

DEMONS 241

Chapter 241: a Minor surprise

Kat stopped. Carefully lowering Minor down so that she could stand on her own two feet. She panicked a little, but as she was being turned she saw Kat's reassuring smile and allowed herself to be moved without complaint.

Once Minor was standing on two feet, Kat then proceeded to slip her arms under Minor's elbows, before bringing her up into a big hug. Kat wrapped her tail around them both as well, before closing in her wings encapsulating the two of them as best she could.

Minor wasn't able to control herself anymore. For all her fancy reality warping magic she had in here, she was still a scared and worried child that had to grow up alone and forgotten. That wouldn't be leaving her any time soon but, Kat would do her best.

As Minor's tears flowed Kat spoke in a soft voice "That's fine Minor. We all have things we are ashamed of, and this is nothing of the sort. You are forever connected to your sister Minor. Even if tomorrow we were able to make a body for you, that wouldn't change.

"You are connected to her through hardship, through adversity, and of course, from living in her head. And, if we can't or even if you don't want to have your own body you are even more connected to her

"That's a special thing, but it is also the normal for you. Anything, no matter how precious, becomes mundane and ordinary after a long enough time. Besides, I went on a few contracts before I met you and I didn't hand out any beacons before you either"

Minor giggled through her tears and tightened her grip around Kat. "Thanks Kat"

"Anytime. I'll have to introduce you to a good friend of mine if I can figure out how to get you two together. Her name is Sylvie and I'm sure you'd both get along great" said Kat

Minor made a sound of affirmation and just clung to Kat for a bit longer. Kat was happy to let them stay that way for a few minutes, before letting go slightly. Once she did Minor seemed to hesitate for a moment but let go as well, and Kat returned her to the princess carry "Now, that was lovely and all but it didn't actually answer the question"

Minor blushed but said "Ah... well... I guess what I want is... In an ideal world, I could visit you whenever I want, and... and I want to be able to talk to Major face to face... and... I do want to stay in here. I think... I think I can do more with the dreams and Major's mind if she lets me, and I do want to be here but...

"Sometimes... sometimes I do want to be able to leave" said Minor. Kat nodded. *It makes sense to me really. Even Lily who loves to read and stay at home will come hang out with me when she can. Wait that sounds kinda arrogant... well I didn't mean it like that and I didn't say it aloud so it's fine.*

Really though, I'm a bit surprised she still doesn't want a body of her own. I wonder if that will change in the future or not... or if it is possible. I'm pretty sure they both have a soul but... maybe it's more like one and a half souls between though two of them?

But wasn't there that kitsune cloning technique or something? I think that is a thing. If Minor can control a clone that will probably be for the best... not sure why she didn't bring it up again? Aw well I'm sure it's not a major thing.

"That's fine Minor, I believe you mentioned it to me before, but it seems that the kitsune cloning technique is perfect for everything you could want. That is assuming it works the way you are hoping" said Kat

Minor nodded "Yes, yes I think that has to be the goal but... I worry that Major might shut me away again. I... I'm not really sure what would happen if she did. As I said I... I am more, so much more, than I was before even with that small piece of existence I have...

"I... I'm not sure really. I'd say it has to be something related to the soul... but... well, I guess I have to believe it exists but I know not how it functions. Anyway, it... it seems that a balance will need to be struck somehow" said Minor

Kat nodded "How hard do you think that particular spell will be?" asked Kat

"Well... Ok, another thing I probably shouldn't say but... if I was willing to share secrets with an assurance that you not speak of them before... I think now it is clear enough to me that doesn't matter. Your word provides no extra security, not really, my secrets are perfectly safe without it"

Kat smiled as Minor continued "So, it's not actually a spell. Perhaps, its closer to what you use as a demon. It is a process that requires mana, but it in itself is not a spell. We do have an accompanying sigil just for show but its intrinsic to our race.

"I'm... I'm not sure that Major has the mana. I think with the pair of us working in concert we might be able to cheat. This is because we do not need to connect the two bodies so they can be piloted because I'll be controlling one but...

"Well, our unique condition is just that unique. I hope, truly hope we can figure it out. And I suppose, if we don't...?as long as Major can actually hear my words than I shall have minimal complaints. Hopefully at the very least Enuco can cast her spell and allow you to re-enter the dream"

Kat nodded "I'm sure she can. She did it once after all. Though... I think I need to make another beacon, that one was only temporary. Once we are done with this whole fiasco I can give you a proper one... though...

*I wonder if I can give Minor one, in person? Like, in the dream. Huh, it really is an interesting question. I'm not sure if I can just manifest one... maybe if I made one, then entered the dream and handed it to Minor... *

But, as much as I'd love the gesture that provides, from a safety concern it might be a horrible idea. I mean, look what I'm doing now. As much as I hope to be wrong it isn't impossible that something like this happens again... I guess I should give it to her in the real world.

Maybe I can make two? I'm not sure how many I can give out at rank 2 though... and do I really want to leave two beacons in the one dimension.

"Sorry about drifting off there, I was just pondering over if I could give you a beacon here in the dream, but I realised it's probably not safe, sorry about that" said Kat

Minor tilted her head confused "What's dangerous about it?"

"Well, how could you have summoned me while trapped here if you had it instead of it being in the real world" said Kat

"Oh" said Minor, voice ringing hollow.

Kat hugged Minor a bit tighter and used her tail to pull the kitsune's own set in close "Hey, hey Minor it's fine. Even if I leave it somewhere else it will still be your beacon, that means something" said Kat.

Granted I don't know exactly how much it means, but I hope it's the thought that counts.

Minor nodded "Yeah thanks Kat"

Minor was about to say something else when her eyes widened. Watching through Kat's fluttering sleeves Minor was shocked at what she could see behind them "Kat, Kat turn around" said Minor with excitement in her voice.

Kat spun on her heel instantly and was met with quite the sight. Springing up from the areas that had been cleared of snow was a field of flowers and bushes and a few other things. Looking closely revealed that even in the footprints Kat had left there was now scenes of life

"This has to mean something" said Minor, and Kat nodded along.

"Yup, I think I have a guess" said Kat

"What" asked Minor confused

"What do you think would happen if I cleared out a circle?" asked Kat

Minor nodded vigorously "Yes, yes that sounds like a good idea, but just in case can you also make that around a tree. I have a hunch"

Kat shrugged, and walked over to the nearest tree, which was just a few paces to the left. "Do you want to sit down while I run around?" asked Kat

Minor shook her head "No, it's time for me to do a bit more, I think. We can use your fire" said Minor with a grin on her face

Chapter 242: a Major tail

"Well, if you have a plan then" said Kat, as she summoned a flame at the end of her tail which she made sure to keep far away from Minor just in case.

"Now, I know your flame freezes, but if we just..." said Minor twisting her hands, and giving a slight grunt of effort.

Suddenly the area around the tree burst into flames. These were orange instead of Kat's usual purple. She could feel a slight drain on her reserves, more than the ember required but much less than the field would.

Kat watched as the snow melted before her eyes. As the fire dimmed, not even a second past before grass and flowers exploded from the ground. They popped up without end, until Kat heard a creaking sound.

Kat whipped around to see the source of the noise but as she turned, instead of finding a pointed pine tree behind her, instead she stood a hundred metres away from a giant sakura tree that extended far into the sky.

Kat couldn't help swallow what little water was in her mouth. As Kat continued to look around, she saw smaller trees dotting the hill, but compared to the behemoth in the centre they looked like mere shrubs.

The large tree also had some sort of presence. Even without focusing Kat could feel it pressing into her being, as if she was slowly being squeezed and compressed on all sides. Her demonic energy flared, and in turn so did her aura.

After a moment, the energy retracted, but her aura continued to climb. Pushing back against this force. It was strange, as Kat felt her aura changing slightly, it contained not just the usual calming sensation but stalwart fortitude.

It was like a lake slowly absorbing the ripples from a stone that had been carelessly thrown. It could not hope to permanently affect such a serene lake but it would endeavour to try. This silent war continued for an unknown period of time, everything seemed to be frozen, the leaves, the branches, Minor, and even Kat's own body, as her aura crashed against this foe with its full force.

In the end, a strange sense of stalemate was reached. Kat's aura exploded for a moment, gaining a huge degree of ground, and covering more area than Kat had ever seen before, before retracting itself back to cover a small area around Kat...

