

## DEMONS 261

### Chapter 261: Family

The group all enjoyed Callisto's cooking. She provided a number of choices from the oven, consisting of some strangely arranged cuts of steak, and a turkey with wings carved into it to match Kat's.

Most of the food wasn't actually eaten, but when it was brought up Callisto just smiled and said that it would be eaten. While it was happening, Kat had to repeatedly promise that she would message everyone when she was away this time, that she wouldn't neglect to reply to any questions they had, and that she would tell them if she needed to drop contact for a bit.

Eventually, Kat decided if they wanted to be like that and gang up on her about keeping in contact, she was going to play the other card. When Vivian next reminded Kat to message everyone, Kat replied with "Do you wish to form a contract about it?"

That shut the repeated insistence down hard. It actually warmed Kat's heart a little that despite their insistence and requests to do exactly what the contract would hold her to, they didn't actually want that. What they wanted, or at least, what Sylvie, Lily, and Vivian wanted, was for Kat to keep in contact with them while out on adventures.

Kat felt a comfortable warm feeling rise in her chest that was unrelated to her demonic energy. \*It really is nice that they want me to contact them but don't want to force the issue. It's kinda funny that despite insisting that I have no choice and I must contact them, to actually make it so I have no choice crosses the line.\*

So Kat resolved herself to do just that, to keep in contact for once on adventures and ensure that she didn't up and disappear for ten days. Once that was settled, they just chatted about random things, such as Vivian's current distaste for the project she's doing.

"Look, it was interesting to start with but they keep trying to force me to make compromises in the design. I wouldn't have a problem with this normally but it's the husband who keeps insisting on changes even though the wife, the one who actually hired me thinks the first draft was by far the best

"The issue is of course, I remember her from school, and know that she certainly doesn't make the sort of money to hire me for a long-term contract so really, despite it coming from her order and her account, I suppose it isn't necessarily her money

"And like I just... I feel like I only keep making revisions because I'm getting payed per hour on this job you know? The money is great, and the initial design concept was so very interesting... but I've been working on it for... actually pretty much the entire time you've been gone Kat" said Vivian

Kat, Lily and Sylvie just smiled as Vivian complained, not really sure about how to comfort her. Callisto had some words of advice though. "Perhaps think of it as doing that old acquaintance a favour instead of a job. I know you're more than happy to go out of your way to help people when they need it."

That seemed to placate Vivian for a while, and so she changed to trying to pull Lily's research into what she was doing about her next step past high school, but it didn't really go anywhere.

It wasn't as though it was hard to get Lily to speak about it, just that there still wasn't much. The girl just didn't know what she wanted to do. A research position clearly, but it would take years to get there as far as she could find out, and limiting herself to a single topic was likely to end in boredom so she hadn't found something to commit to.

Sylvie mentioned that she was learning origami from Callisto. It was a nice distraction from the more serious topics, and when pressed, admitted to being able to do most of the simpler designs. Apparently Callisto was now trying to teach her how to do more complicated figures with multiple different pieces of paper.

They continued chatting into the evening, making it so that their late lunch sufficed for both that and dinner in one. When it started getting dark out, Lily decided she really had to return lest she get in trouble for being out all day rather than trying to find a job or apply for university.

Kat grimaced at the attitude but didn't really know what else to do about it. Sylvie popped off to have a shower, and Kat helped Callisto and Vivian pack up the food and store it. Callisto had... well... fun might not be the right word for the serious woman, but she took her time making sure to use the leftovers to make funny shapes in the food rather than rushing everything into the fridge.

Once Kat had a shower and headed back to her bedroom, she found Sylvie sitting down on her bed reading a book entitled 'Children's Necronomicon'. It was a dark black book with a strange bumpy texture and looked like it was made out of dried flesh. Which, Kat supposed was the point. Except it was contrasted with the bright pink lettering of the title and a flower stamped into each corner.

Sylvie put the book to the side when Kat came in and said. "Can I sleep with you tonight? Since you're only here a day?"

Kat sat down next to Sylvie and pulled her into her arms "Are you sure? You haven't needed to sleep with me for a long time."

Sylvie shook her head "It isn't about that anymore. It's... it's nice to be around you and I can't think of a better way to sleep than falling asleep hugging you"

Kat kissed the little girl on the forehead and Sylvie giggled in response "Well if that's what you want I'll be glad to have you"

The two started to snuggle into Kat's embrace. Once they were tucked in under the covers, nice and snug, with Kat's tail around Sylvie as well, and Sylvie's face buried into Kat's neck, Sylvie spoke. "So... can you use your dream powers on me?"

"Hmmm" murmured Kat. \*That's a good question. I mean, once she goes to sleep maybe but... is that safe for her? Do I want to risk that? I don't think I do... I'd probably want to test it where there is magic first, and then maybe ask Callisto if she wanted to be a test subject?\*

\*Not that I'd want her to get hurt either but... I feel like she is... less potentially malleable than Sylvie in the mental department. Clearly my dream walking must let me do something with people's minds otherwise I wouldn't have been able to help Major and Minor... and I'm not sure it's worth the risk.\*

\*Do I have a good excuse though? Maybe...? How about... Ooh I know.\* "Not this time Sylvie. We still don't know how long it all takes and I might get called to that job on a moment's notice. I need to be ready to leave sadly. You wouldn't want me getting in trouble right?" asked Kat

Kat felt it as Sylvie puffed up her cheeks while still burying her face. "If you say so Kat. I know that you're worried about me, but I'm sure I'll be fine. If you want to wait though, that's ok too. It gives me more chances to hug you like this"

Kat smiled and stroked Sylvie's soft hair. \*Was I just played? Was this actually an elaborate ruse to make it so that I'd let her share my bed more often? No... Sylvie wouldn't do that? Kat thought about it for the extra three seconds required to realise. Yes, yes actually she would. And I'd say that Sylvie is more than smart enough to figure it all out and set this up.\*

\*This way either she gets to have me join her dream, a win, or she gets to hug me as she falls asleep. Also win. Seems the munchkin knows what she is doing.\* Kat let herself close her eyes and start to drift off.

