

DEMONS 171

Chapter 171: German Supplex

As Kat was nodding in acceptance, Nixilei and Kat heard a knock at the door. They shared a quick look, before Nixilei stood quickly and strode towards the door.

On the other side was the old butler of Gareth. *Um... Maxwell? I think his name was.*

"Greeting. Young Master Gareth has called for your presence in the training hall" said the old butler.

"Understood. I will guide Kat there myself" said Nixilei gesturing for Kat to follow behind.

Nixilei began by leading Kat deeper into the mansion, heading in the general direction Kat knew the training hall to be. "You know I could probably find my way there Nixilei. If your busy you can return" said Kat

Nixilei grinned, though Kat couldn't see this. "And miss your confrontation with Kress? You'd have to chain me to the dungeon walls before you could stop me. And even then, I might manage to escape in time. I would not be willing to miss such a... fascinating confrontation"

Nixilei wasted no time as she twisted and turned through the corridors. She strode with purpose, as only someone who instinctively understood her location could. *Which is strange because based on everything I know Nixilei hasn't actually lived here that long. Though I guess this means her memorization speed is exceptional.*

I wonder if it's better than mine? I have to actually look through my memories to find the right one, and only because I can use demonic energy to speed my thought process can I do it in a timely manner, but Nixilei doesn't seem to have any such issues.

Nixilei stopped. Kat had arrived just before the door to the training room. Nixilei glanced once more at Kat before pushing open the door feigning a lack of hesitation. As the doors opened up, Kat wasn't sure what she expected to see, but it felt appropriate nonetheless.

Gareth was off to the side with Green seemingly asleep on his arm. Though Kat suspected the girl was ready to jump into action soon. She'd likely had her rest and was waiting to see what happened. Nixilei had taken a sharp left so that she stood beside Kat when she followed behind.

A subtle bit of politics standing by my side? Or simply a habit of leading Green into important functions. And last, and certainly least was Kress. Arms cross and eyes glaring angrily at the doorway.

Intentionally ignoring the clearly antagonistic swordsman Kat turned her gaze to Gareth and said "So, are we here to discuss my services for the rest of the tournament?"

"Fuck you" said Kress

Kat slowed her turn to a crawl. Eeking out the seconds as her gaze found Kress. "I beg your pardon Kress?" said Kat

"You heard me. Fuck you. We've just met back up and you're already trying to gauge us out of more money" said Kress

Kat took a step forward and looked down at him despite their similar height. "I do not believe I so much as mentioned payment did I? Plus, I'm not the one acting in bad faith" said Kat

"Bad faith? You're getting payed more than enough already and then you go and take the grand prize for the solo contestant. Where do you get off asking us for more?" said Kress starting to go a bit red.

"I won this through my own efforts Kress" said Kat holding up the gem in question. "What do you actually expect me to do"

"Why don't you hand it over? You work for us. Your prize should belong to US" said Kress.

Kat looked to Nixilei with a grin, before enhancing her eyes. The fey gave just the slightest nod, so small that if Kat hadn't improved her sight, she'd have missed it. *You know Kress. I'm not really mad at you. But, I've lived with children for many years, and I know when someone needs to be scolded.*

Turning her gaze to Kress, Kat started to channel her demonic energy for some extra intimidation. *Hopefully this gives me the right effect.* Kat spread her wings wide and pushed a good chunk of her energy into her vocal cords. **nOVelNɛxt.Com**

"Well Kress" said Kat. But the voice that left her mouth was not the clear confident, but slightly soft sound Kat normally had. Now it was a distorted gravely thing. It sounded like Kat had been smoking for half a century and only recently stopped to inhale rocks instead.

"I don't really see what right you have to demand anything of me. Your team looks away as you throw your petty tantrum. You have no right to take my prize. You lack the justification. The army. Or even the personal strength to impose your own will. Heck, you aren't even the one I have a contract with. So what makes you think you can get me to do anything"

Kress looked suitably shaken but he was too angry to stop now. "Right? I have every right. You're just some demon spawn we hired for a quick job. Why the hell do you think you deserve anything at all? You really think you can defeat me?"

Kat stood as straight as she could. Keeping her energy in her voice box for her voice Kat also started to add a few other effects. She started running her energy through her wings, specifically trying to focus on the veins giving her wings a pulsating purple look with a faint glow.

Kat placed the faintest trace of demonic fire just below her eyes. Too small to see but present enough to cast deep shadows, and ready to leap up as soon as she started to speak, to punctuate her sentences. Finally, Kat hid another batch behind her teeth. So that as she spoke, she seemed to leak just a small amount of fire.

"Defeat you? Of course I can. I already defeated you. I beat not only you, but the rest of Skye's team with only minor help from Grace." Growled Kat

Kress started to speak up, but Kat used the large amount of energy she was circulating to dash forward and put her hand on his shoulder, pushing down light. Enough to hurt but not enough to do any real damage.

"Ah, ah, ahh. I've had enough of your nonsense Kress. I've just as much right to be on the team as you do, if not more. I won both the final round, but the one other I participated in. Why now are you acting like a petulant child?"

Kat could see Nixilei, who had moved next to Gareth and Green, smiling with a wicked grin. Gareth looked unimpressed but, who he was displeased with was unclear. Green seemed to still be sleeping but Kat could see one of her eyes were cracked open.

Kress' composure was cracking at this point. His anger was fading, and the depth of his mistake seemed to be dawning on him... except it seemed he enjoyed the taste of feet. "You're just a greedy bitch trying to wring us dry. If you actually have some honour why even, ask for further payment"

Well, Nixilei is a healer... Kat used her grip to throw Kress into the wall. He sailed in a short arc before crashing into it just above the floor. He slid down slightly after the impact and Kat strode after him, tail snaking around her side like a viper searching for prey.

"Do you have any idea how this even works you poor fool? You think all those ingredients and mana just get funnelled straight to me? You think that travelling between realms is easy?" *Because it sure seems that way sometimes * "You think all I care about is money?" said Kat

Apparently, the wall hadn't been enough of a warning. Kress quickly got to his feet and started Kat down once again. "Well, what are you going to do? Why not attack me properly. Come on, you know you want to!"

Ah... this is his bait to get me in trouble. Kat tilted her head back and to the side, making it look like she was contemplating his offer, while she was actually trying to get Nixilei in eyesight.

Once she managed it, the healer gave another imperceptible nod, somehow able to tell once Kat could see her. Striding up to Kress she grabbed him on the sides digging her short nails in just a bit, easily cutting through the leather.

Well, I was never much of a wrestling fan, but... as long as I'm putting on a show. Kat then hurled Kress back, letting herself bend over backwards, carrying his weight along before slamming his head into the training room floor.

A loud cracking rang out from that, as Kat snaked her form to the side and looked down at the now unconscious fighter. *Now... if only I could remember what the move was called I could say something witty.* Kat then raised her gaze to look over towards the other three...

Chapter 172: Negotiating a Contract

And was not at all surprised to see Green and Nixilei snickering, though in very different manners. Nixilei had a wry smile and was letting her laughter ring out freely. It was only her restrained posture and quiet laughs that kept it to snickering.

Green, was instead actually trying to restrain herself to at least keep up the illusion that she was sleeping, or not paying attention but she was failing. Small spurts of laughter leaked out from her as she pointedly looked away and tried to calm her breathing.

Gareth... well Gareth looked like he didn't know if he should laugh or cry, and Kat felt the answer was probably to sigh instead. Kress was a friend and someone that he had known for quite some time. Didn't change the fact that he had clearly done something that was monumentally stupid.

The group just stared at each other from across the training room, as they waited for their two fey companions to finally finish their fits of laughter. Once they had finally recovered Gareth was the one who spoke first. "Was that really necessary"

"Yes" was the response that met him from two sources, neither of which was Kat.

Gareth turned to Green hanging off his shoulder and sighed before looking at Kat for her answer. "Well, if we didn't have Nixilei around to heal him just in case I hit him too hard I wouldn't have done it. I'm not really mad at all, but I do think he needed to be put in his place, so if I can do that by scaring him just a bit it was all worth it"

Gareth's smile faltered even more "You call that scaring him a bit?"