It was strange, she never once got the feeling that she had lost, it was closer to... an understanding that the sakura tree meant no disrespect. *Which is weird in itself. How can a tree mean no disrespect? How can it respect something either for that matter.*

Just as Kat's mind was stabilising itself, a figure appeared to walk out of the sakura tree and slowly walked towards Kat... or at least that is how it appeared. The figure was rapidly approaching despite its tranquil movements. Kat enhanced her eyes with a bit of demonic energy and what she saw only further confused her.

In her field of view, Kat saw Major... or... something close to Major. She looked fine on her left hand side, but her right hand side looked to be made of the same wood as the tree behind her. It was carved in great detail as if no expense was spared, but it did not compare to the true appearance of the left.

A few more seconds was all it took for Major to approach Kat. The figure stopped a respectful distance away, perhaps two metres separated the two. "Greeting intruders. I see you mean me no harm and I welcome you to this garden" said Major(?)

What the hell is this? Please tell me what's going on. Kat looked down at Minor who still rested in her arms and looked just as confused if not more so. *Dammit Minor.* Kat decided, the first course of action would be to put Minor down.

Simply so that in this conversation she could stand on her own two feet. However, Kat was still wary of the figure before her and made sure that while her tail flicked around seemingly aimlessly it always drifted towards Minor, ready to wrap around her and pull her away at a moment's notice.

"Who leads your delegation. I may be welcoming but I do request you state the reason for your presence here" said Major(?)

Kat glanced at Minor who glanced back at Kat with a pained look. *She's your sister, I think it's better you do it.* Thought Kat in Minor's direction. Somehow the message got across.

Minor swallowed and turned to Major(?) and said "Greeting, I am known as Minor, and what might generously be referred to as one half of the being called Shizuka, and this is my friend Kat. We are seeking out my other half to prevent the body with both inhabit's death"

Really Minor? That is how you lead? Despite her thoughts, Kat kept her face schooled. Showing as little variation in expression as she could. "Indeed? Is it as you say? Interesting news indeed." The figure seemed to be contemplating something as it spoke. *nOVeLnext.com*

"I must say, while expressing... doubt for your claims is not the correct words, it is something akin to that. I am aware that I am fighting my own half in a war of truth. Your appearance here would seem to indicate my victory but... the simple fact that this realm has not collapsed seems to indicate that things are in fact, not so simple" said Major(?)

Minor gulped "Well, um, what might I call you as we discuss?"

"Ah, where are my manors. I suppose... this is rather more confusing than your average discussion. You say you are Minor, a half, of what I would consider myself... and yet I myself am yet a half of that... this does complicate matters.

"Would you first... explain to me exactly how it is you came to exist? I have my suspicion of course, and that is why I believe this war of truth to be mine... but, would you care to state who you believe yourself to be" requested Major(?)

Minor swallowed "I believe myself to be the remnants of your sister. I cannot claim to be Haruka herself, but I do claim to have once been Haruka in so much as she was. I have reached the conclusion that when Shizuru combined with me to save her life, I was not as gone as it was believed"

The figure nodded "Yes. That is the belief that I have held to. Of course, you must understand it is even harder to simply take such a precious truth at its face. I wished for nothing more, and I would not be in this situation had I not desired for this truth... what further information can you use to prove this" said Major(?)

Ugh, I thought it was bad at the start of this conversation but what is up with her. Is this all of Major's stuffy manners or something? She's so unbelievably formal.

"I have but few ways to verify my claim. You must understand our limited ability in soul arts. I believe myself capable of sharing memories with you, but that may also be quite the risk if shared in sufficient amounts.

"If that does not strike you as acceptable, then it is possible that my companion's word may suffice? You should remember Kat from our Mother's summoning, and we know demons are unable to lie, thus her statements can be taken as truth" said Minor as formally as possible, but Kat could see her tails trembling

Major(?) nodded, but her both halves of her face remained unmoved "You speak true, to my knowledge at least, however, it is possible for your companion to merely be a construct. I do doubt this, as she feels even more solid than your existence does, but it is strange that her own existence seems to even eclipse mine... and that gives me pause of course"

What the hell does that mean? My existence eclipses hers? I really want to ask but... no this is Minor's show, I won't interrupt. "It seems you have finer capabilities in this manner than I do" said Minor "When I first gazed upon Kat in this realm, I did not recognise her for what she was, thinking her but a mere constructed that I had taken to summoning to help my thoughts"

"Intriguing, you say you lack my capabilities?" said Major(?) "But I am but a fragment, of... if you are to be believed, a half. You are whole, may I ask how it is my powers eclipse yours?"

Minor's tail froze. Kat held her breath, but Minor managed to speak, though it was a strained thing "I believe, that I was clear before. I hardly dare to call myself half of the existence that is Shizuka. Once, I may have been, but for many years I have been locked within the mind as you are now. I know not if this diminished me or if... if recent experiences have empowered me"

Chapter 243: Ki

"Hmm, this is certainly interesting, but I doubt now is the time to delve so deeply in these matters. Can you posit any other reason for your companion to have such a solid foothold within this dream despite not being native to this world" said Major(?)

Minor's eyes flicked to Kat for a second, before speaking again "I... believe that most likely reason for that would be that Kat has a full and intact soul, while I am less than I once was, and you are only part of yourself" said Minor

Major(?) nodded at this, as she stretched herself out, wood creaking as she moved. "I cannot deny your claims. At least not on the face of it. I do however find it strange that such a thing could occur. How exactly is it that... Kat I believe you said, could possibly place her entire soul within our mind... I would imagine that to be impossible" said Major(?)

Minor's tongue traced her lips trying to stop the dry feeling that was beginning in her mouth "I believe that Grandmother is largely responsible for this. I am unsure if you have my memories as well, but before our body's health deteriorated it was explained she had a spell for it. I do not know the specifics though, she did not have time before things got relatively severe. Perhaps my companion could explain more" said Minor

Minor why! Don't make me talk to the terrifyingly formal version of Major. I have no idea how to talk to her. Something tells me she is even more dangerous than the Nightmares "That is acceptable" said Major(?) "And please, refer to me as Ki from now on. It makes it easier for everyone"

Minor nodded and motioned for Kat to step forward. Welp here goes nothing. "Hi Ki, I'm not really sure how to speak properly to someone like yourself so I hope just speaking normally will be fine" said Kat

Minor paled but Kat paid it no mind. *I can be polite, but you guys are being a bit silly about this. You're sisters dammit, even if Ki isn't exactly in full. And man, how many names do these pair have anyway. Shizura, Haruka, Major, Minor, Ki, and surely the other half will get one as well.*

"This one finds that to be acceptable. I am aware of my verbal propensities and I am afraid to say that I cannot control it fully. It appears that at least some of speaking ability remains locked within my other half, so I may only speak with overly formal prose. I do understand how this must look,

"I do apologise to Minor I likely should not confess to this, but her clear feelings of how uncomfortable it was to speak with me like this was rather amusing. This is especially considering that she still seems to view me as superior despite being in two pieces" said Ki with a slight giggle that seemed to distort slightly.

Minor grimaced at this but didn't say anything. "Well," said Kat giving her explanation before things got too weird... assuming they weren't already "I don't know a tonne of the how or the what exactly, but Euko, your grandma cast a spell on the both of us

"From what she said to me, it sort of... does two things. It makes your, Major's and Minor's I guess, dreams more real, as well as placing me within them. I'm not fully clear if it puts my body in the dream, or if it puts my mind in but I seem to have a body either way"

"Oh? Truly? Well, that is quite interesting information. What exactly were you told to accomplish demon?" asked Ki without the heat Euko normally has when using the term.

"Well, I was asked very nicely, and trust me that was a shock, to come in here and bring you both back. Minor couldn't keep the body functioning and Major wasn't waking up so this was determined to be the best option" said Kat

Ki nodded with the slightest frown "Yes but what are you DOing, about it. I understand that you are here and you wish to help in possibly whatever way you can but that doesn't answer what you think you will need to do to accomplish your goal" said Ki

Minor went to speak up, but Ki stopped her "I seek this answer from Kat"

Well... shit "I can't say I fully know Ki. I'm mostly following Minor's lead because this is more her wheelhouse than my own. I've never been inside someone else's head before. In fact, I'm not sure I've really ever been in my own" said Kat

Ki bit her lip and nodded "Yes, I find this to be a rather strange state of affairs. Personally, I do believe it unlikely that ones I am whole and awake I will remember these events. I will be curious to know how both your own and Minor's memories are affected.