She was trying to go to sleep, but once again she ended up in her pond. As the minute's past, Kat could almost see the indistinct ripple that was Sylvie breathing next to her. The pond seemed to move around that area next to Kat, as if it was already occupied despite seeming empty. It also seemed to reach out, almost grasping at the areas where Kat herself resided. In the dream state, she didn't question if this was strange, or perfectly routine.

Instead, she was happy to relax with the knowledge that Sylvie was with her, and it was a good day. A nice relaxing time with everyone before she headed out to the next harrowing adventure. Hopefully it would be more relaxing than her last frantic trip.

## **Chapter 262: What is this guy wearing?**

In the early morning Kat felt the currents that dictated her slumbering state bring her consciousness back together. This placed her in a strange half state of awareness, with a greater capability for thought and decision making than being lost in the waves, but not completely awake either.

Kat decided to see how long she could stay in this strange state. That turned out to be a waste of time, or at least, a mistaken assumption. Plenty of time passed, and Kat could feel it wash over her, something that could be ignored as she chose, and choose she did. *NOVELnext.com*

Even when she saw ripples nearby signalling Sylvie's awakening Kat stayed in her floating dream state. She considered getting up properly with Sylvie, but Sylvie simply decided that breakfast was less important than staying cuddle against Kat. So her drifting thoughts continued...

Until Vivian opened the door. Kat wasn't sure how she knew either of those things, just a strange certainty that she was in no danger and that Vivian had entered her abode. This was followed up by said person jumping in bed with them.

When Vivian started to speak, in hushed mumbled tones, Kat couldn't hear what was being said but she could feel the concepts being spoken. It was a strange thing. Vivian 'asked' "If the entity widely known as Kat should be left to her slumber" which to Kat's mostly coherent mind seemed like a rather long-winded way of asking.

So Kat opened her eyes and grabbed Vivian and pulled her in close as well. "I can't stay long" whispered Vivian as she was brought into the hug "I managed to take yesterday off because I worked over the weekend, but I have to get back to work today. I'm sorry I won't be around to see you leave"

"Don't worry I'll be fine. I have the other two, or maybe other three to worry about me" said Kat

Vivian smiled and gave Kat and Sylvie a quick kiss on the forehead before wiggling out of Kat's arms and bolting down the stairs. Kat and Sylvie stared after her confused. "Why did she leave so fast" asked Sylvie

"I have no idea" said Kat

"Because she's already thirty minutes late" said Callisto from the doorway. Kat and Sylvie jumped slightly, not noticing when Callisto had even arrived, distracted as they were by Vivian's antics.

"That makes sense. I hope she gets to work on time" said Sylvie, recovering faster from the shock than Kat did.

Kat just nodded along in agreement as Callisto managed to gently coax them both out of bed "Come on we can have some leftover fruit before it goes bad" said Callisto.

Kat followed her downstairs, carrying Sylvie with her because the little girl had grabbed onto her waist and clearly wasn't planning to let her go just yet. As Callisto brought out leftovers Kat found herself... feeling... full wasn't the correct descriptor but it was close. Her energy levels were full, felt serene, and she had a sense of... something more like when you know your equipment is all in peak condition.

She felt no desire to eat, or revulsion, just a feeling that it would be pointless. When she explained as such to Callisto, she just pulled a notebook out from somewhere. \*Seriously where? I can see the pockets on that dress and the notebook did not come from any of them.\* And got Kat to repeat her description before writing it all done.

It was about halfway through the meal when Kat got the message.

User Kat is being summoned. You will be summoned within ten seconds.

Kat nodded, about to relax, when she remembered she didn't have her weapons on her. Quickly sprinting back towards the stairs, Kat leapt straight up them without stopping, then spinning on the carpet and heading straight to her room, thankful the door was left open. She just barely made it in time to through open the closet and place a hand on her fans before the light engulfed her.

Entering the vortex of flames, Kat let herself calm down. The mad dash for her fans was rather tense. \*Even if I don't know how to use them, it's still better than nothing. I don't want to take the risk that I need them and don't have them. It was probably silly to take them out of my sash anyway.\*

As Kat was floating in the flames, she felt something new. These flames were different somehow. Kat didn't have long to investigate before she was thrown out of the vortex. Planting her feet to either side, Kat flared her wings to stop her momentum and allowed herself to stand tall as she examined where she had ended up.

The first thing to catch her eyes, was the barrier directly in front of her face. While other summonings she had partaken in may have had barriers, they were nothing like what lay before her. It was an

intricate thing of see-through gold. It had strange things that didn't look like the runes she had come to know floating in the surface.

And the whole thing thrummed with power. Kat could feel it pressing into her skin even as she stood in the centre of it. The barrier giving of an utter certainty that it was unbreakable, which seemed to almost declare war at Kat, daring her to try.

Kat pushed that feeling down. Just looking straight at the barrier was causing her energy to roil within her. It was a strange feeling she wasn't used to. It was as if it was trying to break free of her skin, but flaring her aura slightly around herself seemed to cut off the strange influence of the barrier.

When she did so, the barrier seemed to shiver and weaken significantly. \*What? I didn't even touch it with my aura? Why does it seem so weak now?\* The pressure on Kat had almost vanished, and the gold colouring lost its lustre.

Looking past that, Kat saw grey carved stone, that might have once held spectacular murals. Now it was chipped and cracked with vines growing over it. There were even places where light leaked in slightly scattered around the roof of the room, letting in the slightest shafts of light.

Following one of the lights down, Kat found more moss, clearly clumping together to bask in what little light it could manage. The floor was made of the same cracked stone and seemed only to be in slightly better condition when compared to the roof. Before Kat could really investigate it properly though, Kat found her eyes drawn to a small figure.