Kat shrugged "Yeah I do. No permanent harm has been done to him. He isn't some small child to threaten with a time out, he is a nearly fully grown adult who runs around with swords slaying monsters. He needs to calm down a bit, because the next 'monster' he ticks off may not be so forgiving. Imagine if he'd truly annoyed Thyme for instance"

Gareth's smile dropped into a frown at that. "I suppose you are right about that. Honestly he's lucky that Thyme takes things in such good humour. And you are right, it's just. He has his reasons you know? And he's been a good friend to me for many many years. You've only really seen the worst of him"

"Look Gareth" said Kat turning to face him fully, but dropping her remaining demonic tricks "It took me all of the like, three days I spent with him to see he needs some help to sort himself out. Nixilei and Green clearly think the same otherwise they wouldn't be laughing"

Gareth looked down at Green for confirmation, but she just buried her head in his shoulder. Turning instead to Nixilei she met his gaze with steel in her eyes. Gareth was the one to break first, looking away and turning back to Kat.

"Ok, so maybe he does need some help, but surely beating him unconscious was not the answer" said Gareth

Kat nodded "It isn't the answer, it's the fear that I instilled before that point. However, fear isn't going to keep him in line forever. I've had to deal with many bratty kids. You need to show them how they are wrong properly, not just scare or punish them because they'll just learn to hide it better

"Why, I bet the only reason Kress still acts so overtly is because he hasn't ever really been confronted like this. Nixilei always gets stopped when you stand in, under the guise of fairness. Though I'm not saying she was doing it for his benefit"

Nixilei shrugged at this "I certainly wasn't. I was doing it for my own"

Gareth gave a placating gesture... which looked a little silly because he only had access to one arm "Ok, can we just, move on? You've made your point. Can we discuss how we want to deal with our partnership moving forward?"

Kat pushed her now resting demonic energy towards her head to give her some time to think. *Hey system. What sort of limits do I have on beacons? Can I just have as many as I want or what?*

User Kat may have one active beacon at the current time. This will increase as User Kat's Rank increases.

Will giving one out conflict with the one I have already given Minor?

No. The limitation on beacons is not a D.E.M.O.N.S imposed one. It is a physical limitation of the demon in question. User Kat is not capable of producing multiple Beacons at this time.

Hmmm. If I can only have one should I be a bit careful with them? I really want to make sure that Minor can get a real one when I meet her though. Can I dismiss Beacons whenever I want?

No. User Kat must touch the Beacon in question and reabsorb it.

This is suddenly becoming a bit more of a concern then I thought it would be. Do I have any other options?

User Kat is recommended to make a Contract involving the Beacon involving keeping it within their hands.

Oooh. Yeah that makes sense actually. I really have to remember that I can do that. Other than that though is there anything to really consider?

No. User Kat will suffer no ill effects if Beacons leave the intended recipients' hands. It only means that the new owner will be capable of Summoning User Kat.

Well that isn't so bad then. Ok. If they ask, I'll hand over a beacon under contract. It's not for a few weeks yet that Minor will have the chance to contact me because her grandmother said she had to wait at least a month. That means I've got time to make sure I can cast another one.

Letting her mind return to a more normal speed she spoke "Of course Gareth. Please tell me how you'd like to deal with this"

Kat retracted her wings, letting them sit in their half-folded position that was most comfortable. She let her tail drape around her neck like a scarf. Her kimono, which had at some point started to move around as if blown by some unseen wind settled and she rested her hands in front of her body.

"Right" said Gareth "We'd like to have you return for future rounds. Mostly the same contract as before, but we'd require you to be trying to win all rounds in the future. It was only so lax this first time because between the rest of us we were confident to take the prize even without your assistance"

Kat nodded "That seems completely acceptable. I'm happy to try in the rest of the tournament rounds, it was quite fun when I did so for this one"

Gareth held up a hand "One thing you should be aware of though. Most organisers will not be as powerful as Thyme. If they aren't monitoring future rounds the chance of injury skyrockets"

Hey system what happens if someone cut off my arm?

User Kat would need to reattach said arm then it would recover rapidly. It is unlikely to decay while separated, but the wound will fully heal over eventually making reconnection much harder.

Hmmm

"That should be fine. I'd like to see Thyme again, but even if we do not I'll be ok with more deadly combat" said Kat

Gareth nodded "Good. Is there anything else to cover?"

Nixilei spoke up before Kat had the chance "We must discuss if Kat is to provide us with a beacon to contact her in the future. It is possible to do so without it, but the price just for the summoners services would be exorbitant if we were targeting a specific demon"

Gareth nodded "Yes, Nixilei brings up a good point. Will you provide us with one?"

Kat let a tiny bit of fire leak out below her eyes again giving them those strange shadows while she maintained her smiling demeanour "I am willing. But it would require a contract stipulating you would keep it safe and within your hands. I would rather not let such a thing out into the wider world"

"Wait" said Nixilei "You will at least need to give us permission to hand it over to a summoner else we cannot use the beacon to call you. Unless of course you are willing to teach us instead?"

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Kat shook her head "I am incapable of teaching you the required spell for summoning me. I simply do not know it on the summoner end. Sure I can remember the runes but that is about my limit"

Nixilei nodded "I understand. In that case I have nothing more to add. Though I would request you make the beacon able to be handled by any within our group instead of a single individual just in case"

Kat shook her head but grinned "I'll be leaving off one name in particular if that is to be the case"

Chapter 173: Actually Signing the Thing

Nixilei stood silently but Green let out a laugh said "No Kress" then went back to giggling for some reason as if those two words were infinitely funnier than anything else.

Kat quirked an eyebrow but nodded along "That was the implication yes. He has proven himself to be incapable of recognising the consequences. Even if we have a contract threatening dire consequences, I'm not sure he could avoid doing something extremely stupid"

Gareth looked like he wished to argue with this point and defend his unconscious friend but seeing Nixilei and Green both nodding solemnly, forced him to close his mouth.

"Shall I begin the contract reading?" asked Nixilei

After receiving a round of nods she continued "I Nixilei, on behalf of Gareth, and Green, do so claim that we shall protect the beacon provided by Kat to the best of our abilities. We will not allow it to be removed from our possession except specifically to be used in a ritual to summon you for our own purposes. This contract is valid until such a time that the beacon is returned to the demon Kat. Do you accept?"

Hmmm, I note that you didn't say summon me for the tournament but for your own purposes... but I suppose that's fine. Kat gave Nixilei a long hard look as she nodded trying to indicate that while she did know what Nixilei done, it was acceptable. "I accept"

Chains burst out from behind Kat in the largest numbers she'd seen yet. They rushed like a wave to encircle the three before wrapping them and herself up in a seemingly endless torrent of burning steel.

Kat's vision was obstructed long before the process finished and so she had time to question things. Things like, *are the chains made of steel? They do sort of look that way except for the whole being on fire part.*

Also, why is it still so coated in my colours when I'm initiating a contract with three other people. Is it because they don't know what they are doing? Or is it because it's individual. Like I actually have three contracts here, one with Nixilei, one with Green and one with Gareth rather than one contract involving all of us... system?

User Kat is correct. User Kat is initiating three contracts. Be aware this is not always standard. Depending on the contents of the contract it might be binding between all parties rather than between each partner and User Kat.

I guess that makes enough sense. After this short series of thoughts, the chains finally constricted and sunk back into Kat's bodies allowing her to see once again. As they did a light started to shine from her chest where her heart was.

A deep purple light, darker than her fire normally was, shone out. Slowly, her chosen beacon started to make its way out of her chest. It started off with no colour at all. Completely transparent with blurry edges.

As it made its way further into the world though, it gained definition. It started to bleed into a purple matching the light around it, as it expanded from a projection into a 3D object. The details on the flowers and the spade started to sharpen up.

As it was extending out Kat felt that she could either drop it into her hands or allow it to continue projecting itself forth towards Nixilei. *Bet it's more impressive to go straight for our friendly healer.*

Turning slightly so the light was directed towards Nixilei, Kat let the beacon travel along its predetermined path. Nixilei's face was a mask of calm analysis like normal. Kat felt like pouting when she saw the lack of reaction but decided to hold her regal appearance she was using instead.

Green though, wasn't even pretending to be asleep anymore. She watched the process with wide eyed innocent curiosity. It looked like she was using her eyes to drink in every possible detail that had been etched into Kat's beacon.

Once it reached Nixilei it hovered right in front of her. It was about half an arm's length away and was waiting for her to grab.

Nixilei's eyes lit up instead though. If Kat didn't know she was a person she could have sworn she was a robot scanning the beacon before her. Nixilei let her gaze cover the entire thing, picking up every subtle detail she could before she started to walk slowly around it.

The beacon held in place as Nixilei completed her slow rotation, with her expression perfectly fixed in its natural state. One full rotation later Nixilei finally grasped the beacon in her hand.