"Truly I cannot even begin to guess. It seems that this dream is more real, but is it more dream, or more reality. I think it likely that Minor will retain events because as mentioned before, this is her world, especially if all is to be believed...

"But then what about you, Kat, you are here in full same as Minor, and yet it is only by the power of a spell. I suppose that might be the crux of it, the power of the spell..."

"Never mind I am distracting myself, the-" Ki was about to continue speaking when a great crash reverberated from all around. The ground quaked and the giant sakura tree started to tremble.

Ki had a pained look on her face, this time both wooden and flesh. After a second to recover Ki slammed her wooden arm into the ground. When it made contact with the grass it seemed to expand, increasing in length and Kat could see tendrils of wood coming off it and seeping into the surrounding grass.

"It seems" said Ki through gritted teeth "That I can not investigate you quite as thoroughly as I may have wished. It seems my other more aggressive half is attempting to push into my domain and overwhelm me"

"Is that bad?" as Minor "I... I have some guesses but I still don't really know what to do. I think joining back together without first defeating the other might be impossible, you are acting too individual for a clean merger..."

"But... I don't know what would happen if we deal too significant to your counterpart. That might have some long term consequences, or less likely but I guess still possible, short term ones again"

Ki cracked again "So fast to consider my alternate to be the enemy. Why do you so readily choose to help Ki instead of whoever opposes her? Is it because I have a fancy tree? Or is it because I have managed to convince you that I believe in the existence of my sister?"

That... that is a dam good question. I was just sort of following Minor's lead wasn't I? I mean... she does know more than me but... I guess in this situation where Major has to be the enemy or one of them, even she might not know why

Minor however, smiled at this question "I actually do have a bit of a guess that led me to decided you were the one to support" said Minor "You see, the reason is that Shizuka's favourite season is winter, and yet.

"Your final stronghold is instead Spring, which, I believe is my favourite season... though of course, I haven't been in the real world long enough to feel as strongly about it as you must"

Ki laughed, a strange cackling sound as she pulled her arm out of the ground. "Yes, yes indeed. In this world of abstractions and dreams the small details add up to create exception changes... well that and if you saw my other half they would be covered in foul black tar, that might have swayed you as well"

Well, why the heck didn't you lead with that! Shouted Kat internally. *I mean seriously, those things have been trying to stop us so many times, why am I not surprised that the final boss looks like it as well... still that was a bit of a rude way to go about it.*

Kat then looked in Minor's direction and... Kat wasn't sure what she expected to see but anger certainly wasn't it. "It seems that you may have been playing us for fools" said Minor

What? "What?" said Ki

"What have you been stalling for? Kat's right, if you had simply led with, 'the other me is a tar monster' you'd have us on your side in a heartbeat. Why did you wait so long to mention it?"

"And what? You'd have simply taken my word for it before laying your eyes on the thing? I think not. Plus, her outer appearance is a bit more pleasant until she is struck a few times" said Ki

Chapter 244: Ki Ki

The more Ki talked, the more Kat started to feel something was wrong. *Sure, everything she said seemed fine, but that one line about the other copy being coated in the inky substance is strange, and I think she really was stalling for some reason...*

There is something I'm not seeing here...? Could she have been lying? Maybe? But I'd hope Minor knows her sister well enough to know when she's lying but... maybe she doesn't. Or maybe the fact that this is only half of Major is screwing with her.

"Anyway, now that you're both here we can properly confront the other half of me. If we can defeat them we should be able to get this whole trapped inside my head thing dealt with" said Ki

Kat stole a glance at Minor, and noticed something strange. Despite her smiling face, her tails were all twisted around each other behind her back. *Hmm, does Minor recognise something strange is going on, or is it something else.*

"I see" said Minor "How exactly are we going to do that?"

"Well" said Ki "the tree that you see behind is currently what is keeping the other half of me sealed away in another area. I can't let them break in here, but with your help... Minor, I believe that we can break into their area and deal with them for good" said Ki spreading her hands out to point at the giant sakura tree in the background.

"Sure, if you both want to come up to the base, there will be a door there. We just need to put enough metaphorical weight on it to cause it to shatter and then we can all head in as a group" said Ki with a nod, before turning around and heading towards the tree.

"Ok" said Minor and fell in step behind Ki. Kat took up the rear in a place behind her Minor, keeping her eye out for anything that was out of place. Nothing sprung out though. The only things moving were the falling pink petals, and using a bit of demonic energy she could see the door that Ki was talking about.

It was a strange thing. It looked to have once been elaborately carved with thick lines and extra details, but much of it now looked warped, strange. As if someone had thrown acid over the construction and was satisfied with a job half done

Except it was the bottom half that took the most damage. The bottom edge of the door had a large amount of wood piled at the bottom as if it had sunk and pooled there. Above that was some designs that might have once been vines with flowers on them, that now looked like melting wax and reaching hands.

Above that, stood a picture of the sakura tree, which, with that context, meant that the vines were likely roots. It didn't explain the things that might have once been flowers but Kat ignored that part focusing on the tree itself.

It seemed to be a replica of the giant tree that it resided on, except there were a few differences she couldn't quite make out properly from this distance. *Does it just look weird because the real one is letting leaves fall and it's moving in the breeze?*

Wait... Kat's thoughts tugged on the end of her sentence. *Breeze? What breeze?*

Kat let her tail hang softly to the side, away from Minor for the first time since she entered the area, making sure to still keep an eye on her kitsune companion.

As she held her tail aloft, she tried to sense any change at all in the wind, but there was just nothing. She could feel the slightest breeze that was caused by moving forward but aside from that there was nothing resembling a gust of wind, and certainly nothing that could cause the sakura tree to move as much as it currently was.

Hmmm. Another thing that feels off thought Kat to herself. Letting her gaze drift to Minor, she saw that Minor now had her tails flowing behind her like normal... though the gesture looked stiff, as if she was forcing herself not to do something else.

Hmm, I wish I could talk to Minor about this somehow without Ki hearing. We should have invented like... a secret signal that something is horribly wrong. It just seems so useful now that I've considered it

Also considering how strange the dream is, it is something we really should have. Kat let her tail drift towards Minor's abusing the extra length she had to touch Minor's tail just barely hopefully without notifying Ki

Minor's tails froze when Kat let her own touch the middle one. Minor seemed to stumble a bit in her step but kept walking. Minor moved her three tails so that they covered as much of Kat's as she could before pulling them away and walking forward as if she hadn't felt anything.

Kat retracted her own tail at the same time and tried to keep the frown off her face. *Something must be wrong. I think. I don't know if Minor was trying to assure me that everything is fine or assure me that she knows something strange is happening. I can only hope that if it's the first option she isn't too surprised.*

It was at this point that they reached the tree. "Now, I am aware that Minor is able to assist me with breaking through the scene, but what about you Kat? Do you possess the power to assist us?" asked Ki

"I'm not sure" said Kat "I possess power yes, but it is nothing like Minor's and I haven't really been able to help that much with scene transitions before"

"Regrettable" said Ki "In that case please stand to the side. Minor, please stand next to me as we lean on this door. Please try not to touch the lower half of it. When I count to three, I want you to throw your power into it like a hammer, and I'll try to make mine a sharp point for it to strike does that make sense?"

"Not really?" said Minor "I cannot do anything other than hammer at scenes to make them change but I will follow your lead"

Minor and Ki stepped up to the door. Kat stepped off to the side but made sure that her tail ran along the ground and was touching Minor's ankle. Ki didn't seem to notice or if she did, she didn't comment on it in the slightest.

"Please ready yourself Minor. Please strike the door when I finish saying the word three in just a moment" said Ki

Minor nodded and placed her shoulder against the top of the door. Ki did the same placing her flesh shoulder against the door. Doing this she faced Kat, and Kat looked back into her eyes without hesitation.