In front of her, kneeling was a young man... or a boy? It was hard for Kat to tell. The figure was clearly short even without the fact they were crouching. Kat was sure that they wouldn't even come up to her chin, maybe just barely the shoulders, and with them crouching down, it didn't help this image.

The counter to this however, was that the person was a series of harsh lines. Their black hair fell around their face looking like it was cut with sword rather than any care. This might have even been the case, as on his hip was a sheath with a sword handle sticking out. Kat was unable to say what kind of sword it actually was,

To her very untrained eyes it was merely a simple sword that was rather short, but when you accounted for the young man's height, it seemed to fit him rather well. The sheath itself was just plain leather, with no markings to speak of, and the sword handle simple in the same way. Wrapped leather handle with a clean steel orb marking the end.

His clothing however, was anything but simple. It was an overly complex set of layers that Kat seemed to instinctively dislike. He had a gi that sat over the entire ensemble marked with a very artful rendition of a smoking mountain that had been cleaved in half.

Under that was a leather chest piece that seemed plain and functional, but under that was another set of intricate designs on a shirt Kat couldn't see properly to evaluate. The pants at least were simple, but rather ugly.

They clearly once had intricate designs like most of the other outfit, but they now had leather pieces sewn over them, blocking them from view, but clearly without proper forethought as the plates didn't even end up symmetrical from one leg to the other.

And then, as if to ruin the already bizarre image, the boy had no shoes. None whatsoever. It made Kat think it more likely that the care and attention afforded to the gi was more that it had only recently been stolen, considering how the rest of the outfit clashed.

Then, when the boy spoke, Kat felt even further confusion. He spoke with a deep baritone, much lower than anything a boy that size could produce and he said "I want you to help avenge the honour of my clan"

### **Chapter 263: Ancient Five Layer Demon Sealing Array**

"I want you to help avenge the honour of my clan." That's what the boy said while keeping his gaze planted firmly at the floor. \*What? I... I don't think that's the sort of thing you should be trying to do kid.\*

"I'm going to need more than that" said Kat

The boy started laughing. \*Because that's what he is, a child.\* He was careful to not allow his eyes rise at all, but he let out a full throat chuckle. "Seems you are mistaken about something. I can't hear anything you say through the barrier. This way I cannot be misled by your lies" said the boy

\*Then how did he even know I said anything? If he isn't watching me, he can't see my mouth moving, and if he can't hear me talking the obviously, he can't be responding to that.\*

"Oh? Did you already learn your lesson?" said the boy.

\*No I did not in fact learn anything. I'm trying to figure out what is going on here. Is it possible that he can hear that I'm saying something but not what I'm actually saying?\* Kat wouldn't learn it for a long time later, but this assumption was correct. The array surrounding her had been damaged by the years. It was built to try and prevent demons using power conveyed through the voice to influence their summoners. This one no longer allows words to come out.

"Well? Do you accept? You cannot leave this place without agreeing and I will broke no argument" said the boy.

\*Does... does he know what he's saying? You know what. Maybe it just isn't worth it. I can't argue with him for some reason, and I don't really want to agree to something so petty as revenge, especially not the kind of revenge you summon a demon for.\*

\*Hey System can I refuse this contract?\*

User Kat is able to refuse this Summoning, however User Kat will be punished for failing to pay off User Kat's debt.

Kat pursed her lips at this and started to flick her tail in irritation. \*Well, that isn't good. Do I have no choice? Kat eyed the barrier that was trapping her. I could maybe try and break this down... but that still doesn't really help other than allowing me to talk to him. I still need to agree to the contract because of my debt.\*

Kat bit her lips. \*Contract, back when I was summoned by that professional and the chains were strange you mentioned that I could fight the specifics of a contract can I do it here?\*

User Kat is capable of fighting the terms of the Contract.

\*Right but how?\*

User Kat may use multiple techniques.

\*Right but can you be a bit more specific please System? This is rather important.\*

D.E.M.O.N.S is Authorized to inform User Kat that User Kat may use Willpower, or Alternative Wording when accepting.

\*Ah yes, and that is so specific and helpful Kat felt like rolling her eyes, but settled for flicking out her tail again. Wait, surely the alternative wording contingent on the other party actually being able to hear what I'm saying right?\*

User Kat is correct.

\*Great. So the fact that I'm prevented from talking to him means I'm just reliant on willpower?\* Kat sighed and looked at the strange barrier again. \*Maybe I'll try and take it down after all.\*

Kat reached out towards the barrier. When her hand came in contact with it her aura seemed to buckle slightly before it settled down shortly after. The barrier felt warm under Kat's hand, not majorly so, and she imagined that even to a human it wouldn't be an uncomfortable warmth.

Kat decided to try and just use her strength first. Pushing forward but keeping herself from being empowered Kat pressed her hand into the barrier. It creaked loudly under her efforts and sparks started to fly off of the barrier around her hand where it made contact. The boy seemed to flinch, likely hearing the sound as well but he didn't move.

Kat pressed on, pushing as hard as she could without empowering herself but hit a wall, the barrier stretched slightly under her hand and was sending off showers of sparks as she pressed against it.

Clicking her tongue softly Kat started to circulate her demonic energy concentrating it on her hand. Instantly, the power in her arm increased explosively, and the barrier bent and whined under her efforts. The barrier was not significantly distorted and the sparks threatened to block her vision.

Still Kat pressed onwards, circulating energy around her ears to protect them, Kat also empowered her feet. \*If one arm isn't enough. Let's see how this goes.\* Kat pushed herself forward. Locking her arm at its full length, Kat pressed on, now using her legs as leverage against the failing barrier.

As soon as she put her full weight behind it, the barrier shattered, forcing Kat to take a step forward. The boy flinched when he heard it break, and started to look up... only for another barrier to spring to life in front of Kat. This one slightly larger and the same fancy gold as before.

\*Well that's just great. Break one down, summon another.\* Kat turned her gaze to the floor. There she saw a large set of circles underneath her feet. They were packed together decently tightly, four in total. One lined up with where the first barrier was, and the final ended just slightly before the boy, with the second one where the current barrier was exited.