Turning it over once she made a fist and then, the beacon disappeared. *No... that's wrong.* Kat could hardly believe what her eyes were telling her. In place of the expected gemlike symbol now stood a detailed tattoo that looked to be engraved in Nixilei's arm.

A quick flash of white light as a sigil burned into existence and then the item in question was gone. Kat's regal veneer cracked, and her mouth hung open staring at the spot in Nixilei's hand where the beacon had disappeared.

"ahtchaba... o.... Ok what" asked Kat

Nixilei's smile moved upward slightly before locking in place. "A special spell taught to those in my line of work. A rather unique application of healing magic. Your beacon shall be completely safe with me. I can assure you that it will not leave our sight"

I have no idea how to respond to that. It's perhaps the coolest thing I've ever seen. "Um, can you do that to other people?" asked Kat

Nixilei nodded "Yes but only I, or someone else with the spell can retrieve the item in question so I wouldn't recommend it to anyone who is incapable of properly utilising the spell. Where did you think I hid my daggers in these flowing robes?"

Kat quirked her eyebrows. "Is a spacial storage not an acceptable answer"

"I'm afraid not. Those are completely banned for use in the tournaments" said Nixilei

"Oh" said Green suddenly jumping upright. "Before I forget"

Green tapped her bracelet and the same sigil that had appeared for Nixilei appeared for Green. A moment later the bag she had received during the maze round. Reaching deep into the bag she pulled out a familiar doll. *novelNext.com*

It was the one of Thyme with a kimono reminiscent of her own on it. Green zipped over next to Kat, handed it to her and then ran straight back to Gareth all in the space of two seconds.

Kat smiled as she beheld the doll, her prize for interacting with Thyme between rounds. It reminded her a bit of the Timmy's and that made it all the better. "Thank you Green" said Kat

Green nodded "I thought it best to give you now considering you won't stay"

Nixilei and Gareth both raised eyebrows at this. "Were we not intending to invite Kat to stay for one more night before she leaves us?" asked Gareth

Green shook her head "No, she will not be accepting. It's Kat's time to leave" said Green.

Nixilei looked completely accepting of this answer but Gareth still didn't look convinced. He let her gaze shift to Kat and looked for confirmation.

"Green is correct" *Though how she knew is a mystery* "I planned to leave as soon as this was all sorted out. This particular adventure has been fun, but it is time I get back to my own friends and... family" said Kat

"I guess it's a long five days" said Gareth

Kat nodded "That it has"

As Kat said that, the tell-tale glow of summoning appeared beneath her feet. *Huh, you know, this is somewhat weird that it chooses now. Is it because I'm ready to leave and they are ready to see me go?*

Correct.

"I'll see you all soon. And remember not to eat using Haste Green" said Kat

Nixilei grinned at this while Green pouted. Gareth gave a solemn nod. Kat waved as she let the portal take her. Colours washed over her, and she felt a profound sense of correctness. Shivering at the comfortable sensation the need for sleep almost overwhelmed her now she was fully relaxed.

What's going on? Kat ran her hand through the shifting colours that danced as flames before her eyes. *Why is it so much better this time?* And then it hit her. This was true teleportation. Not the horrendous mockery Thyme used. And this was right.

Kat let herself be carried by the flames, before they gently deposited her in her room. Kat carefully placed the Thyme doll at the foot of the bed. Opened the cupboard and used one of the mostly empty shelves to place the box containing the gem and her new fans before looking at her bed.

Good thing my skin repels everything. Thought Kat as she dismissed and resummoned her kimono collapsing onto her bed and letting sleep take her.

Chapter 174: Kat took a deep breath as her mind jolted from sleep. She had always been a morning person, but the disconnect of going from extremely tired to completely awake and alert despite not having any dangers to contend with was a strange one.

Kat started to stretch out but found something tugging on her tail. Looking down towards the offending object she found Sylvie, sleeping peacefully wrapped up in her tail and clinging to the end with a soft smile on her face.

Kat looked towards her clock and found it read 7:00am. Her first thought was slight panic as the need to get ready for school awoke in her. Before the rest of her brain caught up to her and reminded her that school was over. Not just for the holidays but for good.

So instead she pulled Sylvie upwards using her tail and wrapped the little girl in her arms. Grabbing one of Kat's pillows she placed it gently under Sylvie's head as she hugged the girl close with her three limbs.

Sylvie slowly opened one eye as Kat was fiddling around with everything but quickly closed it again before Kat noticed once she realised that Kat was going to snuggle with her for a while longer.

Once Kat was sure that Sylvie would be comfortable, she held the little girl tight and let herself relax once again. After a few minutes of relaxation with Sylvie, Kat started to remember the gem in her closet.

I should probably ask about that. Hey System what will that gem do to me?

Once User Kat touches the gem in question it will likely boost User Kat to rank 2. This is only an estimation though, as User Kat has an unusual Demonic Flame.

Yeah yeah you've mentioned that one before system. Guess I should get it done soon then before my next summoning.

User Kat is to be informed that due to the extended nature of the recent Summoning and the additional rewards received User Kat will have that Summoning count as two weeks' worth of work. User Kat will not need to accept another Summoning until the following week.

Kat couldn't help the smile that formed on her lips. As much as she enjoyed her weekly adventures, that one earlier break from the madness wasn't all that restful. She was still settling in with everything and she had the most recent transformation hanging over her head.

Now I can just take a week off. Well, maybe not the full week. I should probably still use that tainted ruby on say... Monday? Just to make sure I'm used to the changes for next Friday night.

Maybe I should do it this Saturday instead? It's still two days away I think... Today is Thursday, right? Things got a little odd there with the teleporting around and the time freezing Thyme was doing.

Kat dismissed her thoughts of work to concentrate on the comforting feeling of holding on to the little girl in her arms. *I remember back when Sylvie first came to the orphanage and I let her sneak into my bed. I miss those times. Perhaps now that we live together I should encourage it more*

Though... Kat felt her right wing digging into her side as it was crushed between the bed frame and her side. *Perhaps I will need to figure some better way to hold her first. This isn't the most comfortable thing, and it is only through the grace of my regeneration that I can be confident this isn't causing me any long-term damage.*

Kat sighed and dismissed her thoughts that had rapidly turned once again to more serious considerations. She could worry about them once she was doing something else.

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And so for the next hour Sylvie and Kat were content to enjoy the quiet company of each other's embrace. At some point Kat managed to work out that Sylvie was not in fact still asleep but chose to politely ignore that knowledge in favour of hugging the girl a little bit tighter.

Despite Kat's relaxed attitude, the last few days had really been a toll in some ways. Sure she could shrug it off for the most part, but she had never been so thoroughly focused on everything that was going on practically the entire time, or at least most of it during the final round.

Even her journey with Minor had not been so stressful because she could allow the endless sound of her footfalls and her rhythmic breathing to somewhat convince herself that nothing was going to go wrong.

Even still, one hour of time with Sylvie was enough to recover from the stresses of the most recent summoning. As intense as it was, Kat was still unrattled, and the day was calling to her.

Giving Sylvie a slightly tighter squeeze signalling her intent to start moving, and then acting on that signal caused Sylvie to pout. With her pyjamas on and hair messed up from sleeping, it was perhaps the most effective pout Kat had even seen from the legendary girl.

And when her big eyes opened up and seemed to plead with Kat for another few minutes she could not resist their inherent charms. Instead, Kat fell onto her face with Sylvie wrapped up to the side before pulling her in with one arm and letting her wings fall over Sylvie.

Hopefully this is comfortable enough for her. Though if Sylvie's instant attempts to bury herself in Kat's side was any indication it was comfortable enough.

Just as they started to get comfortable though, the door was cracked open just a tiny bit as Vivian scanned the room looking for the youngest member of the household. Seeing Sylvie's white tuft of hair poking up from under Kat's wing answered her question.

Vivian slowly went to close the door again assured the Sylvie was fine when Kat raised her other arm and beckoned her over. Vivian paused in shock, but the arm kept beckoning. Kat's hearing was good enough to have heard the click of the door. *And besides I bet Vivian will enjoy this as well.*

Vivian looked down at her black and red checkered business suit and shrugged before sliding up to the side of the bed as well and slipping under Kat's wing with Sylvie. She couldn't quite fit under the whole thing like Sylvie could, but without wings herself she could turn on her side and hug them both.

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"Welcome back Kat. It's good to see you safe" said Vivian in a whisper.

Kat smirked "Of course, have you seen how well I regenerate?"

Vivian however didn't deign to respond to Kat's question and instead squeezed them both tighter, unafraid to use her full strength to squish them both slightly.