No change of expression seemed to occur, but they held each other's gaze for three seconds before Ki looked away "Ok. One

"Two

"Three"

As soon as the words left Ki's mouth her body started to glow blue and she pulled back before slamming into the door. Minor mirrored this motion, except she was glowing with a light red when she did.

As soon as they both made contact with the door, the world seemed to screech in pain. The scene shuddered for a second before tearing itself apart. Despite this, the giant tree stayed in place, while the storm that consisted of the remanent shards of the scene, whipped around its branches, dislodging a few petals, which just calmly drifted down towards the ground.

Kat felt herself tense as the aura contained within the tree seemed to double. It pressed into Kat's own bubble she hadn't realised she'd been keeping up. Despite its newfound power Kat's aura didn't yield to it, and instead pressed forward to full cover Minor.

She twitched slightly when the transition was complete but didn't otherwise react. Ki didn't react at all, and Kat tried to keep her aura from enveloping her as well. The moment stretched on, for a bit longer in Kat's eyes before everything snapped into focus.

Kat looked around, and other than the tree at her side, she found herself in a wasteland of snow and ice, with spikes jutting out of the ground randomly in place of trees.

The snow fell thick and heavy, making it hard for Kat to see much beyond a few hundred feet, even with her advanced vision, as the snow started to overlap too much for her to see any further details.

Minor seeing that the scene had changed, shifted herself so that she was within arm's reach of Kat, who for her part, let her wing extend slightly so that it would block the falling snow from hitting the kitsune.

Of course, it's more snow. Why would it be anything else. It isn't as though we are on our third run through a snowy scene. Hopefully this is the last one for a long while.

Chapter 245: What's that over Yonder

As Kat looked around at the snowy landscape, looking for anything that might give away what they were looking for, Ki started to say something. However, before she could even get the first sound out a deafening boom sounded from somewhere.

Kat's ears rung as she tried to steady herself. Pushing demonic energy to her ears to help recover, let her feel that she was actually missing her eardrums. The ringing continued as they were quickly regenerated.

While this was happening, Kat's vision was also slowly recovering. The disturbance caused by the roar had made her vision swim slightly, but her eyes were better off than her ears. They managed to spot the faint shadow of something moving at the extreme range of her vision.

Even with Kat's improved eyes, the details escaped her. It looked to be a human sized figure, but the sheer distance away implied it was something much larger. **Is that thing getting closer?** Kat narrowed her eyes and tried to get a good look at the thing, but with the distances she was working at, it was hard to determine if it was moving at all.

Then, as if it realised it was being observed, sped up drastically, leaving no doubt as to the likelihood of its movement. Kat could see the figure rapidly increasing in size, first to twice her height, then four times, and further still.

As the figure got closer, the details grew clearer. It was another figure reminiscent of the ink golem found in the Autumn section of the scene. It had large stocky limbs even as it sprinted at breakneck speed. Its 'skin' was a constantly shifting mass, dripping towards the ground, but Kat could not make out if any was actually left behind.

That was where the similarities ended. Instead of being black like ink, this golem was instead a strange blue, it was surprisingly bright, blending in with the snow better than it should have. The colour was something around a bright aqua, it had a clear dash of green in it. This was the trend for most of the body, but there were two exceptions.

The first of these was the head, instead of the smooth rounded surface Kat expected, it was a sharp angular thing, more like two triangles sticking up from the neck area that had joined in the middle. It was a much darker blue than the other areas making it more like the black you'd expect, but with a slight coating of snow that seemed to stick on it at various places almost making it look diseased.

The second deviation, was the massive club that rested on the figures back. As it was running Kat could only make out the hilt and the start of the structure to identify that it was in fact a club and no other weapon. The hilt, though to call it that might be misleading, was a dark black that absorbed light, the same as any other Nightmare, but the rest of the club, presumably, was a glowing neon green.

The colour change wasn't gradual, it was a sharp line that separated the two colours, and neither dripped like the figure that wielded it. Both sections were completely smooth, and somehow looked... sharp, to Kat.

How does that even work? How can it look sharp? But even as Kat thought that question she was forced to avert her gaze as her eyes started to burn. She didn't notice at the time, but had she looked at her eyes, Kat would have been able to see minute cuts that had started to form on the surface of her eyes. As a demon though, her eyes didn't bleed and her vision remained mostly untouched.

While this was happening, Minor had fallen to the ground. Once she had realised the danger, she had thrown a pile of snow over herself mostly to block her ears which were bleeding. Counter to this, Ki stood tall, while the 'breeze' moving her sakura tree seemed to increase slightly.

Ki's mouth moved, perhaps in an attempt to say something or rally their spirits, but Kat's ears were still recovering completely and whatever sounds Ki made were completely drowned out. Minor sat in the snow, and made no movement indicating she had been heard either.

Ki seemed to notice this, and simply crouched and sharpened her gaze. Watching the titan approaching them. Kat too, watched as its size never seemed to stop increasing. It now towered over everything except the sakura tree, easily a few stories tall.

As the creature approached even closer, Kat's eyes picked up something strange while she was pointedly looking away from the weapon. The chest section of the golem was oddly smooth. The dripping sections seemed to avoid one particularly small patch about two third of the way up its chest.

Whatever it was however, blended in well, and was coloured exactly the same as the 'flesh' that surrounded it. Another point towards it being something noteworthy was that when Kat cast her gaze around, she found Ki's own gaze locked on to that very same section.

As the creature approached, deep thuds started to resound, and shortly after that, the ground started to shake. The snow started to jump every time the thing took a step. At this point it was vast, taking up most of Kat's vision if she was looking straight at it. Minor, had managed to get up, as well, though it she still had trails of blood running down her ears.

I can only hope that Minor is able to use her fancy powers to heal herself a bit otherwise we are in for a rough time. I should also probably get some height. I don't want to get crushed under foot.

"I'm taking to the skies, does one of you want to come?" asked Kat

Ki shook her head "I must remain grounded to stay connected with the tree, but I suggest you take Minor"

Kat nodded, and headed for Minor, who bent herself sideways, so that when Kat picked her up, it was easier. Once she had Minor in hand, Kat stomped into the ground shooting off into the air and spreading her wings.

Kat flapped her wings as hard as she could trying to gain as much height as she could. *Do I want to aim for that funny spot or go all the way to the head? It's a blob monster, so I'm not sure how much taking its head off will actually help, and I mean... I don't see any eyes on the thing but... maybe it's worth getting as high as I can, I can always drop down...*

But then again Kat looked at her rapidly climbing height, even as it made a minimal dent in the height of the golem, *can I drop as fast as I can fly? I mean I think so... but clearly some strange magic phenomena is what lets me fly... so maybe I am faster than my terminal velocity?*

Except... I don't remember that? Wait... Kat scoured through her memories rapidly but was unable to recall it. *Damn, I might just be looking in the wrong place, or I might have forgotten it. I think it was over a year ago that I learnt about it in class*

Kat couldn't help the chuckle that escaped her lips. *Ha, a year. I feel like I've done so much in the last month that a year ago seems like an age ago.* Kat shook her head and focused on the golem again.

It seemed to be slowing down, or at least, its apparent height wasn't changing as much as it was before. Kat was above head height now, and looking down at the golem provided nothing new, except for confirming the fact that the thing's weapon was a club, and that the rest of it was in fact green.

Just as Kat was averting her gaze from the weapon, the golem moved. Its hands moved with agility a behemoth of its size should have been incapable of. Drawing the club in one swift movement it swung towards Kat making use of the extra reach to launch an attack at her.

Kat's eyes went wide, as she started to shoot off towards the side, but trying to dodge a weapon the size of a house was a trying task, especially at the speed it was travelling. Kat managed to just barely clear the area of impact a moment before it would have collided with her...

But it didn't even matter, at that size the air pressure alone was a decent attack. Despite her dodge, Kat felt like her back was smashed with a sledge hammer, she felt the bones in her wings shatter as the leather tore in places.

Kat grit her teeth and stifled a scream as she started to fall towards the ground. Forcing as much energy as she could into her wings, she felt them starting to heal on her back. It wasn't a pleasant experience, Kat could feel it as every splinter of bone crawled its way back into place through her body sending new waves of pain across her mind.

Chapter 246: a Major box

Despite the pain Kat was experiencing, once she felt the bones in mostly acceptable condition, she stretched her wings out again, to try and slow her fall at least somewhat. Despite the holes in her wings this was reasonably effective... for a split second.