\*Hmm... well that wasn't so hard, I can just break a few more of these. If it's only four I can handle that.\* Kat empowered herself again, pushing against the barrier. The sound was worse this time, and sparks

completely covered her body. They lightly bounced off without doing damage but it wasn't pleasant feeling.

Kat pushed with her full weight. The barrier creaked, and Kat grit her teeth and kept pushing against the golden wall that contained her. After a few seconds of this though, Kat stopped, as she clearly wasn't making any progress.

\*Hmm... all at once then?\* Kat lined her shoulder up and folded her wings so they wouldn't absorb any of the impact, making sure to hold them out of the way. Kat pushed as much energy as she could into her legs and bit into her shoulder, just in case, before kicking off the ground.

Kat impacted the barrier with a boom. Kat watched as the resulting explosion threw back the boy's clothes, leaving them to whip in the wind. Kat took a step forward and then, of course, the third barrier came up.

\*Hmm... should I just use some fire maybe? Seems my physical strength isn't quite enough.\* Kat summoned a small bead of fire onto her finger and pressed it into the barrier. As soon as her finger came into contact with the golden wall, Kat felt a great pain shoot through her body.

Kat wrenched her hand back in a panic as pain spasmed through her body. She tried to remain standing but she felt herself wobble and fall to one knee. When the boy heard this, he let out another chuckle. "Foolish demon. It seems you thought you could destroy the ancient five-layer demon sealing array my sect's forefathers constructed. Your only hope of escape is to accept my proposal" said the boy in an arrogant manner.

Kat grit her teeth and tried to calm herself down, focusing on the pain actually seemed to help, as it worked its way through her system faster. Kat calmed her breathing and let it run its course. In, and out, in and out, Kat kept her breath steady for a full minute before she had the confidence to stand once again.

\*Seems this isn't quite so simple after all.\* Kat moved her gaze to her fans at her hips. But then again. \*Pretty sure someone somewhere quoted the saying. 'Any problem can be solved by hitting it hard enough. If you ever find this not to be the case... well you just didn't hit it hard enough or with the right weapon.\*

Kat smiled and pushed her energy into her fans. They seemed to eagerly drink in the energy she was supplying them. Once Kat got the sense that they were full, there was a slight purple glow around the fans, and she was down to half energy.

Smiling Kat swung the fans, slicing into the barrier in question before her, it popped like a bubble. There was no pain, no resistance, and only a few measly sparks. Kat grinned and went for the fourth barrier that appeared as a quick follow up.

It also stood no chance, her fans cutting through the golden wall like butter. Kat smiled. \*Well that wasn't so bad. Seems like this five-layer sealing array ain't all that.\* Kat only had a moment to realise what she'd just repeated in her thoughts before golden chains through themselves up from the cracks in the floor.

They wrapped themselves around Kat's entire body and over her mouth before pulling her down into a kneeling position. Her arms and legs were chained together behind her back while her wings were bound to her chest. \*Well... oops\*

### **Chapter 264: Gathering Information**

"Ha, see the array is no match for a beast like you" said the boy, no the child. Kat could hear him shivering, and watched what she could around the chains. The boy was practically shaking in his boots, and while he spoke clearly there was fear in it.

\*Ok I'll admit I got a bit cocky here.\* Kat flexed her arms and the chains groaned in protest. She tried to move her fans around but found her wrists to be well-bound. \*Well... looks like I'm not the only one that made a mistake. Clearly the kid is actually scared of me but...\*

\*That begs the question of how did he summon me then? He doesn't seem to know what I am other than a demon, even though I imagine I'm fairly recognisable with my wings and tail. He clearly wasn't prepared for me to bust down the other four layers.\*

\*And he is still trying to put on a brave front for some reason, despite shaking like a leaf on a blustery day. I mean, does this kid even know what he's doing? Does he understand the contract?\*

Kat flicked her tail in annoyance at the thought that she was about to be forced into a contract because of her debt where the other party had no idea what they were doing. Then she paused, and flicked her tail once again, this time just as a test. Her tail responded, completing its slight flick.

\*My tail is free.\* Kat grinned under the chain around her mouth. \*That's big. That means these chains aren't perfect, they are just doing their best. I might even be able to slip out of the one covering my mouth.\*

\*Actually, does that prevent me from accepting the contract? \*

No. Only a clear indication of consent from both parties is required.

\*I suppose that makes sense. It would really suck for someone who was mute if that was the only way to confirm things. I suppose there was also the time I signed the contract with Vivian and that triggered it as well.\*

\*Well, now the question is, what should I do? I have a free tail, and likely a chance to free my mouth. The kid is scared, but... I don't really have a good sense of how strong he is. I get the feeling that summoning a demon is supposed to be expensive...\*

\*And other than the party from Green's world, everyone else who summoned me is really strong or had someone strong with them. Even right back at the very start, there was a master and apprentice.\*

\*So, what are the chances this guy is actually strong? This place is clearly falling apart, but it still works. So I have to wonder if he just activated the formation here, or if he was strong enough to get materials to summon me.\*

\*It seems like a bit of a risk but... worse comes to worst I suppose I have my tail. The real issue is that if I get 'killed' and sent back I imagine whatever punishment they've got lined up for me will come into effect.\*

Kat sighed, letting a long breath flow around the chain covering her mouth. Deciding that freeing herself at least a bit was prudent, Kat leaned forward into the chain, waiting for it to spark slightly, and then yanked her face backwards.

As planned the chain around her dropped to the ground clattering. The boy froze at this, going as still as a human could possibly get. Of course, Kat could still see the small rise and fall of his body as he breathed, and even the subtle twitches of his hand that likely wanted to grab onto his sword.

"Foul demon, you cannot escape from the chains. Each is more powerful than the last" said the boy with the slightest waver in his voice. \*Credit where it is due, he's good at pretending everything is fine. Or at least, voice wise he is.\*

Kat looked down at the chain on the ground, before giving a slight tug on the chains. They seemed no stronger than before, but considering her limited motion, perhaps that wasn't surprising.

