I'm really not sure which is better. Kat ate her food absentmindedly still trying to figure out where she was going wrong.

D.E.M.O.N.S advice?

Perhaps User Kat is simply unable to properly control the flame at Rank 1. User Kat has far surpassed the average Rank 1 in other ways because of User Kat's unique features like True Sight, and flight. Additionally User Kat's regeneration is unusually potent for one of such low rank

So are you telling me I shouldn't be practicing this?

D.E.M.O.N.S cannot advise User Kat on this matter.

And why not? Pretty sure you've advised me plenty in the past

D.E.M.O.N.S is unsure the best path for User Kat's development. When User Kat asks for advice that almost all demons would already know the answer is easy. Now User Kat asks for highly specific advice for a training regiment with no precedent while already a unique case because of the awakening process.

Oh, seems the almighty system has something it can't do then?

D.E.M.O.N.S could dedicate further energy to figuring out the answer. However the diversion of such a large amount of resources to answer the question would require one of User Kat's favour tokens.

This stopped Kat. *Hmm, those things are kind of important.* Kat summoned a bit of flame on her hand and watched it. *Then again it's not like I've considered using them until now... but wait wasn't there something that might let Lily and Sylvie use magic?*

Kat tried to recall, but her practice with her flame seemed to have drained her more than she realised and when trying to look back, her mind was a little foggy. *Wait a minute...* Focusing her mind further she found that it wasn't just that she was tired. She had plenty of energy left.

Scouring her memories of the last few days she found them all in perfect clarity. Going back further she found they continued to keep their crystal focus, and simply shifting through them required some, but minimal effort.

However the further back she went the more the details seemed to be lost. The memories seemed like they were coated in a thick layer of dust she couldn't quite get rid of. A few seemingly random memories stood out in contrast though

The letter she received from Lily for one, that time she spoke with Sylvie shortly after turning into a demon and a few others... *System what's going on? What's happening to my memories?*

nOveLNext.com

User Kat please explain in further detail.

Kat thought about what was just going on, trying to keep it in simple words and direct her thoughts to the system. It was a little weird since if it could read her mind why it didn't know what she meant was a little confusing.

D.E.M.O.N.S finds this confusing. There is nothing unusual with User Kat's descriptions.

Kat spluttered. *What do you mean nothing unusual my memories are fading!*

All mortal creatures are affected by a degrading memory. User Kat is a demon, which slows this process but does not stop it. User Kat is simply able to more easily exam the memories dissipating and use Demonic Energy to reinforce some if necessary.

Huh. Kat hadn't really thought of it like that, but the description made sense. Even if her memory was better and gave her crystal clarity for recent events surely it would run out of room eventually. *So how long do my memories stay clear?*

D.E.M.O.N.S is unsure. Memories from before User Kat awakened suffer from degradation already. Some demons have better memories then others. User Kat should study this.

Kat quickly double checked her memories and found that the system was right. Everything since become a demon was in that crystal clear almost perfect memory form she had come to expect. Even some of the others from just before her awakening were the same. It was only memories older than that, that had degraded at all.

Kat let out a deep breath. *Ok, I'll admit that freaked me out a little. Sure jumping the gun a bit, but I mean, the difference was just so clear.* Kat let out a deep breath. It was an unsettling feeling to actually see your memories decaying in real time. Despite it being natural, what slips away from you often goes unnoticed.

Kat decided to quickly change gears and return to practice with her flame. Things didn't change much. The flame still failed to obey or shot off uncontrollably. Kat felt she was doing a little better but after another few hours of still limited success Kat picked up some more soup and headed to the lounge room to eat it.

There she found Grace and Skye, and they could not have looked more different. Grace looked serene, her empty plate void of anything except the faint traces of water that would seem to indicate she had just finished a salad. She had a light smile on her face and a relaxed posture.

Skye was the opposite; she had a mostly uneaten plate of something. Whatever it was, it had been spat out and now Skye was writhing in pain with her left arm gripper just below her throat.

"Ah... Skye you okay?" asked Kat somewhat unconcerned. Skye would have saved her if it was serious.

Skye struggled to look over at Kat and did her best to shoot a venomous look in her direction. It didn't work that well, as tears leaked from Skye's eyes and she looked to be rather occupied.

"Grace, um suggestions please?" asked Kat

Grace cracked open an eye and looked at Skye's present state before shutting it again "She ate the poison herself. I told her it wasn't something she could handle, but she decided to try and perfect her antidote spell

"I'm sure you can quite clearly tell how well that went. Not really sure what to do either. I know what she ate was poisonous, but not what it actually does" said Grace before closing her eyes once again.

Kat shrugged and pushed her calming aura onto Skye, just lightly as she didn't want to risk knocking Skye out and getting disqualified. As Kat did so she watched the healer's eyes come into slight focus.