As she opened her wings to full, the air caught on them and snapped the new connection between the bones that hadn't quite finished setting yet. Kat cursed her impatience as she started falling once again.

Concentrating on fixing her wings, and fixing them properly, Kat pushed her energy towards her back and tried very hard not to focus on the splinters making their way through her skin and muscle as her power tried to put her wings back together.

It was slower going than Kat had wanted. Getting the splinters into place wasn't too bad, it was the strengthening and re-joining of bones that took the most time. Even though this time was in reality only a few seconds, with Kat's enhanced thought processing speed and the fact that she was falling down towards the ground it was a rather large concern and much too slow.

Dammit, is this even going to be fixed in time. Kat glanced and could see that she was actually knocked far to the side of the golem, and that she had already dropped to around where its waist should be... if a semi-amorphous cascading wall of Nightmare fluid could be said to have a waist.

Ok, let's just try not to focus on the excruciating pain in your back. Sure, the pain can't compare to that time you had gravel forcibly imbedded into your throat and had to cough it back up, but that might just have been the human part of me that was still left at the time giving up

That or my sense of pain has become more acute... which I really don't want... or think can be the case now that I consider my other problems... is it just the wings maybe? Kat's thoughts Kat off as a

particularly large wave of pain hit her as her right wing snapped into place. It was still too weak, but the bones were all in place and the pain had lessened.

Ok, that's good. Kat looked at the rapidly approaching ground, she had maybe a few seconds more of falling before she'd impact the snow. *That isn't so good.* Kat looked at Minor who had grabbed onto her and was digging her nails into Kat's flesh... or trying, they didn't seem to be able to break her skin.

Ok, so... do I do something for Minor? Keep her safe from the inevitable impact? Kat moved her awareness to concentrate on her wings. They were so close to being ready, but they just weren't quite there...

"Minor! Can you slow us down at all!" yelled Kat over the wind. *Hopefully she can do something...*

Minor seemed to grab to Kat tighter, as the world twisted slightly. When Kat blinked, the ground looked to be further away but it was hard to tell. She was about to steal a glance at the golem for context but Minor flicked a tail in the way. *She must have a reason.* Kat continued to work on her wings as fast as her energy would let her.

A mere ten agonising seconds later Kat's second wing snapped back into place, and she could feel the bones had completely settled. Flaring her wings out Kat quickly stopped her fall, remembering to still be slightly careful with Minor and made sure not to just stop in place.

Kat turned herself back to face the monster and saw it engaging with Ki, or more accurately, it was engaging with her tree. The giant tree, while not even half the height of the golem was much wider, and had a number of branches.

Every time it swung towards the thing's monstrous form, the branches would extend for just a second to take a swipe at it. In the places where the branches managed to connect, small pink flowers bloomed, but they didn't last long.

They seemed to be fixed in place, and when the strange ink that the golem was made up of kept dripping downwards came into contact with the flowers, they just seemed to be overtaken. The only exception was around that strange distortion around its chest. In that area no flowers ever seemed to appear.

Perhaps I need to rethink my plans... that damned club is much faster than something of that size really should be and I'm really not sure how I can dodge that. I'm just not fast enough I don't think... I could maybe try to get in close so that the angle is awkward but does the thing even have bones? Perhaps its arms are more like my tail than an arm and can be whipped around pretty much as much as it wants.

As Kat's thoughts turned back to the club, she watched the Nightmare golem use it, to little effect. It had grabbed hold of the club with both hands and brought it crashing down onto the tree that was attacking it.

Instead of snapping branches and a shockwave of air, a perfect sphere surrounded the tree made up of sakura petals. The club slammed into the makeshift barrier and hardly budged it in the slightest. Kat braced herself, fearing the shockwave she knew had to come... but even that was missing.

Ok... what the hell. How does that even remotely make sense! Sure, attacking with the branches, ok. Magic extending attacking branches, that's fine too. Leaving petals where you attack the monstrous Nightmare creature? Why not?

However, I feel like I really need to draw the line at stopping a shockwave that only would have occurred because you stopped the damned club dead in place. Why is this ok? I thought the dream world still had some rules!

"Minor what's the plan" asked Kat to try and distract herself from what just happened

"I- I don't know Kat" said Minor

"Anything at all would be great" said Kat

Minor flinched but spoke with some determination "I'm... I'm really not sure what I can do here. The only thing I can think of is distributing your fire a bit... but you must have taken a lot of damage reducing your reserves and I just don't know where we need to hit the thing"

Kat nodded "Yeah that is a problem. I certainly don't have enough energy to freeze the entire Nightmare" said Kat

Plus, at least for the moment it is more than happy to let us plan. Kat smirked as another blow rained down on the sakura tree before it quickly retaliated. Neither really doing any noticeable damage to the other.

It does seem like we need to be the tipping point. They might just be able to keep hitting each other till the end of time... I wonder if that is partly conceptual though. Major not being able to pick a side and we need to choose one? But if that is really the case then should we side with Ki or not?

The giant Nightmare does make it seem like it has to be the one we go after, but I still want to believe Ki is suspicious... but could I just be wrong? Maybe seeing someone made out of wood that just isn't expressive like Thyme is gives me a sense of wrongness?

"Do you have any other good ideas Minor?" asked Kat

"Um... er well... what about your aura? Could you calm things down maybe? Maybe fighting isn't what we are meant to be doing" said Minor

"Hmm" mumbled Kat. *I'm not sure what we are or are not meant to be doing is really the point here. I just... ok maybe the fact that this is more a conceptual battle than anything else makes some sense. Neither side is making any major moves against each other only myself and Minor.*

And even then, we are only attacked if we go after one or the other. It seems to be a stalemate. But to progress forward before we always had to break the scene. We never played along...

So is there a third solution other than side with Ki or side with the golem? I sure hope the alternative isn't to defeat both of them, because I'm pretty sure that would be impossible even with Minor's help and careful planning.

"Hey Minor" said Kat

"Yeah?" asked Minor

"You think that maybe we need to break this scene as well? Maybe not quite in the same way, but... could we need to do something else to fix Major other than just beating up half of her consciousness" said Kat

Minor's face screwed up as if she'd just eaten a lemon. The words that came out of her mouth looked like they had to kick and punch their way out, but she looked better once they'd left. "Probably. Major has been fighting herself and that's why she's stuck. I guess we have to think of something else now don't we"

Chapter 247: Major is Everything

While Minor and Kat were trying to think of 'something else' the battle continued to rage on. Seeing that its attacks weren't doing anything to Ki's sakura tree, it decided to switch tactics. If brute force wouldn't work perhaps repeated trauma would work.

Moving the club to its right hand, it lifted the edge up and away from the tree, before it started to rotate it around in its hand. Slowly building speed as the hilt of the club danced through its fingers, sometimes a bit more literally than a human would be able to, the club continued to generate speed.

Once the club had reached a speed at which a standard human would only see a faint blur the golem started to lower the club back down towards the tree. As it spun, it let out massive gusts of wind that were visible to Kat.

That has to be the effect of the dream right? It just isn't that fast... but it is quite a lot of wind. While this was going, a droning sound started to rise from the club, slowly increasing in sound alongside the speed.

This eventually culminated in the golem bringing the spinning club down on the tree. Of course, the shield instantly jumped to its defence, slowing the club down slightly and letting out a horrible grating sound.

Kat flinched, back as she started to feel pain in her ears. Summoning up her energy to coat her ears Kat wrapped her tail around her head to try and block the sound. Minor noticed this from Kat's arms and flattened her ears in alongside Kat so as to dampen the sound.

However, neither Ki nor the golem seemed effected at all by the sound. The tree's barrier showed no sign of breaking despite the force behind the club, which was completely intact from what Kat could see.

Is this what it's like to watch an unstoppable force meet an immovable object? No that seems wrong... well... maybe? The immovable object seems to be winning in this instance... unless they are both unbreakable objects?

Actually hold onto that thought. Could that actually be the case? This is a dream, and it is possible that both halves of Major have some core argument or belief and the club and shield is a manifestation of that?

Dammit I don't know enough. Kat bit her tongue and started to explain her thoughts to Minor... it didn't go so well because neither could hear over the ridiculous noise that the golem was still making.