\*Now, what do I want to say? Try and scare him more? Convince him that this won't hold me for long and negotiate a better contract, one not centred around revenge? Or perhaps I should try and convince him I mean him no harm...\*

\*Hmm, I wonder if he knows demons can't lie. It's one of those things where nobody would believe it if I just said it but... if they already know, then I might be fine? How universal is it though?\*

\*Once again, people seem to know about this, but I'm in some forgotten temple. I just can't shake the feeling that he's some random kid who activated the circle and has no idea what the hell is going on, only a few random stories and the barest hints of information.\*

Kat sighed again. \*I just can't know. I have too little information. So... maybe powerful slightly annoyed demon? A kind one though?\*"Seems your little chains are easily slipped. Why it was simple to remove the one blocking me speech, something you seem so afraid of" said Kat

"S-shut up. I will not hear your lies" stammered the boy. \*Just great. So he doesn't know what he's done, and he doesn't know I can't lie. Perfect. Maybe try and play this up somehow?\*

"Why would I lie to a child? Surely the truth is that much more... invigorating" said Kat diverting the slightest amount of energy to her voice box, making the words reverberated slightly more. \*What the hell am I saying?! This feels so overblown... maybe I'm laying it on a bit thick.\*

"You- You're just trying to trick me. I- I made you the deal. You will help me get revenge or you'll never be free" said the boy. \*Oh he has so little idea how this works. Why couldn't it be someone even slightly competent.\*

\*Maybe... maybe play to how scared he is. Pretend revenge is beneath me? Maybe try and spread the idea that I could do it easily but isn't worth my time.\* "Your deal?" said Kat measuring her demonic energy output "You summoned me for petty revenge and you think I'd agree?"

"Shut up! It's important. I need to get revenge for what they did to my family!" said the kid.

Kat pursed her lips. \*I wonder if this is more serious than I thought... Press for information?\*"What, your parents weren't willing to keep you from making the mistake of summoning me?" said Kat

"Mistake? My parents are weak. They don't understand why I need to do this! They tried to stop me!" shouted the kid, working himself up.

Kat groaned internally. \*Yay I've got a small child after revenge but it actually turns out to more likely be babysitting duty because his parents couldn't stop him from doing something stupid.\*

"Weak? It seems they know what is most important already, and I doubt revenge ranks highly on that list" said Kat with a smirk the boy couldn't see, but could almost hear in her voice.

"No. I'll show them. I managed to break into this temple. I managed to summon you. I will manage to get my revenge as well and you can't stop me!" said the kid.

\*Oh God he's one of these kids.\* Kat thought back to her history of dealing with them in the past. \*Maybe giving him a good whack on the head will teach him some manners.\* As Kat thought that though, the kid pulled out his sword.

"If you won't help me, I'll just have to go myself" said the kid. \*Ah shit. Now what do I do.\* Kat started to speed up her thoughts considering what to do now that the kid was bringing out the sword.

\*Great. Just great, he decided to pull out the sword. I doubt it can do much damage to me, but the concern is that he can send me back. I'm not scared of the kid, but I am scared of what a bunch of demons think is an acceptable punishment for not coming through on your debt. Well, when in doubt, double down. Or at least, that's what Lily said was in a bunch of books she read. I don't think either of us actually know how to bluff properly.\*

"Ooh, don't want to negotiate with me so you brought out the sword. Ha, go on and try your best. I'm sure I'll be really happy to help you with your revenge after you start trying to ruin my clothes" said Kat.

The boy wavered when he heard this. He was standing up but was looking off to the side in order to remain looking away from Kat. The sword in his hand shook. His knuckles were white as he had the sword in a death grip.

"What do you want then?" growled the boy.

\*Well... that is the question. Can I convince him that revenge isn't a good idea?\*

### **Chapter 265: Chains Anyone?**

Kat glanced up to the sword raised to strike her down. \*No probably not while he's jumping between terrified anger and just terrified. I doubt I can make any meaningful change in such a short time...\*

\*But maybe that's all I need to do? Buy myself some time. What about... hmmm, so the contract is to help him with revenge... what if I instead agree to help him while he tries to take revenge for this incident. That means that once he stops trying to take revenge, the contract is complete right?\*

\*It gets me time, and it means that I don't have to do anything too bad, I just have to provide assistance. Maybe... help him when necessary while he tries to get revenge? I can maybe use some of my demonic leverage or whatever it's actually called to make sure that it's when I deem necessary instead of him? That should give me a lot of freedom to act while not tipping my hand too far.\*

\*I need to ask for something else though. Something that makes it look like that's what I'm trying to get instead of the reworded contract.\* Kat tried to properly take in the room as well as she could without moving her eyes. He wasn't looking at her, but Kat didn't want to take any chances.

\*Dammit, it's all ruins. There isn't anything here that gives me some clue as to what I could ask for. I also really don't want to ask for something suitably demonic just in case I'm forced to get it. Imagine if I asked for the souls of the innocent as payment and he actually tried to give them to me. That is not a thought I want to entertain.\*

\*Plus, the guy is clearly a scared kid. I don't want to ask for something he can't give me and then have the system force him to pay what I'm owed, or whatever the contract might do to him. I wish I could just ask for a rock or something but he NEEDS to believe that's what I really want.\*

\*Hey system do you have any good ideas?\*

D.E.M.O.N.S suggests requesting one Favour as additional compensation. A favour with no limit is particularly deadly.

Kat wanted to think of a better solution but the system's idea was a good well. \*Wait does it count as an idea if it's a program? Is the system a program or an AI? Does it have a soul? Wait, I'm getting distracted.\*

\*Hmm, system if I do ask for a favour, will that be a problem across dimensions?\*

No. When enforcing a Favour from a Contract, User Kat may request that Favour from across dimensional barriers.