"More" croaked Skye

Shrugging again Kat leaned harder on her aura on Skye. Kat was surprised at the ease of control she felt. Despite practicing with her flame she could clearly feel the boundaries of her aura and how much force she was applying to Skye.

Just as Kat started to let her mind consider the possibilities of her newfound control Skye took in a shuddering breath before giving one huge hacking cough.

Chapter 149: The Final Countdown

Skye heaved, but whatever she was trying to get up remained firmly within her stomach. Summoning two sigils around her. She glowed a strange orange before turning her head to the side.

With another great heave a rainbow of colours exited Skye's mouth. The floor opened up underneath the torrent allowing it to escape the confines of the resting area. This continued for a surprisingly long time. It was only after a full minute that Skye stopped the flow of the colourful liquid and took a long deep breathe.

"Tha-" Skye started but coughed again. Reaching her hand up to her throat another sigil appeared and then she started again "Thank you for that"

"Um? For what exactly?" asked Kat

Skye shook her head "Whatever you did to clear my mind, it helped me more than you know. That damned dish didn't just have your standard toxins in it, it also started to sear my mind making it almost impossible to concentrate on spells"

"Ah that, don't mind it so much, you looked rather put out" said Kat

Skye clicked her tongue "That's an understatement. No thanks to elfy here" said Skye jabbing her finger towards Grace

Grace raised just one eyelid and glanced slowly over at Skye "Well, I warned you did I not? I warned you that at least half of that dish was poison. Who knows what crazy effects they have combined other than Thyme... oh wait now you do!"

Skye glared at the elf "You could have done something! Anything? You're a trained adventurer, for crying out loud. I bet you know basic first aid"

Grace shut her eyes and went back to her calm state "Well, as I said I did warn you. Plus, what's normal about intentionally eating a dish made of poison, nobody would be crazy enough to even think about it"

Kat pretended to cough and look away. It was a wasted effort though because Skye was invested in harassing Grace for now.

"Kat was able to solve the problem in less thirty seconds and she just walked into the room. Seems the demon has a bigger heart. Though that ain't saying much considering yours must have shrivelled long ago" said Skye

Grace didn't so much as twitch at the insult and simply continued her steady breathing. "I possess not the power that would have helped you. The only option with any chance to succeed would be to slice you open, and I'm sure that would have been considered an attack"

Skye bit back a retort. It was so much harder to argue with Grace now she was calm. What had changed so much since the day at the sand skipper? "Oooh, seems like the elf wants to remain calm. Grown up a bit since the sand skipper ey?"

Grace let out a yawn. "I was running on limited sleep, recently recovered from being terrified out of my mind, just fought of a giant bird and then found out there was a rogue element I hadn't detected nearby? Perhaps I was indeed a little on edge" said Grace

Skye grit her teeth and turned her eyes towards Kat "Do you have any way to heal my fully? I don't have the mana for it and I can feel the remnants of the poison slowly eating into my stomach"

Kat opened her mouth to say something when Grace spoke first "There is no need Kat, she will be fine"

Skye looked ready to launch into another verbal spar with Grace, but Kat stepped in first this time "I have nothing. Not just because of what Grace said, but I can not heal anyone I'm afraid"

Skye nodded at this and stood up shakily heading towards the kitchen and training hallway. Stopping in the doorway she looked back "Hopefully I can find something to help in the kitchen. Oh and Kat, Thank you, and I'm sorry. Grace, fuck you"

And with that she stepped through the door that promptly shut behind her.

Kat raised an eyebrow and looked to Grace, but the elf still had her eyes closed. So, Kat voiced her question "What was that about?"

Grace shrugged "Who knows what goes on in a humans head. Especially that one. Probably just regrets making a bad impression of herself"

Kat considered Graces words. *Really? I mean... it was a rather bad impression to start arguing with Grace, but then shouldn't she be apologising to her instead?*

Kat shrugged and headed for the dorms. Once the door shut behind her Kat dismissed her kimono and headed for the shower, making sure to turn it straight to scalding temperature.

Relaxing under the streams of water she considered if it was a good idea to send another message to the others back on Earth. *I mean... they have to have seen the other message right? But what do I say? I spent a day accomplishing nothing and I'm no closer to coming back then last time? I'm sure that would go over well.*

Actually system? Would it even start a new message since I'm still on the same summoning?

Of course. As long as the content is specified as a new message the previous one will be erased.

Well, there goes the easy option of not wanting to mess the messaging up.

In the end Kat did send a message, but it was nothing noteworthy, just some well wishes and a promise to tell the full story once she returned. *NOVELnext.coM*

Summoning her kimono Kat flopped down onto the bed and felt the wall catch her wing. I do really wish these beds were a bit larger. I know it doesn't hurt or cause me problems when I wake up but it's hardly comfortable.