Kat felt herself relax further. It was... nice to sit here with Vivian. She hadn't really been the type of person to go for hugs all the time, and especially not with Gramps after she'd grown up a bit. *But perhaps I've missed this more than I thought. This is certainly the best way to spend my time off work.*

Kat couldn't help the giggle that escaped her at the thought. This set Sylvie laughing as well as Kat's breathe tickled her ears, and Vivian, always willing to laugh joined in with glee.

Sadly though, it was only another ten minutes before Vivian untangled herself from the two girls. "I'm sorry but I promised to meet my client in just thirty minutes. I already have to go and change my suit now, but it was well worth it. I'll see you two later" said Vivian

Sylvie struggled slightly in Kat's tail. Kat allowed her to escape easily before Sylvie jumped up and gave Vivian one last hug and waved her goodbye before Vivian snuck out of the room.

Kat was going to ask Sylvie what she wanted to do now but was instead tackled by a small, fast moving blur causing the mattress to bounce Kat slightly as said bundle tried to bury itself into her once again.

"Come on Sylvie, we should really have breakfast" said Kat

Sylvie shook her head. "You can't keep leaving for so long each week" mumbled the girl.

Kat stroked Sylvie's hair. "Perhaps I have been taking the longer jobs more often than before" Kat said as she pulled the girl in closer much to Sylvie's delight "But I don't really get to choose"

"Then you should take me with you" said Sylvie.

Kat smiled at her and said "My work is a bit dangerous. I'm ok because I'll always be kept safe and sound. I'll be returned if something really bad happens, and even if I get a bit injured I heal right up"

Sylvie ignored this and said "I want you to promise me to take me along if you can. At least once"

Kat smiled, but wasn't willing to make such a promise. She knew that Sylvie was deadly serious, and the result would likely be a contract. *And I just don't think I could bring myself to put her in a dangerous situation.*

Chapter 175:

Once Kat finally managed to complete the exceptionally difficult and gruelling task which was escaping from Sylvie's pouting face, Kat headed downstairs. Keeping Sylvie in her arms to stop the worst of her nonverbal protests.

This wasn't too difficult to accomplish because with her demonically enhanced strength carrying a nine year old that was happy to come along for the ride wasn't a trying task. Kat was initially trying to figure out how she was going to make herself breakfast without Gramps around but quickly remembered that Callisto had probably made something.

And she was right, a quick breakfast of finely diced bacon (so Sylvie could eat it presumably) and eggs disappeared into the two hungry girls before Kat decided to message Lily about coming around.

Receiving the affirmative, Kat quickly spent the few minutes she was sure to have, washing up the dishes she'd used with Sylvie while putting the rest of the food back in the warmer just in case Lily wanted to grab a few bites when she arrived. *Though, if there is one thing I'll give her parents credit for is that they do feed her properly whenever they can.*

While Kat was doing this, she kept her demonic energy in her ears. The sound of the water was a little overpowering, but she was able to filter it out somewhat, so it wasn't so bad. She could hear Callisto humming a tune upstairs, as well as the quiet breathing of Sylvie as she sat on the seat nearby and watched what Kat was up to, as the sink was much too high for her to actually assist

Eventually, Kat could hear the sound she was waiting for, the sound of Lily's approaching footsteps. Quickly drying her hands, she snuck up to the doorway making sure to keep out of the line of sight the glass around the edges provided.

Kat quietly unlocked the door and hid behind it. She'd already briefed Sylvie on what to do as Lily came through the door. When the doorbell ring, Sylvie played her part perfectly, yelling out in her quiet voice ???The door is unlocked"

Kat waited with bated breath to see if the message was heard, but she was starting to hear Lily rocking back and forth on her feet presumable to wait for the door to open. *Bother she couldn't hear her. Plan B plan B*

Kat signalled Sylvie with her tail that the plan had failed. Sylvie quickly 'ran' over to the door and managed to open the handle slightly. As it opened, it revealed Sylvie alone to Lily's eyes.

Kat waited as she heard Lily remove her shoes and take a step in. "Hi Sylvie, where's Kaaaaa-"

Lily was interrupted as Kat quickly struck out with her tail and pulled Lily into a hug. She let out a quiet "Eep" of surprise before realising what was going on and settling down slightly to start berating Kat. "What the heck are you doing"

Kat shrugged "It seemed fun at the time"

Lily's eyes narrowed "And what's with the hugs? Who are you and what have you done with Kat?"

Kat snorted and just squeezed Lily harder. "Sylvie managed to convince me I was doing this hugging thing wrong"

Lily gave Sylvie a confused look, and only got a nod in response as if that was justification for the bizarre chain of events that just happened. Kat started to lead the two back to the couch, letting Lily go and picking Sylvie up, wrapping her in her tail before sitting down on the couch.

Lily followed somewhat confused and took the seat next to Kat. "So um... really, um, can you tell me what's going on? This isn't that normal of you... I mean not that it's a problem um..."

Kat patted Lily on the head "Don't be so nervous I understand. I just... So I got back from my most recent summoning and someone" Kat bounced Sylvie up on her knee "Said I was away for too long and crawled in bed with me

"And well, it was nice just hanging out in bed hugging Sylvie. It was great fun being away on an adventure and all, but I really did miss you guys. It's strange. Not seeing you for two weeks over the holidays didn't seem nearly as long as the past half-week did" explained Kat

Lily seemed to cringe at the last words before nodding along and making a grab for Sylvie. Kat relented and Sylvie happily moved over to Lily's lap, though kept Kat's tail in hand. "She's right though, and so are you. I mean... um, look I tried not to worry, and thank you for those notes, they helped a lot but...

"It's just not the same. Knowing you are safe with Gramps... or um, I guess Vivian now, is very different to knowing you are away in a completely different universe, possibly in trouble where we can only get letters occasionally" said Lily

Kat nodded, and Sylvie nodded vigorously "Lily said it well. We missed you even though it wasn't long"

Kat winked at Sylvie before snaking her tail out from the little girls' grip. Sylvie pouted but winked at Kat in understanding. Once the limb was free Kat used it to encircle both Lily and Sylvie and pull them to her side.

"Well, I'm here now, and it's time for me to tell you all about it. So it started off really professional..."

##

Kat spoke at length about her first meeting with the party, the adorable Green that couldn't quite rival Sylvie, the calm Nixilei who seemed to watch everything, the fiery Kress, and the poor Gareth who had to put up with the lot of them.

She had great fun explaining the tournament and all the crazy things Thyme set up for them. Sylvie and Lily panicked a little hearing about the orb challenge, but Lily more so than Sylvie.

It was the 'death match' that really got them panicked and took Kat more time to calm her two worried friends than it did to talk about the process. She may have skipped over the deadlier parts like the Barbarashi fight and tried to turn the death worm into the joke that it was, but they still looked at her suspiciously. Before she finished up with her scaring Kress.

"So, tell me more about this gem then" said Lily, nervousness long since forgotten though not her worry.

"Well, I'm not really sure on the specifics myself. The system seems to think it will make me rank 2, but it isn't certain" said Kat

"You should use it as soon as possible, in fact, why are you here with us when you could be getting stronger" said Lily voiced pitched slightly higher.

Kat drastically, though not painfully, tightened her tail's grip on the pair. "Because this is more important. I've got over a week to rank up"

"Wait what?" said Lily confused

It was then Kat realised, she'd skipped over the fact she had the week off, and was now starting to understand Lily's worry. *Ohh... Lily thought I was heading out tomorrow night. No wonder she was panicking. Right that's actually a much fairer criticism of me then.*

"I've got the week off Lily. I don't have to worry about it just yet" said Kat

Lily visibly relaxed into the couch at this point as if Kat had lifted the weight of the world off her shoulders. And, upon closer inspection saw a similar reaction in Sylvie as well.

"So, when are you going to become more powerful Kat?" asked Sylvie with a tilt of her head.

"Well..." said Kat intentionally drawing the word out for suspense "I'm not really sure. Depends what you both have planned, but I was thinking perhaps Saturday, instead of my summoning I'd do whatever it was I had to do with the gem. Latest I'd want to start the process is Monday just in case I need time to let my powers settle or something, I'm not really sure how this works"

Sylvie nodded and so did Lily who spoke next "Well, from the sounds of things it will actually be a little hard on your body. I suspect that unless your regeneration can take care of everything for you, it'll take you a bit to recover"

"Why do you say that?" asked Kat curious.