\*Ok so a favour... some time in the future. Should I make it a while in the future? Or just ask for it?\* Kat tried to ponder how exactly she wanted to ask for the favour, but her options weren't great. She kept going back to just asking straight up and letting the boy impose his own restrictions on the favour. It would get him focused on the favour instead of her wording and it would probably be less restrictive than if Kat tried to present restrictions she thought he'd be happy with.

"A favour" said Kat letting the words reverberate for a second before continuing "I promise to help you when necessary while you try to get revenge for this slight against your family... all for one favour in the future"

Kat watched as the boy gulped, seemingly weighing the words she said. "I- I won't be tricked into an endless favour?" he said... but the words sounded hollow, almost implying that while he wouldn't be tricked into one, he might still choose to enter into it by choice.

\*Ok, how do I respond?\* Kat let the silence stretch, but only slightly, as she was abusing her increased thought speed to consider things. \*Do I just let things wait out? Let him keep talking to himself? He already sounds like he's half convinced to just say yes for some reason...\*

\*Or do I laugh? As if he told some cute joke? Maybe try and imply that the fact he even got this close to agreeing to it is already a mistake? Force him to impose what he thinks are intense restrictions? I mean really I don't care about the favour, I'm doing this to change the wording and to not go to demon debtors prison.\*

\*Let's go with a polite and soft laugh... \* Kat stopped on the thought. \*I don't really know how to do that though do I? Shit ok... let's just wait then.\*

And so Kat did, she let her cognition return to normal and had thirty seconds pass. The boy broke first, he didn't make it to thirty-five seconds. "Fine. But, I won't do anything that would directly damage my interests... and... I won't do anything that will destroy my reputation... and... no that's all"

\*I wonder what the other thing is.\* "In that case, I accept" said Kat and... nothing happened.

"Uh..." mumbled the boy

"You must accept as well" said Kat

"Oh um... I accept?" said the boy as a question.

\*Oh great. The great contract knows what reluctance is. Is that why people think they are supposed to use their full name and a bunch of other stuff? It proves that they are serious about it?\*

"Properly" said Kat letting an edge bleed into her voice that she didn't really feel.

The boy gulped at this, and Kat could see him chewing on the inside of his mouth. The sword in his hand wavering. It danced back and forth, almost like a snake, as if he was trying to find some target, some outlet for his indecision.

Eventually though the boy seemed to make a decision because he grit his teeth and put away the sword and said "I, am Mao Xiang, from the Mao clan and I accept this contract with the demon before me" voice still shaking. \*Wait why do I know Mao is the last name?\*

But it seemed to be enough as the chains that covered Kat were drastically overshadowed by the purple chains that burst out from her. Where as before they were only impressive in number, now there was something more to them.

As Kat pushed her will into the contract, she could feel a massive weight settle behind the chains, as if it wasn't her that was reinforcing this. Kat would later learn that this assumption was false, she was indeed the one powering the presence behind the chains but... that wasn't a concern for now.

No the major concern was that the boy was screaming his head off. In response to the rush of chains he freaked out and drew his sword... which did basically nothing. The chains seemed to take his act of aggression as a direct offense swarming in even greater numbers than before exploding from Kat, destroying the gold chains that bound her and tightening their grip on the boy.

Kat gulped as she watched the scene. \*Did I do this? Is this all because I bargained for a favour? Or is this something else? Is it because I'm rank 2... why?\*

Kat was trying to wrap her head around the sheer power she felt radiating of the chains.

If her rank one chains felt binding... these almost felt suffocating, as if they were willing to go out of their way to cause additional suffering if they felt they were being denied for whatever reason, and Kat felt a slight fear of them creep into her mind even though these chains were hers... she just didn't want to recognise the fact.

Finally... a few weak purple chains snaked their way across the ground and started to bind her. They just barely made it to Kat to complete the contract. They were weak, especially in the face of Kat's onslaught of chains. They bound her, but only in the weakest sense, and they seemed to have only managed this much because she wanted them to.

It furthered solidified the slight fear in her mind. She didn't expect that her willpower was so superior to the boy in front of her. He might be angry, and wielding a sword, but clearly his will was no match for Kat's, especially when amplified by her demonic nature and she wasn't sure what to do with that information.

\*How badly have I bent this contract? What am I even being held to anymore? The other contracts felt properly binding but this... this feels almost like a joke. Maybe I shouldn't have thrown so much of my will behind the chains... I... well I don't know if I was expecting resistance but I wasn't expecting this... that's for sure.\*

\*System... is this... is this normal?\*

D.E.M.O.N.S is cannot share the information of other Contracts...

Error...

Error...

Override DELTATHREESEVENEIGHT\*##@\*)912848591

Reconstituting Question...

Accepting new Parameters

Redefining restrictions

No Kat. This is not normal.

Kat gulped and dragged her gaze over to the boy, who had fallen to his knees and was now letting out shuddering gasps. \*Well... I'm not sure that makes this any better.\*

### **Chapter 266: Get Me Out of Here**

\*So... is he going to be ok?\*

Kat directed her thoughts towards D.E.M.O.N.S while watching the boy struggle on the floor as she stood up. Now Xiang just looked rather small and somewhat pathetic.

No permanent damage was done to Summoner Xiang, however upon seeing the Chains of Contract Summoner Xiang attempted to resist in a poor manner causing damage to Summoner Xiang.

Kat let out a long sigh as she watched the idiot on the floor. \*You know. I have to wonder if I might have taken this to a bit of an extreme... but then I remember that I'm a demon now and that other demons surely would have done worse.\*

Xiang managed to bring in one large gulp of air that seemed to stabilise him. Once he managed that, Xiang took out his sword and slammed it into the ground before using it to pull him to his feet. Once there, he stood up at his full height, which was still nothing compared to Kat without including her horns.

"Ha, now you're my servant for the duration of the contract. Let us head off immediately" said Xiang, tired, but somehow still sounding arrogant.

\*Does... does he not know this isn't how this works? What does he think just happened?\* Xiang didn't even wait for Kat to make a reply before he turned around and started to head out of the room. Now that he was walking away Kat could see a door at the end of the steps he had seemingly worked up.