Ok, more immediate plan, find some way to plan. Kat let out a sly grin at her own thoughts. It seems that just because neither party is making progress, doesn't mean that neither is winning. If the golem is doing this intentionally to limit our involvement in the fight then we really do need to figure something out.

This shows a level of forethought I'm not sure I can combat... unless it's just a coincidence maybe? I mean Major is just a teenage girl same as I am... is she really some mastermind?

Kat's worries were unfounded. She was starting to overthink things. The golem had simply tried to break the shield in a secondary way. This is because most spell shields have some kind of weakness, you just need to find it.

If the sound wasn't currently preventing Minor and Kat from speaking, she would have been able to find this out simply by asking. As it stood though, they needed to grit their teeth against the grinding sound that was still ringing out from the fight off in the distance.

Kat looked around as she tried to figure out where she could possibly go to get away from that sound when Minor pulled on her sleeve. Dropping her gaze to the kitsune, showed Minor pointing down towards the ground.

Kat tilted her head at this, but Minor just nodded and continued pointing down. Kat dropped to the ground, it was only a short distance after her rather spectacular fall, and in only a few seconds she was standing on the ground.

Minor jumped out of Kat's arms and started to drag her foot through the snow. Kat made to step forward to get a better look, but Minor just held up a hand in a gesture to stop. And so Kat watched as Minor drew a door in the snow, then bent down and OPENED it.

The world seemed to shake slightly when Minor grabbed the door handle but the feeling past quickly. Minor led Kat down into the snow, and to Kat's surprise, as Minor mimed stepping down, she actually started to sink further in.

Confused, but trusting in Minor Kat followed. She felt herself stepping into the snow. It was a strange feeling, exactly the same as if she just happened to be sinking rather far into the snow covering the ground, however she left behind no footprints once she stepped into the doors area of influence.

With a nod at seeing Kat following, Minor took a few more steps downwards and disappeared. Kat followed calmly. As the snow climbed past her eyes, Kat made to blink by reflex, and found herself in a small room.

It was closer to a box than a true room, with hardly enough area for Kat to stand, and just barely enough for her wings to stay out. In fact, when Kat double checked the dimensions, she found that was exactly the case. The room was just large enough that she could stand without touching the ceiling or the walls.

The other thing she noticed was the sound. The horrible grating had been completely silence and Kat let out a long breath that she didn't know she was holding "Thanks. Thank you so much" said Kat

Minor nodded "I should have done this before. It was torture on me, and I'm pretty sure you have better hearing than me even with your tiny human ears"

Kat had a moment of panic. *When did I ever tell Minor I used to be human? Wasn't I told not to talk about that? Shit did I... no, no I just have human ears, like the humans she's clearly seen. I hope?* "I'm not sure" said Kat trying to disguise her panic as uncertainty "You have much larger ears, and I have some extra toughness... but who knows"

Minor nodded "Indeed. But now that we are in the quiet, we can start to plan"

Kat nodded "Yes, first order of business. Are we fighting both of them?"

Minor shook her head "I don't think we can. I don't know how long we can hide here before we get thrown out so I wouldn't count on that. Additionally, we simply can't take them both. We might be able to tip the balance but we need Ki or the golem to have a balance to tip"

Kat bit her lip and ran her tongue along the inside of her teeth. *Dammit I think Minor is right. I mean, I was already thinking it but I didn't want to admit it.* "And that means we should probably side with Ki doesn't it" said Kat

Minor nodded "Yes. I agree with you that something else must be going on, but we just aren't strong enough. I should have thought about this more before, but as strong as we are, this right here is the centre of EVERYTHING Major is.

"We can affect it, and tip the balance but ultimately we are weak players even though we both have our full minds unlike Major. It just doesn't matter because for all intents and purposes, Major isn't just the golem or Ki, she is everything." Said Minor

Kat clicked her tongue "Yeah. I guess we knew that didn't we. These are her memories, her scenes, and her conflicting ideals" said Kat

Minor nodded.

"So, we still don't know how to attack the golem. Do you have any ideas?" asked Kat

"Well," said Minor "I think we need to get closer. I can use my power to plough through the snow and get us to its feet. Once there we should be able to start attacking. I'll stay on defence, ready to open another door down into the snow to escape, and you focus on attacking and watching for retaliation"

Kat nodded as she considered it. *That's probably for the best. I can slow my perception of time so I can better watch for threats, and Minor can't risk touching the golem like I can. The real question is how far out of the snow we can risk sneaking.*

"Sounds like a good plan all things considered" said Kat "Let's head off. Do you know which direction the golem is, I think it's that way ish" said Kat pointing roughly towards the sound.

Minor smiled "It doesn't matter, I'm using my power to tunnel so it is only the walk and the exit that really matter. Come, follow me through the tunnels. Just like old times" said Mino

Chapter 248: a Minor space

Minor took off, in the opposite direction Kat had pointed. Kat shrugged and followed behind, but for every step they took, the sound of a whirring club and repeated impacts started to get louder and louder.

Kat gave an unamused glare at the back of Minor's head, but the wry grin on her face told the real story. *Show off.* Minor for her part, glanced back and saw Kat's look, then giggled in response knowing that she had managed to bring a little levity to their situation.

As the tunnel continued, Kat could feel it shrinking as it started to scrape against her horns. She pulled in her wings as well to prevent them from catching the wall. After a few more steps she could feel her horns starting to scrape away snow that was dropping down on her.

"Hey Minor, it doesn't bother me, but it might be a problem for however you are making this tunnel. My horns seem to be taking chunks off the ceiling" said Kat

Minor whipped around in panic and looked at Kat with wide eyes. Minor's eyes focused on the ceiling where the pointed part of her horns that poked up above her forehead were clearly imbedded in the roof.

"Oh" said Minor "That's my bad. I didn't notice I was doing that. No wonder things were getting so much harder"

Kat tilted her head "Why is it harder this way? I mean I suspected, but I'd still like to know"

Minor turned around and continued walking as she spoke. "See, with the tricks I'm using, I'm abusing a few things, like the fact tunnels just keep going, as well as the fact that ice is easy to walk through

"Those factors combine to make it easy to keep walking forward down a tunnel. My mind must have drifted a little and that's what caused the tunnel to shrink. The issue with that is, you're breaking the uniformity of the tunnel

"So, my mind tries to correct for that, and your body is more than capable of forcing itself out of the abstract so we were clashing in a battle of wills you didn't even notice"

Kat frowned as she followed behind. The ceiling had already returned to its previous height where she could feel it only at the height of her step where it lightly touched the tunnel. It was still much narrower than before but Kat didn't mind. "Were we really clashing wills? I find it hard to believe mine is that much stronger than yours" said Kat

"Um... it's a little more complicated than that. You might not be, but you were preventing your core self from changing while I was just trying to keep a bit of snow in place. Think um... ah, ok I got it.

"So, say that our core self is an ice cube, and the changes we make to the environment is the water that falls off. Even with a tonne of water, you can only take small chips out of a large compact piece of ice, but if you drop that same cube of ice into the water the impact is massive" said Minor

Kat nodded along behind Minor "Ok that actually does make sense. My 'ice cube' is more than solid enough to ignore a few droplets of water but the wall... what is it in this analogy?"

Minor shrugged "I guess it's sand on the side of the river or something? The water can easily carry it away, but trying to smash into it with an ice cube won't really work. It's why we can only make little changes, and have to make use of currents, I.E, mental ideas and shortcuts"

Kat nodded more vigorously now "That makes a tonne of sense. I think I get how your abilities in here work"

"Well I'm glad" said Minor "Also, we're here. Are you ready"

Kat tilted her head, and listened for the sound of grinding from the battle presumably above them. She could hear it somewhat clearly, but the snow was a much better insulator than it should have been.

Still Kat took in a deep breath and steeled herself. "Just go for the leg, or at most the knee" said Minor "You can do more damage later if need be"

Kat finished her breath and nodded. As she bent her knees and prepared for the jump Minor moved off to the side and placed her hand on the ceiling... which was actually a lot lower around her.

Kat's eyes met Minor and they nodded slightly at each other. Minor threw the door open and Kat launched herself out without hesitation. As the door opened Kat saw herself hurtling straight for the thing's leg. She was only a few metres away and approaching fast.