"Well, just based on the way you explained everything, it seems less like you are working your way up to rank two, so much as it's like you are shoving as much power into yourself as you can and hoping that it does the same job?" said Lily unsure

Kat gestured for Lily to continue so she did, "Um, so, ah... think of your body like a glass. Currently you keep it mostly full and steady. Normally, that glass gets formed and shaped as it grows. You however have a fully formed vessel that might need breaking open a bit..."

Chapter 176:

"Sounds violent" said Kat with remarkably little worry

"This is serious Kat. If I didn't know so little about how magic actually functions, I'd bar you from even attempting it. Simple physics dictates that this is a horrible idea, but I also recognise that physics went straight out the window as soon as interdimensional travel got involved and seemingly no cost" said Lily forcefully

Kat ran her fingers through her friend's hair "Lily calm down, it's fine. Look, the system warned me not to try when my energy was low. It must then be reasonably confident this will work if my energy is high otherwise it wouldn't even attempt it" Kat explained slowly

Lily pouted, trying to rival Sylvie at her best. She failed of course, but she certainly got closer than Kat would have ever expected she could. Lily's pout finally broke as she sighed. "Look, can you um... maybe just... actually maybe that's a terrible idea"

"Just say it Lily, Kat won't mind" said Sylvie

"Fine" said Lily "So... I wanted to say that you have to make sure that we are around when you use that gem, but... if what I'm thinking is even remotely correct it would be better if we weren't there. Then you don't have to worry about us getting hurt"

Kat nodded. "I suppose that makes sense. I remember the first time I ranked up the whole area was frozen... huh I wonder if it's still like that. Might not have been the best idea to just leave a huge patch of frozen ground in the middle of the forest"

Lily shrugged "It should be fine. I think we'd have heard about it if someone was causing a big freak out you know"

"The government might be trying to cover it up though, assuming they know magic exists" said Sylvie

Kat raised an eyebrow "Where did that come from Sylvie"

The young girl shrugged and made an embarrassed face "I don't actually believe that... just that I've been able to use Vivian's computer for a bit"

Kat groaned "Ugh... I don't want to know what it would be like if you turned into a conspiracy nut. I already have one of those" Kat looked pointedly at Lily

"I take offence to that" said Lily "I research ancient topics and even more recent ones then use the information I've gathered to come to well-reasoned conclusions"

"See" Kat pretended to whisper behind her hand "Conspiracy theories"

Sylvie giggled at that and they all smiled. Allowing themselves to relax. After a few minutes passed Lily bought up another important topic "Shouldn't we be going through that menu of yours? The one that allowed us to see D.E.M.O.N.S text and what not"

Kat shrugged "I mean we certainly could, but I imagine that I'll get new stuff once I upgrade to rank 2 so I'm not sure there is much point. That and I think we should do it with Vivian included as well"

"Actually, we already talked about it, and Vivian said it was fine as long as I caught her up afterwards?" said Sylvie

Kat smiled. *It's nice to know that Sylvie is spending some time with Vivian while I'm away. Perhaps I should find ways to cut down on the longer jobs... at the same time though perhaps we can settle into a better routine in the future, or get say demonic video calls. Then it might not be so bad.*

"My point about ranking up still stands though" said Kat

Sylvie shrugged and let herself fall so that she was leaning on Lily's shoulder and being supported mostly by Kat's tail. "Enough about me then. What about you Lily did you put any thought into what you want to do?" asked Kat

"Learn magic" Lily whispered, and Kat was sure she wasn't meant to hear the quick response because after that she spoke up "Um... I mean, only sort of? I've been researching I mean" said Lily slightly flustered. *nOvelN*ext.cOm

Yup, definitely been researching magic instead. "So courses? Universities? Something else?" asked Kat

Sylvie looked like she was about to speak up when Lily glared at her. This resulted in Sylvie giving a shrug and settling back in comfortably. *I see. It's the both of them isn't it. That's why Sylvie wanted me to promise I'd let her join.*

"Um... I mean, courses?" said Lily

"Are you asking me for the answer?" said Kat

Sylvie got a cheeky smile and went to speak up, but Lily cut her off once she noticed the smirk. "Um... telling. I mean, I've been exploring my options"

Kat just nodded. *If she wants to keep it a secret I won't push. It seems at least that Lily and Sylvie are working together on this. Plus, even though the system said that those tokens I have would let them use magic, it seemed like I'd need to wait a bit.*

I wonder if rank 2 constitutes a bit actually. I'd think 3 might be more likely though. One seems like something you just get handed to you, while rank 2 is still training wheels all things considered.

Even the tournament wasn't all that difficult because of how strong I seem to be inherently. I can only imagine that it's going to continue like that, so I'm not sure I can even fathom how strong I'd be at rank 3.

Pretending she hadn't noticed anything amiss Kat carried on "What options have been explored so far?"

"Ah... um well. Um coding!" said Lily. Kat raised an eyebrow "What I ah, mean is that I decided coding wouldn't work for me"

Kat nodded and gestured for her to continue "So..." Lily bit her lips "I had a bit of a look, and I wouldn't say it's something I couldn't do. I mean, I kinda get how it functions, and I think if I really dedicated myself to it, I could be pretty good

"But... I also just don't really care? If that makes sense to you Kat" said Lily

Um... not really? "Maybe?"

"Lily has no passion for it" said Sylvie suddenly "She can spend hours researching random topics, but she can't help but get distracted if she's trying to write a program"

Lily turned away in embarrassment but didn't contradict Sylvie's explanation. "Well, at least you know that now so you can cross it off the list. What else have you been checking into" said Kat

"Um... there was also trying to be a librarian? But I'm not sure that would actually be all that good for me either. I mean it sounds cool, and maybe I would like the job but, see, it turns out that it's really going digital. That's actually what led me into the whole coding thing.

"Being a librarian is a lot more about managing the library's database now then it is just taking care of the books. That's actually called a custodian and it was really hard to find information about that surprisingly.

"There is also becoming a teacher librarian, but I don't actually want to go back to school really, um, because it just doesn't seem like a good idea. So, it just sort of wouldn't work. I mean there is librarian's assistant type positions but... and I feel kinda bad saying this, but it's sort of beneath me? It wouldn't really be a challenge I don't think

"And that's not to say I don't respect them, um I do, but it's just a lot more, talk to people and help with problems then organising the bookshelves and keeping to myself you know? So, it just seemed like something I'd maybe only do as like a part time job... maybe" said Lily

Kat nodded. "See, that's plenty of useful information. You've still got plenty of time to make a decision... well actually you might only have a few weeks to apply. I can't seem to rec- I'm not truly sure how that all works"

Sylvie narrowed her eyes at Kat's stutter, picking up that it was something she was trying to lie about. Lily however was deep in thought. "Yeah, well, I did apply for a few various things so that I can get offers. Not really sure which ones I'd even want to accept but I did make sure to put things out there so that I wouldn't be late"

"I'm glad you are making progress though Lily" said Kat "It's important to figure these things out. I mean, I can't really talk because I've ended up in a bit of a unique situation, but I think my advice stands"

"Yeah... it does seem like it would be interesting" said Lily

Kat decided to take her chance "But would you really want to go on adventures like me? It sounds fun but the tournament was pretty serious, and getting stabbed was rather painful"

Lily opened her mouth to retort but closed it. It was clear that she didn't really know how to respond or understand what it was she truly wanted. *And if Lily doesn't know. How would I?*

Chapter 177:

The girls talked about a few lighter topics, not really focusing on anything too long. Content to while away the morning, until, Sylvie asked a particular question. "Hey Kat, I was thinking about your recent trip away. Does this mean you can take us flying?"

Kat went to respond with a no, but then thought about it a little more. *If it's possible for me to fly with anyone Sylvie might just be small enough for it to be fine. Even if it isn't perfect, I should be able to at least glide around.* "Ah, I mean, for you perhaps it might be possible, but we'd be leaving Lily out of it" said Kat hoping to avert any potential danger

"That's fine" said Lily "I'd be plenty happy to just watch. I haven't seen your wings get any use yet and I know I'd love to see it"

Kat's eyes widened. "Uh... well um, ok? But where would we have the space? It's probably not safe to do it around here and Vivian isn't around to take us"

At this Sylvie got a wicked grin as if she'd just remembered something important, because she had. "That's ok. Callisto said she'd take us. She was even more interested in seeing you flying around then we were when we brought it up before"

Kat felt the final blow to her plan of trying to escape in a physical way, like they'd struck her through the stomach like Kress had but tried not to show it. "Ah... that's great then. Not today though, it's almost lunchtime and we should just relax for the day"

Sylvie threw up her hands in celebration, before trying to squirm out of Kat's grasp. Once Kat let her go, Sylvie practically bounced up the stairs towards Callisto's room and she had no illusions of what was about to happen.