Kat spent a second looking around, before heading after him. \*So... why is he so calm now? I mean, there isn't anything in my contract preventing me from just slapping him for being disrespectful right?\*

User Kat is correct.

\*Wait... I... I don't want to do this but... if I killed him would my contract be complete? He would no longer be looking for revenge but... surely that isn't how this works.\*

User Kat is mostly correct. User Kat could dispose of Summoner Xiang and have the Contract complete.

\*Surely this isn't normal either right? The Queen and that guy who does this for a living would have made me promise not to attack them or something if it was actually necessary right?\*

User Kat is correct. Some Summoning Circles force that into the Contract. Young demons are sent to Dimensions where such steps have been taken already. This Dimension should have the same protection however the Summoning Circle used for User Kat did not.

\*Um... is that because it's old? Actually that is two questions in a way. Is it because the circle was made before they figured it out or is it because over time that part of the circle was destroyed?\*

It is likely to be one of the aforementioned suggestions of User Kat, however it is unclear at this time what the cause is.

\*Welp... that's great I suppose?\* Kat thought as she made it down to the bottom of the stairs. She found herself in a doorway heading towards a tunnel. Xiang had already headed inside passed the broken doors she could see had fallen inward.

Kat kicked one as she passed it, and the door flashed gold for a moment before dimming. \*Strange... I guess they enchanted the doors to be stronger or something? But they didn't remember to enchant the hinges.\* Kat let out a small chuckle at that thought. She found it amusing that perhaps the only reason that Xiang had managed to get in was because they only fortified their doors and not anything else.

"What are you laughing about" Xiang growled as if Kat had somehow personally offended him. \*Which... actually might not be impossible. How do I want to answer him? Do I want to continue pretending I'm older and more powerful than I seem? Should I let the facade crack a bit?\*

\*I have no idea what I'm doing really, and I doubt I can keep up the act long. Maybe I should try to answer a bit more casually and then work my way down. If Xiang asks, I can answer that I'm just acting more casual, or something... it doesn't really matter if he believes me because it's too late to change the contract... right?\*

Contracts can be changed if all parties involved agree to the change.

\*Welp at least he needs to get me to agree. Anyway, I should really answer.\* "I'm just laughing at the poor enchanting done on the doors."

"Poor" shouted Xiang "Poor! You call one of the greatest works of our clan poor!? That seal would last one hundred thousand years if necessary. It opened for me because of my bloodline and the fact I passed the temples test! And Enchanting? You would call it by the same name as those hacks? No it is true Array Formations!"

"Right..." said Kat thinking about the fact that the doors clearly fell forward... from her perspective... back towards where Xiang must have come from "Even accepting that, clearly the hinges were not given the same consideration"

Xiang flinched at this but didn't stop moving, instead he starting to speak "Well... what about this hallway?"

"What about it?" asked Kat confused

"You- you can't feel the spiritual echoes? The power in the walls?" asked Xiang shocked.

Kat looked at the wall, and saw a plain stone wall slowly falling apart. It was a bit better off than the antechamber but not by a particularly large amount. Um no? Kat flicked her tail across the wall casually and scored a deep mark in the stone. ... \*Something tells me that isn't what was supposed to happen.\*

"No, I don't. I can't tell what you are speaking about. These seems like normal walls to me"

"Ha" said Xiang, who was happier now "Seems you aren't that powerful after all if you can't feel the greatness of these halls!"

"Are you sure?" said Kat with a sigh, as she tried to resist punching the wall just to prove she could damage it and see his reaction.

??Of course I'm sure. Clearly a lowly creature like a demon has no eye for magnificence" said Xiang.

\*Urgh. Should I feel more insulted that he talked down my entire race? Is this because I grew up human... \* Kat glanced at the crumbling rock. \*Maybe it's because it's a weak insult anyway.\* "Hold up one moment then" said Kat

Xiang paused and turned back, a smarmy grin on his face. \*Oh so that's how you want to do it then.\* "Watch" said Kat.

Raising her pointer finger Kat lightly placed it on the wall. Xiang scoffed as if this was already a joke. Kat just smiled and pushed her finger into the wall, the stone compressing under it as if it was sponge.

Xiang paled. "W-well, clearly the aura has faded over time of course... and I mean... the temples secret was summoning a demon such as yourself so... I mean... of course, you can bypass the defences otherwise why were you summoned?"

Kat thought about that for a second, and an idea came to her. \*System... was I summoned because there was nobody stronger wanted to come?\*

User Kat is incorrect. User Kat was summoned because 70% of the offering price was destroyed over the years rendering the items worthless.

\*Ah... that makes so much more sense.\*

So, Kat walked through the tunnel following after Xiang. It was around an hour later that she found herself in a slightly larger room looking even more destitute than the room she was summoned in. In the corner was a stone golem of some sorts with a number of gashes across its chest... though the stone was already crumbling in odd places, and looked to have once been much larger.

"See, that is the guardian of the temple. I defeated it as part of my trial to summon you" said Xiang proudly stepping over the broken remains.

Kat felt like slamming her head into a wall. \*No no you really didn't. This thing is so obviously broken beyond repair... and it was like that before you arrived Xiang... He's an idiot isn't he... why did I agree to this? Oh, right Demon Debt.\*

Xiang led Kat through the halls. She passed through a number of rooms with 'guardians' in them along the way. Though in reality Kat doubted the claim. There were a few other golems, a spider the size of a dog that looked mummified already, the corpses of a rat pack, and a nest of dead birds.

\*This kid robbed a tomb didn't he... but he keeps claiming it belongs to his clan right? So why does he not see how broken down this place is.\* As Kat stepped out into the sunlight, Kat looked back at where she had come in.