The sound hit Kat the moment she passed the layer of snow, but she didn't let that distract her. Flaring her wings to quickly stop in place she set her hands on fire and plunged them into the monster's leg.

Unlike how previous Nightmare's reacted and required sufficient effort, this one was set ablaze. A huge area twice as tall as Kat blazed into light with only a moderate amount of demonic energy. The leg started to freeze before her eyes.

Kat wound up for a second strike, only for her ears to ring when the background noise suddenly stopped. Kat's eyes went wide as she dived straight back for where Minor was hiding, taking no time to check the surroundings.

As she shot down Minor's eyes went wide seeing the golem lifting up its undamaged leg to take a stomp at Kat. Minor dug her hands into the snow door and got ready. The instant Kat was even partially through the door Minor pulled on it as hard as she could.

The door slammed shut and ended up pushing Kat the last of the way as it slammed shut. Minor then started pulling Kat forward but she got the message, unwrapping her tail from her ears and grabbing Minor, Kat shot off back down the tunnel they'd left.

As soon as Kat's feet left the ground, a boom echoed from everywhere. The world shook and Kat slammed into the wall as it vibrated. As Kat started to recover the tunnel shrunk to half its size in a single breath.

It didn't collapse, and while a bit of snow fell down, it simply flattened the tunnel until there was no room for Kat to so much as crouch. Sandwiched between the ceiling and the floor Kat grunted as she tried to turn over and make space.

Only for a second quake to occur. Kat braced herself as her space was reduced to solely the area around herself and Minor. Holding her breath, Kat tried to move but found herself bound. Waiting with bated breath, Kat feared the third and final stomp... but none came.

Ok... ok. Thought Kat as she tried to calm herself down. *Is this considered a success or failure? It seems like the golem is much weaker to my fire than I ever would have thought. Previously it was a struggle to freeze them, taking basically my entire reserve to freeze one about my height...*

But honestly, based on the results from before, I might only need twice as much energy to take on this big one as I would for a standard Nightmare. Now granted, that's still more than I have... but we just need to weaken it and then have Ki take it out...

On the other hand. I can't move and neither can Minor. We seem to be trapped, which now that I really think about it, my strength should be more than enough to break through some snow. Is it a leverage thing?

"Minor can you move?" asked Kat with what little room she had to open her mouth.

"No" said Minor, or well, that was Kat's guess at what she said anyway. It sounded a lot closer to "nnnn" but that at least wasn't a yes. *Ok, plans... well when in doubt use my tail.*

Setting her tail on fire Kat tried to flex it a bit and free it from around Minor. Kat found that it was tightly pressed against Minor, and if she was to move it too much, she might hurt the kitsune.

Hmm, ok... horns maybe? Kat moved her demonic energy up to her horns and tilted her head. The moment she did she heard a cracking sound. Taking it as a good sign Kat kept applying pressure to the ceiling and the creaking sound continued.

With a wrench to the side, Kat pushed away a bunch of snow freeing her head. *Ok progress.* Kat then pulled her arm in close. Trying to make what pathways she could. It was slow going but with her skin it didn't catch on the ice in the slightest.

Kat slammed her head to the left cracking the ice around her arm. Once that was done, she managed to wrench her hand free and into the growing space around her head and left side. That was enough to pull her body forward freeing the rest of her.

Yesss leverage. With one last wrench Kat cracked the remaining ice, freeing herself and Minor from the confined space.

Chapter 249: a Minor confession

With a little more effort Kat smashed the surrounding snow so that Minor and her could sit up again. It was still a bit cramped but they were both thankful for the space. Minor even had to spit out a mouthful of snow.

"Thanks" said Minor with a scratchy voice.

"Are you alright?" asked Kat

Minor coughed once more and placed her hand on her throat. As she rubbed it Kat could see slight crystalline cracks running along her neck and inching onto Minor's face. Kat's eyes went wide, but when Minor noticed this she waved a dismissive hand at Kat

"Don't worry I'm fine. I just had to prevent us from actually getting crushed. I made it so the space shrunk instead of collapse and it might have been a bit more taxing than I'd suspected" said Minor

"You're breaking into pieces again!" hissed Kat "I can handle myself if I really need to, and I'm tough enough to survive a fall"

"Yeah but what about getting hit by that club" rasped Minor "I can help"

Kat frowned "You need to recover" said Kat with a flat look

"Look, I'm fine Kat" said Minor and Kat felt her eye twitching as her glare intensified.

"Please look after yourself more Minor. We are so close to being done, just... just don't over do it please" said Kat

Minor sighed. It was a raspy sound but as it continued on it started to sound more human. Accompanying this the cracks in Minor's neck started to close up until they were just faint lines. Kat could still easily see them without any energy in her eyes but they looked more like faint scars rather than cracks.

"What do the cracks mean Minor. I haven't chewed you out for them yet, but I refuse to let you help unless you explain that to me" said Kat

Minor grimaced "Ok... look, um, ok so... I promise it's not as bad as its going to sound" started Minor

Kat raised an eyebrow at how nervous Minor was already seeming. "So, it's um... right. So, essentially I'm using the same ability to keep myself together as I am to influence the world... and um, it's easier to keep myself together than to do anything else because...

"Well I've been over it, but this is MY body in a very real way... and um... dam" said Minor ending in a sigh

Minor frowned, took a deep breath and changed into the older version of herself. Kat frowned *I thought we weren't doing this Minor, this isn't good for you.*

"I can see that look on your face" said Minor "It is necessary to explain this in a timely manner" Kat went to open her mouth but Minor held up a hand "Yes I could have asked for you to use your calming aura but I doubt you'd have been happy with the request.

"Anyway, as I was struggling to say, my hmm, soul? I guess, my sense of self keeps my form together. I can change and pull at it a bit, and the way I've been changing things around us is to extend that sense of self into the memories a just a bit."

"Now, this is easy because I myself am essentially just a collection of memories attached to a soul with no.. no body... and um actually" the mature grown up form of Minor started to waver. "Aura please" the figure squeaked out.

Kat grit her teeth. *I don't like this Minor. I will punish you for this once we've finished this and you've recovered properly.* Kat increased the power of her aura. She'd kept it up this whole time to deal with the influence of the tree. *Wait that means she was this shaken up with my aura on already!*

Kat frowned through her teeth but ramped the power up. Minor's older looking form stabilised and nodded. "Ok, thank you" said Minor a little breathless "It seems this is harder for me to say than I'd thought. Essentially, I extend myself into the dream to let my change 'myself'" said Minor with air quotes

"And that allows me to make the dream more malleable. The reason I crack and fall apart is because I only have so much strength to keep myself together. If I use it to influence the world too much my sense of self can start to fray and I crack. Not sure if it counts as literal or figurative, but that's what happens"

"Wait so you're killing yourself slowly every time you do that!" said Kat appalled

Minor winced "Look it isn't quite that bad. I can probably put myself back together by myself given time, but it's a risk. The thing I'm unsure of is the truth of how much of my memories are stored in this form

"See, if most of my memories are off in my section of Major's head, then I'll be fine, maybe just lose a few hours of time. But if that isn't the case, and it is as we guessed earlier that most of the memories that make me, me, are actually contained right here, then we have problems" said Minor.

Kat frowned and sunk into her thoughts. *So, what does this really mean? She's at about as much risk as I am? I don't know if I'm actually safe here or not. The system doesn't seem to be but it might pull me out anyway.*

By the same token, Minor might be fine, but only if her memories aren't mostly stored in front of me. Dammit. I can't even say that she's taking an unnecessary risk because I don't really believe that. I also can't say I'll be fine because I might not be.

Kat tsked, before speaking "Ok, but you need to keep yourself safe. If you start cracking then we can take a break. I don't want you shattering again"

Minor shrunk back down to her normal size "Don't w-worry. I should be fine. The reason I broke completely before was because I did so much at once. One large defensive impact to protect myself is actually really easy to recover from because conceptually, recovering from damage over time makes a lot of sense"

Kat gave Minor a flat look "Then why was it so hard the first time?"