Kat took a sidelong glance at Lily who seemed very happy with herself before Kat sighed. *Fine. If that's how you want to play it. I guess I deserve this one.*

A short time later Callisto lightly stepped down the stairs with Sylvie in hand. How she managed to move so silently, even while carrying a nine year old, albeit a small one, was beyond Kat. Once Callisto was standing next to Kat and Lily she spoke up. "I know of just the place for our gathering. I spent sufficient preparation time and thus have found a perfect place to partake in our particular interest"

How long did you spend planning the sentence though? Around the same?

 "That said, I will of course still need to prepare the required sustenance for you all. Do you have any requests for food to be prepared for our journey tomorrow?" asked Callisto *nOvelNext.cOm*

Wait...

 "When did we ever say tomorrow?" asked Kat

"Tomorrow" Callisto reiterated and the date was settled. Sylvie's pouting face might have helped.

Lily mentioned her old dislike of oranges, and her slight dislike of lamb. "Though I think, that ah, it might just be my parents don't know how to cook it" said Lily "We only ever had it a few times, and we sort of all agreed it didn't work"

"Hmm" said Callisto thoughtfully "It might be a genetic disposition to avoid the substance for some reason. Would you like me to exercise my culinary skills to provide you something I know to be palatable to most or would it be best to stay away from it entirely to be certain you'll enjoy everything"

Lily thought about it for a moment. "Um... I mean, ah, if you don't mind let's just keep it safe"

Callisto nodded "I am sure with your continued involvement in Kat's life that I will at some point have the opportunity to introduce it to through leftovers. That should alleviate the guilt you feel for not potentially eating the meal in question"

Kat watched Lily gulp and die a little inside as Callisto continued to talk. She wasn't quite... equipped to deal with the full force of Callisto's presence it seemed, but Sylvie at least got on with her fine.

"What about you Kat? You have not mentioned any dietary requirements to either myself or Vivian, but I have taken note of the few things you have eaten so far and nothing seems to be an issue" said Vivian

Kat failed to stifle a laugh. "Well, I should be fine. I managed to eat food that was so spicy it was considered a lethal material. Spicy doesn't do it justice, it could melt through steel I'm pretty sure"

A light seemed to shine behind Callisto's eyes at this and the corner of her mouth quirked up just a little "Ooh? A challenge is it? It seems I will have to forfeit my chance to participate this time however, as I do not possess the required cooking implements to prepare something at that heat, nor the required culinary knowledge of what food could even survive at such a temperature. Anything else I could procure?"

"Well..." said Kat drawing it out as she thought of the poisonous dish she had considered not eating "I might be able to eat some poisonous stuff and enjoy it but I'm not sure"

Callisto's eyes brightened again before quickly dimming. "As much as I may desire to take you up on this secondary culinary quest, I think I will have to decline. Cooking an extremely overheated dish is acceptable and easily marked and avoided by the others regardless of when I approach the task.

"Trying to work with poisonous ingredients though is a different story. I would have to ensure that it is all very clearly marked, that it didn't contaminate the other food, and that nobody else thinks even for a second that it is safe for them to eat. That is on top of the consideration that you yourself do not yet know if it is acceptable for your own consumption"

Kat gulped "Ah... your right I suppose. While I do think I will be fine, because at the time I saw such a dish, it smelled great to me and I'm pretty sure it isn't supposed to, I understand your concern"

Callisto nodded. "Good, what time would you like to depart? I can ensure my personage to be available to leave at any time you so choose. The destination I have in mind is approximately an hour and a half away by motor vehicle"

Kat shrugged and looked towards Sylvie who had a similar response so, they all turned to Lily who balked under the three's gaze. "Um, ah, er... I um, I'd have to make sure my parents know..."

"Your parental figures can be notified by myself to ensure that they hold no... misunderstandings" said Callisto in a somewhat aggressive way.

Lily gulped "Um... then ah, whenever you like, we can sleep in the car?"

Callisto nodded but with a frown as if she expected, but disliked the answer she received "Understood, it shall be a 7 o'clock departure then"

Callisto handed Sylvie off back to Kat "I require some additional time to prepare things now, please continue keeping Sylvie company as I would detest if she was hurt as I throw parts around my room. Please ensure that you all have any equipment you wish to take tomorrow prepared before sleep takes you"

Without waiting for an answer Callisto left with great speed, somehow not running despite that, and vanishing up the stairs leaving Lily somewhat dumbstruck. Kat was more interested in how she was able to move that way but quickly returned her attention back to Sylvie. "I guess she sorted that out for us didn't she?"

Sylvie nodded with a big smile "I talked to her a lot about it while you were away. I spent most of my time helping with her work"

We're all doomed. "That sounds like it was good for you Sylvie" said Kat trying desperately not to think about what was bound to happen in a few years if Sylvie became more like Callisto.

"Anything big you want to prepare for tomorrow Lily? Or shall we get started watching a movie or something:" asked Kat

Lily finally shook herself out of her stupor, still not quite recovered from the whirlwind of a conversation speaking with Callisto generated. "Um... yes, movie, is ah... good yes"

Kat shook her head and patted Lily's own. *She'll recover in a moment I suppose.* Kat walked over to the TV and started rifling through the DVD's Vivian had collected. She seemed to have everything ranging from old Disknee movies to Jame's Blonde films and everything in between.

Kat saw a second box nearby and took a short glance in before shutting it quickly. Clearly it was Callisto's box, and the sheer number of horror titles caused Kat to quickly place it back and pretend she knew nothing. Kat wasn't sure she trusted Sylvie not to follow her new role models example and pick something from it. *Can't scare Lily any more than Callisto already did, she needs time to recover. *

Chapter 178:

It was the following morning. Sylvie and Kat were completely ready to leave for their trip, wherever it was exactly Callisto was taking them. Sylvie had donned a dress with some longer sleeves and a large sun hat to keep her skin safe from the sun.

Kat was wearing her usual, which meant her kimono of course, as the only thing she was capable of wearing at the moment. Lily had yet to arrive and Callisto had gone off to find her. Kat was currently making herself busy by loading several boxes of Callisto's into the car

I wonder what she's prepared so much for? These boxes aren't light at all, and I can't really figure out what she'd need so many for. Kat was now on the third box. They were about half a metre cubed, but there was six of them.

As Kat slotted the third box into the boot, she realised that Callisto must have these boxes made specially to fit her car. They fit the length perfectly and Kat was now sure that the other three would just barely fit in the other half of the boot.

Sylvie was sitting around on an old desk in the garage swinging her feet and being patient. She was careful not to get into Kat's way, even though with Kat's enhanced strength the boxes weren't much of a concern. *nOvelNext.cOm*

The girls turned when they heard the garage door open. As it climbed up it revealed a very strange looking Lily who was acting like she'd seen the end times. She had a long dress like Sylvie, however it had short sleeves. To compensate, Lily had a coat instead, but looked to be a little uncomfortable as she was.

Kat smiled and waved with her tail as she deposited the next box into the car. "Hi Lily"

Lily walked past Kat with the barest nod and sat down next to Sylvie with a thousand-yard stare. Sylvie waved her hand in front of Lily a few times but got no response. "Kat... Lily seems to be a bit broken"

Kat placed the fifth box in the car before walking over to her friend "Hey are you... alright?"

Lily's gaze turned to Kat but still said nothing. Kat poked her friend in the cheek with her tail and finally got a small laugh. "Ok seriously what is going on Lily" said Kat

"Um... well... So, you know how I was a bit late?" asked Lily

Kat nodded

"Yeah well, my parents didn't really want me to go... that is until Callisto showed up..." said Lily

"Why do you say that like the end times are coming?" asked Kat

"Well, ah, Callisto just started to talk to them... in that way she does and eventually they started sweating, and then she shooed me out the door, and just kept going, in that calm quiet voice that tells you she knows exactly what she's doing" said Lily

"Well of course that would be because I am entirely cognisant of exactly what I'm doing" said Callisto stepping into the garage "Her parents were simply under a strange misconception about their daughters work ethic that I managed to correct them on"

"Yup" said Lily "That's about right"

"Right..." said Kat still somewhat confused, as she ducked over to grab the last box and loaded it into the car before shutting the boot.

"Thank you, Kat, for packing those boxes for me. I lack the required strength to do so as efficiently as you have managed. It seems that you have gained more than a few additional features" said Callisto as she stepped into the car.