Despite her complaints though, Kat was able to drift off easily into a deep sleep.

##

And then it was morning. Kat awoke and showered before her meal this time. She'd had the full three meals yesterday and could feel that her body would actually rather she didn't have the extra food.

Summoning her kimono and stepping out the door Kat was surprised to find nobody around. Kat checked on the clock room and found that she still had around 2 hours. Well, 1 hour fifty-three to be exact but who's counting?

Kat headed to the kitchen and was slightly disappointed to find it free of Timmy's. Once again, the sweet call of the poison dish sung out in her mind... but after seeing the state Skye ended up in her voice of reason had plenty of ammo so she settled for her fruit assortment again.

Kat finished up her fruit in short order and relaxed in the lounge. She felt there was no reason to watch the clock because the exit was in this room. Assuming the door opened she'd be fine, or the others would know.

But time continued to pass. After what Kat felt was around an hour she poked her head into the clock room to see she was about right, only 45 minutes remained. Walking back to the dorms Kat started banging on the Grace's door

Rather quickly the elf in question poked her head out of the door with a questioning look. "Good morning, just thought I'd mention there is only forty five minutes left"

Grace's eyes widened before nodding and heading back into the room. A short time later a barely half dried elf exited with water dripping from her hair as she lightly jogged down to the kitchen.

Kat let her go and headed towards Skye's door. Knocking thoroughly she found she got no response. Kat bit her lip slightly and looked around. *Do I just leave Skye here? I mean... maybe it's for the best? Then again, a healer is really nice... at least for Grace? *

Kat tried once again but to no response. With a shrug Kat left the door behind and went to the living room, only to find a perfectly awake Skye with a drink in hand.

"Ah... hi? How did you get there?" asked Kat

"I walked?" asked Skye confused

Kat nodded for yes, this did in fact make sense, Skye did lack the necessary appendages to do anything other than walk places, and it was doubtful she had the magic capacity to teleport... of course this wasn't what Kat wanted though.

"Right but... I thought you were still asleep" said Kat

Skye shook her head "No, I was meditating in the training rooms"

And she says that like it explains absolutely everything. Kat shrugged and took a seat on one of the empty couches. A short time later Skye joined them as well and quickly ate her meal, which looked to be made entirely of a neon green lettuce looking vegetable.

Once that was done Grace took a long gulp of her tea and looked at the others. "Well... almost time?"

Kat shrugged, and Skye seeing this sighed but got up and checked the clock room "Yup, one minute left" said Skye

Chapter 150: Ruined Ruins

Kat stayed sitting down and relaxed as the time ticked down. Letting her head drift towards the door, a clicking sound rang out, and the door opened at a leisurely pace. Skye marched straight for the door as soon as it started opening.

Kat pulled herself to her feet and looked to see what was beyond. For the others it was obscured by a thick white film distorting the view. Kat saw a grey wall slightly beyond the door obscuring her view instead.

Grace took one last long gulp of tea before getting up as well. Side by side Kat and Grace followed after the impatient healer. Once through the door, Grace to could admire the impressive view known as 'a wall'. Skye had already turned left though, so Kat and Grace followed calmly.

After they took the left turn the wall dropped away and Kat could now glance out at the final stage in all its glory. *Guess I don't need to get a bird's eye view.* The final stage was set in a recess within the ground.

The terrain slowly sunk as it approached the centre of the island, with a proud tower standing tall in the middle of it all. Surrounded on all sides by cracked and ruined stone walls, overgrown with moss.

It looked almost like everything leaned in towards the tower, whatever the town was, it was built for the tower, and perhaps die for it. The pavement looked weathered and the vines were thick and strong. Various trees had cracked the pavements occasionally, but they were few and far between.

The walls themselves were of moderate height, just high enough to block someone's vision, but not so high as to be impassable should the need call for it. "So the last stage will be ancient ruins" said Kat with a grin

"Well actually" said Grace "These aren't ruins at all. Well, I mean sure they look like that on the surface, but quite a few things don't add up. I bet Thyme made the whole thing just for the tournament"

Kat curled her tail into a question mark "What makes you say that?"