Minor winced "Because it isn't quite the same... it's like... the difference between making yourself tired, and getting punched. You can recover from the pain of getting punched rather quickly, but if you are tired you need a full night's rest"

Kat narrowed her eyes. *Don't think I missed the fact you said recover from the pain of a punch Minor. I want to read more into this but we've already wasted enough time. My energy is nearly back to full for crying out loud.*

I guess I should make another attack then. But where? "Ok fine" said Kat with a distinct distaste in her voice she couldn't quite remove to stop Minor from realising she'd noticed Minor's little slip "Where do we attack? The knee? Or that weird section in the chest?"

Minor smiled "Well, I say we bring them down first. We can go for the chest later, but shattering the knee seems like a great start"

Kat nodded "Agreed. Am I going to be the same distance from the leg?"

Minor shrugged as she pushed herself into a kneeling position and started to draw on a fake door. "Maybe? I can't be quite exact enough to know" she responded.

Kat shrugged as well and got into a horrible botched version of a sprinters start. She couldn't make enough space to stand up, and so hunched over with feet pressed against the wall ready to shoot out was the best she was going to get.

When Minor through the wall open, Kat dashed out once again. This time she was firmly behind the Nightmare, and had a bit more time to take stock of things. Angling her body Kat flared her wings in such a way as to not reduce her speed from launch and started flapping.

Her aim was to hit the closest approximation of the knee the golem seemed to have. It didn't have any obvious bend in it anywhere, but she was hoping that by applying enough fire to the area a good hit from her or the tree could knock it off balance.

Locking her eyes onto the target Kat started to summon her fire onto her hands, and upper arms. She didn't want to get twisted from just touching the thing, so she made sure to extend the fire a bit past her skin hoping to freeze the thing on contact with her before it could start draining her reserves.

Kat took in a deep breath and pulled her arms back and to the side, ready to bring them down in a hammer strike. Just before she would run into the back of the golem which seemed to have not noticed her presence, Kat bent her back backwards and to the side before whipping herself around and slamming into its leg.

Chapter 250: a Minor falling

As Kat's flame came into contact with the Nightmare's slick form it instantly froze over. As soon as this happened the full strength of Kat's body slammed into the thin coated of ice sending shards flying, all packed with demonic fire, deeper into the thing's body.

A boom echoed out from the impact as the golem stumbled forward. As it bent forward at the spot Kat had struck, the ice only cracked more. Capitalising on this, the sakura tree slammed into the golems left side, smashing it to right.

That is where another crack sounded out from the spot Kat had attacked. The last vestiges of the inky substance froze over before breaking, sending the golem falling to the side. It looked like it was all happening in slow motion but, this was only an illusion brought about by its massive height.

As it fell though, it was not idle. Bringing its massive club around, it slammed it into the ground, trying to prop itself up using the its right arm and the club instead of its leg. This halted the fall for only a moment before the tree struck it in the chest causing it to tilt slightly, but it held firm.

Kat was making her way back down to Minor just in case, when it brought its left hand down, slamming into the tree's branches that were about to strike it again. They tried to retreat back behind the shield it could summon, but a few tips let out sharp cracks as wood splintered under the force of the impact.

Kat was down to Minor by the time the golem tried to retaliate. It slammed its free hand down towards where Kat was before as if it was swatting a fly. Kat ducked into the shared space which Minor shut against the wave of wind that was sure to follow.

There was a slight rumble after the door slammed shut, but nothing compared to the previous time. Kat held her breath for a moment longer just in case she was speaking to soon, but Minor had no such reservations.

"We did it" said Minor breathless.

Kat smiled and said "Yeah, yeah we did"

"Ok" said Minor nodded her head back and forth "Do we go for the chest thing now?"

Kat tapped her cheek with her tail "I mean... yeah maybe? I'd guess that the Nightmare is going to be ready to protect its limbs a lot better now so maybe going for that would be a good idea. But we'll need Ki's tree to take full advantage of it. Do you think it's fine? I heard a bunch of branches break"

Minor frowned at that "I don't know... was it a lot of branches?"

Kat shook her head "I don't think so. Just a few that didn't make it to the shield before they got crushed by its arm"

Minor chewed on her tail for a moment before she said "Ok, then I think we're fine. We should still be in the same spot of I open this. Are you ready?"

Kat nodded. "Ok then" said Minor "Let's do this"

Kat readied herself as Minor pressed against the door. As soon as it opened for the third time Kat shot out once again, but she wasn't prepared for what she saw. The Nightmare golem had turned around, it was taking repeated strikes from the sakura tree to the back, and was now facing her head on.

As soon as Kat saw this, she quickly found what its limbs were doing, and its remaining leg and now left arm were supporting its body, while the other hand was being brought back to slap her out of the sky.

Kat shoved the energy she was building into her mind and everything slowed. *Shit!* Kat took a few moments to try and reign her panic back in. *Ok this is bad. I'm already being targeted. I can change directions really quickly but I don't think I'm fast enough to turn back before I get slapped by that arm.*

I can dodge, I think, but the issue with that is the wind sheer from the strike is still going to slam into me... unless there is some way to avoid the worst of that? Well, it isn't using its club to strike me so it might not be so bad...

Kat tried to look for a path to escape, but only had the urge to frown the more she looked around. The fist was striking down at her, but could likely move itself to the left or right if she tried to feel too far too fast.

Turning around was already ruled out so she would need to try and go forward to deal with it. *Could slamming into the fist be the safest? No there is no way that just tanking the fist is more ideal than try to go through the air pressure.*

What if I bring my wings in and curl up? I might take a bunch of damage to my skin, but last time, the only reason my wings took so much damage was because they were caught up in it all. My back itself was almost completely fine...

Ok that's the plan. Kat's eyes narrowed as she kept her slower perception and prepared for the task ahead. As the fist got closer, Kat moved herself the slightest amounts to the top of the fist. She was hoping that if she got blasted into the sky by the air, she'd have enough time to heal if necessary.

As the fist got closer and closer, Kat got ready to make more obvious moves. As soon as she could feel the beginnings of that air way Kat put all her effort into flying up. Just barely clearing the edge of the fist, Kat quickly brought in her wings and curled into the closest approximation of a ball she could manage.

She felt the air pressure slam into her. It rattled her wings a bit but they held strong. The same couldn't be said for her trajectory. She'd hoped that she could get higher enough to be knocked even further into the air, but that wasn't to be.

Instead the air wave sent her backwards away from the golem at an impressive speed. She was spinning rapidly and was surprised to find that even with her eyes opened she didn't seem to be experiencing any sought of nausea.

Eventually, the rotation slowed enough that she was able to risk spreading her wings out. She snapped them open in one motion, and Kat felt the pull on her muscles but they held firm. Looking back at the way she came from, she found herself at least a kilometre out, likely longer. With the size of the golem it was kind of hard.

Well shit. Kat looked down and found herself barely above the snow. Hmm, wait a second. Acting on hunch Kat drew a door in the floor the same as the ones Minor had made for her and waited for a second.

After a moment of held breath, the door swung open to reveal a panting Minor. She had cracks running along her hands and looked like she'd just run a marathon. Before Kat could worry, Minor beat her to the punch "Kat! You're alright?"

Kat nodded "Yeah, I'm fine, I was able to dodge... sort of. Anyway I'm fine"

Minor nodded and gestured for Kat to follow. As the door slammed shut behind them, Minor dropped to the ground. "S-sorry for this but... I had a feeling you'd... figure out the door trick... it just... took a bit more out of me than planned" said Minor in between panting gasps

"Why did you look like you've run a marathon?" asked Kat worried enough over the cracks.

"Ah, had to... cheat a little... I just... made it as if I ran to you... it was supposed to be easier on me... less cracks but... I didn't realise you were so far out" said Minor

Kat scooped Minor up and flared her aura again. Minor's eyes fluttered as if she was about to fall asleep but she held strong. "Not... not yet Kat. I need to be awake for... this" said Minor as she pushed open another door.

As she did, she collapsed into Kat's arms. Kat froze in place, until she saw the cracks receding. Then the soft sound of Minor's breathing further soothed her heart. Poking her head out, Kat found herself around a minute out from the Nightmare.

It was no longer facing her. Now it was using its free arm to tank hits from the tree as its leg started regrowing. Every bit of dripping Nightmare ink seemed to lengthen it slightly. *Ok this is my chance.*

Kat looked at Minor asleep in her arms and debated if she should take her or not. *I... I can't leave her alone but... can I risk carrying her towards that thing? I know I don't want to but...*