The others piled into the car. Lily took the front, and Kat took the back with Sylvie on her lap. There was the consideration for Sylvie to sit on the chairs next to Kat, but it was decided with the space Kat's wings took up and her inherent strength, Sylvie would be safer sitting with Kat under her seatbelt and tail.

As they headed out of the town Sylvie spoke up "So where exactly are we going Callisto? We are heading somewhat towards the forest, but most of what is out this way is large properties"

Callisto nodded from her position in the driver's seat "That's is an astute observation Sylvie and you are most of the way to the answer. I have a... business partner I suppose that happens to own a large section of land most of which is forested area. I use it for testing some of the more volatile creations of mine and so I simply said I was running some tests

"We will be heading towards a particular forest clearing. If I had my ideal circumstances, I'd travel slightly further than the care would allow, but sadly we are not equipped to transport my equipment any further along the road so the first clearing will have to do

"We shouldn't be interrupted but you never know. If we run into issues, I'll deal with it somehow. I have a track record for a number of things so if I can come up with something suitably unbelievable, they are quite likely to accept my word in regards to what is happening"

"Wait unbelievable?" asked Lily who had recovered during the ride... mostly

"Of course. They seem to think that I am missing a substantial number of the screws that keep my head in place. If I was to give them too reasonable of an answer, they'd think I was trying to hide something, which in this case happens to be completely true" said Callisto

Callisto... should you be admitting people think you are crazy?

"Well of course I should. It makes interaction with a multitude of people simpler, and it is much easier to tell when speaking will be worth your time" said Callisto

"Wait did I say that out loud?" asked Kat

Callisto shook her head "No not at all, but Vivian's friends had a habit of asking such questions and I got used to the particular facial expression"

Kat nodded. "Does Vivian have a lot of other friends?" asked Sylvie

Callisto seemed to consider this for a while. "Well... I suppose that depends on what exactly you mean by that Sylvie. I know Vivian keeps in contact with a far greater number of people than I myself do, and I also know that she would say that they are friends...

"But I'm not sure you can truly consider them as such. They are not as close knit as Vivian and I or you three are to each other. I'd label them as mere acquaintances, but I also know Vivian would go much farther for an acquaintance than I think she should"

Callisto turned off the main road at this point and started across what looked to simply be a random field. There were some boarder lines marking the property but no fence, and the only sign she was going the right way was the faint traces of other passing vehicles.

"Is that bad?" asked Sylvie

Callisto considered the question for some time as the car continued onwards. *I'm... not sure. I'll let Callisto handle this one because it is a hard question.*

"I'm not sure I truly know Sylvie" Callisto finally voiced after five minutes of silence "See, I'm sure that she is happy with the arrangement and considers there to be no issues at all. I however do not believe that many of them would return Vivian's favour in full, or in part

"The thing is, Vivian is happy to give of herself. Her time and energy. She has a larger amount of these things than most, and it only seems to bring her more joy, and encouragement to spread that to others

"I am not capable of that. While I hate to sound transactional... I could not consider someone a friend unless they are willing to do as much for me as I am for them, and I only truly trust Vivian to return my assistance in full.

"Perhaps this is a crude example, but it is the best I can think of. Say someone asks you to help build a shed. If you do not know them, you would ask for payment. If you know them somewhat, you might ask for lunch. If you are true friends, the other person would simply turn up knowing there is a shed to be built and that extra hands are appreciated.

"I trust that if I needed help Vivian would appear beside me, and I hope she understands I would do the same without question... but I do not trust any others to do the same" said Callisto

"Not even me?" asked Sylvie with a pout on her face.

Callisto froze. The car started to slow without her foot on the pedal until they pulled to a stop.

"Callisto?" asked Sylvie

"Hmm... perhaps I understand a bit of Vivian after all" said Callisto as she drove off once again.

Chapter 179:

"I don't quite get it... what do you mean Callisto?" asked Sylvie again.

Callisto smiled a kind smile, "Perhaps it is not my place to share. Let us see if the others have been following along well enough to provide for you a sufficient answer"

Sylvie turned her pouting gaze from the rear-view mirror to Kat. "I think Sylvie" started Kat "That Callisto would do anything for you, and unlike her opinion of others she requires nothing from you to gain joy from helping you"

Sylvie tilted her head confused "But I'd help Callisto with anything!" Sylvie insisted

Kat smiled "I think that might be part of the point Sylvie. She did her part without wanting anything and knows now that you'd do the same. She did not when she started though"

Sylvie thought on this. "That still doesn't explain the part with Vivian though"

Callisto nodded and spoke up "I'll assist you with this last segment. I believe that I now understand that Vivian is willing to trust others will return her favour, and does so with the understanding the easiest way to find people who would help you with anything, is to first be willing to help others with anything"

"But that isn't quite what you believe" said Lily picking up on Callisto's phrasing

Callisto nodded "Yes, I still hold my belief it should first be two way, but I do perhaps now understand how children factor into these thoughts, and why Vivian does things her way even if I do not agree with them"

"You really never thought about it before?" asked Sylvie

Callisto shrugged "Please understand, I speak with very few individuals that I respect enough to listen to their opinions, and I discount many of Vivian's on account of how different we are as people. It's not that I dislike speaking with her, or listening to her advice... just that, it is normally not applicable to myself

"So, no, I have not truly considered it before and perhaps that is something I will need to address in the future. For now, at least it has not led me into any major trouble so I will continue as I have but with new perspective"

Pretty sure it's gotten you into trouble and you just haven't noticed. Kat mused.

The scenery slowly turned from open fields to more forested land, with trees quickly rising forth from the ground. As they started to close in on the car's path, more and more debris popped up in the way, but Callisto continued onward.

It was only a short ten minutes later they reached the assumed clearing. It was a large space, easily as large as a football field. It couldn't possibly be natural, and was likely maintained, but the signs of that maintenance was absent aside from the trail leading towards it.

Kat let herself and Sylvie escape from the confines of the vehicle and started unpacking the boxes. Callisto meanwhile inspected the car for any particularly notable errant sticks that might cause operational troubles in the future.

Once the car was looked over and unpacked the three stood staring across the clearing. "So what now" Kat asked

"Now" said Callisto opening the first box "We begin the setup"

Callisto started pulling out pieces for a gazebo from one of the boxes and handed them over to Lily. To Sylvie she handed the tarp to connect them all, and to Kat she handed another box.

"Lily, Sylvie start connecting those pieces and I'll assist. Kat I want you to take this box over to the other end of the clearing and leave it there for the time being" said Callisto

Kat was confused but shrugged. Sprinting the box over and running back was no issue, but Callisto was making swift work on the gazebo construction and was already half done. Another few minutes of fiddling and it was completely ready to go.

The next box Callisto got Kat to move into the shade, and explained it contained the food they would be eating a little later and left them in the corner.

As they were opening the next box, which contained a table Lily asked "How exactly do you know which is which?"

"See the faint lines" said Callisto pointing to a faint marking in question "I can tell based on that"

Lily squinted and could still hardly see the things in question but shrugged and continued to help.

After going through the table box, they quickly unloaded the last two. One contained folding chairs for everyone, with Kat's even having no back, while the other contained a strange assortment of devices, like stopwatches and measuring tapes, scales, that Kat assumed Callisto would be using for testing.

"Before we start properly, with some power testing, Kat would you mind doing a short flight around to make sure nobody is nearby?" asked Callisto

Sylvie tried to take a step forward but Callisto rested a hand on her shoulder "Not just yet. I have a considerable concern that I wish to see the truth about"

Kat tilted her head at Callisto's vague wording, but just shrugged at her and stood a bit away from the tent. Kat started flapping her wings, expecting to start flying... but nothing happened.

Hmm... Kat through her energy towards her legs and kicked off from the ground. Kat rocketed upwards, spreading her wings as she started to slow down. Once in the air she started pushing the energy into her wings instead.

Kat felt her wings flapping much faster than usual, but still settling into a decent rhythm. Kat tried to take stock of the situation, but it was... not ideal. At the present point in time she could keep herself, airborne... but only just.

Dam, I can feel my wings screaming on my back. Not quite to the point I have to stop, but they aren't happy. I can keep a steady altitude, but it's going to be difficult. Plus I seem to be quite rapidly bleeding demonic energy as I do this. I'm not sure how long I can stay in flight, but it isn't quite as long as I'd like I don't think.

Kat tried to do some light manoeuvres, moving around, flipping over, and was surprised once again to find her movements just as responsive as she remembered. There was no delay, perhaps a little overcorrection, but nothing serious. Once she got used to the burning sensation it wasn't so bad.