"Well" said Grace as Skye got out her book and started writing "If you notice, the walls are all a bit to uniform in their height. Even with the cracks none of them are lower than eye level except when there are major holes,

"Secondarily, they all seem to be made of exactly the same material. Even in towns with only one major resource for building shelter at least a few will inevitably be made of something else. Finally, there isn't much evidence of old plants

"Look at those vines, and even the trees, there are no dead vines only living ones, and the trees don't seem to have any leaves underneath them, though I will admit it is hard to make out from here" said Grace

"I don't quite follow. Why would there be dead vines? The whole area looks really healthy to me" said Kat

Skye somehow made her notebook vanish and said "Exactly Kat, the vines are all healthy"

Kat returned her tail to the question mark position. Grace sighed "Plants die, all of them, and it is only natural that the dead one's help further the ecosystem in some way. These ruins though, they only have living plants, they haven't been around long enough for anything to die, or it was just cleaned

"You can see why either of those options makes it very likely that it isn't a real ruin" said Grace

"Right... but why does it matter? Thyme has been really good at designing environments so far, so does it matter if they are fake ruins or real ruins?" asked Kat

Grace bit her lip "Well, perhaps, I can't be sure yet. Though look at the way everything is arranged" said Grace as she gestured out towards the rubble "It looks closer to a maze then a town, with winding streets. This is in spite of the fact that everything is also clearly built around that tower"

"Hmm" mumbled Kat as she took another look at the ruins. *I mean, I guess Grace is right?* Kat could see what Grace meant about the height but didn't necessarily agree with some of the other assessments. *I guess I'll just accept her answer.*

"Actually Kat" asked Grace "Can you see if you can spot any of the other teams around the edge?"

Kat nodded, *I really should have thought about that.* Pouring demonic energy into her eyes Kat looked to the side. Rather quickly she spotted a similar grey wall to the one that she was standing next to. She couldn't see anyone standing next to it, but the angle was rather bad.

Seems Thyme designed it that way. Checking her immediate surroundings again, Kat noticed that they had a great view of the area, they were actually hidden rather well from others sight. With the grey wall, and the few random bits of stone it likely blocked anyone who would otherwise be able to see them.

Kat tried again to glance around and did find a number of other exits but no signs of movement. Thyme had aligned the debris in such a way to make spotting people nearly impossible before they entered the ruins.

"Seems like Thyme though ahead. I can tell where other people might have exited, but Thyme has blocked my line of sight perfectly. It looks fine at first glance, but it's actually quite genius"

Grace nodded "Well that should be within Thyme's capabilities. Is it worth the risk of flying? You can surely spot a few people that way, but I'm not sure we want that kind of attention"

"No" snapped Skye "I mean, no it isn't worth it. It's too much of a risk to give away our position to multiple teams and not even find them all ourselves"

Grace narrowed her eyes and Kat shrugged before looking directly up into the sky. She had expected to see the sun overhead but instead found a wall of fog that looked to have been dyed bluish. It even had a fake sun.

Huh, weird. What's the point though? "The sky is fake" said Kat

Skye looked over at Kat shocked but Kat quickly gestured above them making the healer follow her arm and nod. Grace took a long as well, being careful not to stare directly at the fake sun. "I think that sun isn't moving" said Grace after a moment of hesitation

Kat, having no qualms with staring into a magical sun, turned her gaze fully towards it. She only had a second to realise this might still be a bad idea before it fully entered her vision. To Kat's great pleasure though, it didn't burn her eyes at all. Pushing energy into them might not be the wisest idea, but she wasn't hurt.

Kat studied the sun as best she could and found it unchanging. Of course, Kat only really gave it about ten seconds so she couldn't be sure. "It doesn't seem to be moving at all"

Grace nodded "Well, it is somewhat unfortunate that the sun is in our eyes if we are heading towards the tower, but at least we can hide in it's shadow once we get moderately close" *NOVELnext.com*

"So what is the plan" asked Kat glancing between her two companions

Skye licked her lips but said nothing, switching her gaze to Grace. "Why am I the one in charge? I'm just the scout" said Grace

Kat and Skye shrugged, though Skye's was a little forced. Grace for her part sighed "Fine, well, first thing first is to get a move on. I think we should try to be somewhat quiet, but I doubt you pair are well equipped for stealth"

Kat flapped her wings lightly in response lifting herself just slightly off the ground and hovering in small circles. "Ok maybe you are equipped for stealth" said Grace, surprised at the lack of noise generated by Kat's flight.

Skye got a pained expression "I'm not though. I've had to sneak before, so I won't be completely dead weight, but we wouldn't make good time"

Grace bit her lip "Well, we can either go for a fast walk, keeping low and quiet, or go for an all-out sprint. We don't have the luxury to sneak too much. The orb must be in that last tower otherwise what was the point of giving everyone that resting area to catch up."

Skye nodded and Kat replied "That does make sense. I recon we have to go quiet. We don't know if the ruins are just that, ruins, or if Thyme has left us some traps. I wouldn't put it past him to have some giant, uh I dunno, leopard or something"

Grace groaned. "Of course, how could I overlook something so basic. Just because a normal ruined town wouldn't have traps or large predators doesn't mean this one doesn't especially after I pointed out how fake it is"