Swapping to scouting around Kat used a bit of energy to enhance her eyes and looked around for some indication of movement. *I can't really see anything... but that's more to do with the fact that there are things in the way.* Kat scanned the numerous trees. *It's not like I have x-ray vision. If there is a tree in the way, doesn't matter how far or in how great detail I can see.*

Kat dropped back to the ground and started taking in long gulps of air as she let her wings hand. "So, what have you discovered Kat?" asked Callisto

Kat took one last deep breath before straightening. Circulating her energy once more she felt the burning in her wings vanish and her lungs cease their cries. "It seems that I can fly, but that it is much harder on me. When I'm summoned, I can float for hours with virtually no stress on my wings.

"Here though, it is much harder. Perhaps with practice I'll be fine, but I think it's likely that the only reason I can keep myself going is that my energy is regenerating the muscles in my wings as they wear out"

Callisto nodded "Based on the few things I am aware of, that does seem to likely be the case. I'm not sure exactly what suppressing your demonic energy does, but it is clearly a large component of your flight"

Kat nodded. "Actually one moment"

Kat took off around the edge of the clearing and used the mostly circular track as a way to get to her full running speed. She felt herself starting to have issues with keeping to the curve, but her speed was unquestionable. *Ok... so this is a little odd I'm still just as fast.* Quickly completing the lap, she ended up back in front of the others.

"Seems like I can run just as fast as before... it's just the flight that seems to cause issues" said Kat

"Well, I do have a few possible ideas that I first wish to go over with Lily. While we are otherwise occupied could you perhaps take Sylvie on that flight you promised her assuming that it is safe to do so?" asked Callisto

Kat nodded. "I can at the very least ensure that she will be safe. I can still glide without trouble so even if her meagre weight is enough to stop real flight she won't get hurt"

Sylvie gave a big cheer upon hearing that and jumped into Kat's arms, causing the demon to rapidly correct her posture and catch the little girl.

Chapter 180:

Once Sylvie was securely in her hands Kat thought about wrapping Sylvie up with her tail. *Thing is though, I sort of need that when I'm flying. It helps my correct alongside my wings, and I'm not sure I'd be ok without it.*

Hm... I think I'm strong enough that everything should be fine. Plus I can dive after Sylvie in the worst case. The only issue is if she panics and wiggles out of my arms. That would be the only issue.

"Sylvie can you make sure to hold on tight? I'll do my best but if you try to wiggle out of my arms it's going to be hard on me" said Kat

Sylvie nodded enthusiastically "I'll be really careful Kat"

"Ok" Kat gave a final nod to the other two before checking her demonic energy reserves. It had recovered mostly, but still wasn't quite full. Shrugging it away for now Kat directed her energy towards her legs and launched herself up

Quickly using her wings to keep her ascending Kat felt them start to burn. Pushing some energy towards her back rather than her wings, hoping the presence of the extra energy would help counteract the pain and up her regeneration.

To her surprise it did in fact seem to work. She was able to dull it to a slightly uncomfortable feeling of pressure that was building. Keeping herself moving upwards Kat slowly started to change into a small circle. Kat could already tell that trying to hover upright as she did normally would be almost impossible.

She required that extra bit of momentum from flying forward to compensate for Sylvie's extra weight. *At least I can actually keep flying now. I wonder if that means I would have been able to lift Grace... then again Grace was a lot taller and had a bunch of gear as well so I'd say the chances were low.*

Once Kat was comfortable, she wasn't about to fall out of the sky she loosened her grip on Sylvie so that she could move her head around. Sylvie craned her neck so that she could look around.

Kat winced a little at how uncomfortable looking around like that must be, but Sylvie's face was lit up with a big smile and Kat was unwilling to let her turn around while so high up. "What do you want to do while you up here?" asked Kat

Sylvie had no answer. She was beaming and trying to take in as much of the scenery as possible. Despite hearing Kat speak she certainly wasn't paying attention and could hardly make out the words.

Kat grinned seeing Sylvie ignore her in favour of the view. Let's do something a little more intense. Kat started to climb slowly, just enough that in Sylvie's wanderlust she wouldn't notice the difference.

Once Kat had climbed a few extra metres she stopped flapping her wings and dived. Air rushed past the two of them as Kat let herself fall. Sylvie giggling all the way. Once Kat started approaching the tree line, she extended her wings in full and halted their fall.

Using the sudden stop to change direction Kat spun 180 degrees and started heading back towards the others. Once she was sure Sylvie was secure Kat gave her wings a large beat and angled herself for a barrel roll. Tucking her wings in as her momentum shifted Kat managed to spin but was losing height.

Straightening herself before she touched the canopy Kat once again let Sylvie have a little more room to move. "We are going to have to land soon" said Kat. *I'm missing about half my energy now. I know I wasn't full when I jumped, but I'd hate to fall out of the sky.*

Sylvie nodded; a bit saddened to hear that but keeping her smile. The short experience was magical enough that even knowing it was about to end couldn't ruin it for the girl. "Is there anything you want to do quickly as we head back?" asked Kat

This time Sylvie got a concerned look on her face. Nothing was springing to mind at Kat's question although she was sure that she wanted to do something... Kat let herself slow as much as she could without losing altitude to give Sylvie time to think.

Eventually Kat was directly over the clearing they'd started in and Sylvie hadn't come up with any unique ideas. Kat checked her energy reserves and saw that they were still around a third full. *Huh, I wonder if it was those few fancy manoeuvres that really cost me, or if I was a bit lower than I thought when I took off.*

I know it wasn't the take off. Just throwing demonic energy at my legs has always been ridiculously efficient, and that even held true as I ran around the clearing earlier. Kat started to circle the clearing as she descended. Sylvie still hadn't come up with any ideas.

"I think I'll just enjoy the rest" said the girl in question.

Kat nodded. *A nice answer. I'm kind of glad she isn't just using her last moments to think on something she can't find an answer to... Though it sounds a bit morbid when you put it like that. *

Eventually though it was Kat that had the idea. As she started to scrape the canopy Kat pretended to run along the trees. It was a little awkward twisting her body so that her feet could touch the wood, while keeping her wings straight enough that she didn't just fall.

The giggles coming from Sylvie though quickly made it worth the effort, alongside the shy smile Lily had while watching. Callisto for her part had a notebook from somewhere and was jotting things down.

Eventually, the fun had to come to an end. Kat finally landed in front of the gazebo and put Sylvie on the ground before straightening. "Interesting" said Callisto "You seem not to be tired at all despite the toll I'd have expected flying to take on someone of human size"

Kat shook her head "It isn't quite like that. I have some other type of energy in me that I never had as a human. I now burn it while I'm doing strenuous activities like flying or running. As long as I have at least some I'm fine, but once I run out I crash"

"Indeed? Well that is certainly different though I suppose the main point of difference is likely just that you can more accurately deduce the remaining energy rather than the system a human has set up where their body tells them they are breaking down" said Callisto

Lily nodded but Kat shrugged in response. "So, what exactly happens when you run out of energy? You said you crash but that is not an entirely descriptive word of what I assume must happen" said Callisto

"I just fall over. Quite literally in fact, and I can no longer move. I think my tail might be an exception to that, but it seems more like I have a reserve system for avoiding fatal attacks" said Kat

"Fascinating. I suppose for a likely more combat involved species wherein their own body is a primary weapon such a feature would be more highly desired. Especially when the body simply gives way. It sounds a bit like a low power state of an electronic device" said Callisto

Kat nodded "It does seem that way. It's not that I lock up, quite the opposite. All my muscles just sort of give up except for the important ones I'd think"

"Are you still conscious?" asked Callisto

"Yes" said Kat

This gave Callisto pause "That... doesn't quite seem right. I would have imagined that keeping your brain functioning would be using up a significantly larger portion of energy than the rest of your body so to hear that it does not put you to sleep is strange to me"

"Hmm" said Kat "I think, if I had to guess from what little I know, my body actually uses it to keep operating. Perhaps my brain is closer to a human's and doesn't actually require demonic energy. I do still need to eat after all, just a bit less. What if all the food is really just for my brain?"

Callisto's eyes lit up at that. "Yes, that could explain things quite nicely. Though that would beg the question of if demons are genetically related to humans in any way. Obviously, they must be able to interbreed to some extent otherwise you would not have been human when you were born. The question is though, is that a more advanced feature demons have developed or is one a genetic descendent of the other

"We have some idea of how humans evolved on our own planet, but if we have the entire multiverse to consider it might not be entirely clear which species actually came first in the grand scheme of things"