It was a cave entrance, with something carved above the entrance. Squinting Kat managed to make out the words. 'Chuu Clan low to medium level demon summoning facility and remote storage'

"Hey Xiang... what does that say above the entrance" asked Kat

Xiang turned and scoffed before saying "That is the ancient text. Nobody alive can read that anymore"

### **Chapter 267: Leafing the Temple**

Kat groaned. \*Of course. Of course, the compound doesn't even belong to his clan. It's so old that his ancestors probably just set up here and stole a bunch of stuff, and now this 'ancient secret' turns out to be some storage facility of somebody else's.\*

"Come!" said Xiang "We must be off quickly. We should make what progress we can before the fall of night"

Kat looked up at the nearly setting sun. "Would it not be better to set camp here considering it is almost nightfall?" asked Kat

Xiang shook his head and chuckled as if Kat was an idiot "Of course not. Now that I am on the quest for revenge, I shall not waste a single moment. I will find the main compound of the Shattered Flame Sect and show them what happens when you mess with the Mao clan.

"Besides, what is wrong with a night under the stars. Such a thing is normal on a quest! I shall not shy away from it! We shall charge forth and make camp later" said Xiang.

Kat looked over Xiang, who bore no indication of supplies or a tent. She even scanned his fingers for storage rings but the only thing of note was a small pouch attached to his sword's sheath that was likely his wallet.

Kat listened as Xiang turned and strode off into the forest. She could hear the slight clinking of coins and suggested her guess was correct. \*But if that is the case... then where is his supplies? Surely, he isn't quite that stupid. Kat shrugged and followed him down the path.\*

Well, 'path' was a generous term. To Kat's eyes it looked like someone had taken a machete to the foliage and bashed it out of the way. This led Kat's eyes to drift to the sword hanging on Xiang's hip and she started to get an idea of how the path was made.

Looking closely at the destroyed foliage Kat noticed that it was in fact rather new. She didn't comment on it though. The real question that arose from that knowledge was how he found the 'temple' in the first place. If he was the one that made this path than that means he had no idea where he was going... \*Is he just lucky then?\*

Kat followed behind Xiang for another two hours before the sun had well and truly set and he called for a stop. "Stop here demon. I shall rest while you watch over the camp"

Without even waiting for her answer Xiang pulled out a necklace Kat hadn't noticed. On the end was a simple iron ring. It flashed for a split second before a sleeping roll was pulled from it and pushed over to the side by Xiang. A second flash signalled a second item. This one was a bag filled with crackers.

Xiang bit into them and glanced over at Kat before returning to his crackers. \*Is this guy just going to eat in front of me?\*

Kat checked her energy reserves and found them full, then considered the thought of eating and found that she didn't have any desire to do that either.

\*Ok well maybe I'm fine but what's this assumption that I'm going to guard the camp.\* "Why do you believe I will just guard your camp for the night?" asked Kat

Xiang paused halfway into a bite, looked at Kat, and then continued to chew on the cracker. He took his time finishing off the mouthful, chewing, what was likely an excessive number of times before looking up at Kat and saying. "Is that not your job as my demonic servant?"

"No, no it really isn't. I haven't suddenly become a slave now that we have a contract. I have to adhere to the terms yes, but there was nothing in them about waiting on you" said Kat

Xiang frowned "It did say you would help me get my revenge though" Xiang mused.

\*Don't correct him of that little error just yet.\* "That still doesn't mean I'm your servant. Guarding for the night doesn't further your plans for revenge in any way" said Kat

"It is your duty as the contracted demon to protect me though is it not?" said Xiang with narrowed eyes.

\*Is it system?\*

Not unless explicitly stated by the Contract.

\*Good to have that confirmation.\* "It is not Xiang. There was nothing in the contract that requires me to protect you either" said Kat

Xiang's eyes widened at this and his frown grew significantly. It seemed to have dawned on him that he'd been tricked, or at the very least, he did not have the power in this relationship he thought he did.

It was unclear to Kat exactly what the boy believed he was entitled to, but he clearly was under a few misconceptions.

"Well, in that case as the one that requires less sleep you will stand guard" said Xiang

Kat smirked. \*That at least is true. I could go a day without sleeping when I was rank one if I had to... so I can certainly do it at rank two... but should I admit to that? I could force him to take a shift but... that would probably slow us down in a big way...\*

\*Wait isn't that what I want though? I don't want him getting revenge, so making this take a few extra days is fine.\* "I can guard you for a number of hours but I will be sleeping for at least some of the night" said Kat careful not to trip up in trying to lie about needing to sleep.

Xiang frowned further as he considered this. He tapped his sword methodically as the gears in his head turned mulling over the situation and likely trying to find some other option. In the end, nothing must have been forthcoming as he said. "Alright then. You will wake me when you wish to sleep and I will watch over you" said Xiang, with a slightly pained expression.

Kat nodded and the boy shoved another cracker into his mouth. Looking at the biscuits closer though, Kat wondered if they might instead be 'hard tack' she'd never really seen hard tack, and didn't know what it was, so she was unsure if this counted. It did look hard and seemed to crack and shatter more so than allow itself to be bitten properly.

Eventually though, Xiang finished his meal and crawled over to the sleeping bag he had before slipping inside and closing his eyes. Kat watched him for a moment longer before looking around the area they'd chosen to stop.

It wasn't much. It was just a spot that had slightly less foliage than the rest of the path. It couldn't even be called a clearing, just a bare patch of dirt barely long enough for the one sleeping roll. Changing tactics, Kat then looked up above. The tree's seemed to be some kind of Sequoia tree, or at least, if it was a different tree, it looked close enough for it not to matter.

They resembled Giant Sequoias' in all but height and girth. The bark was the familiar reddish colour with minimal branches until you were closer to the top. They swayed very slightly in the breeze, but the wind wasn't particularly fierce.

Kat glanced over at the sleeping boy and decided that running off, while possible, was still a bad idea. That and he clearly wasn't asleep yet as Kat could hear that his heart was beating quickly still, an indication of his unease.

Kat shrugged before glancing between a few branches. Spotting two decent sized ones at around halfway up the tree and close together Kat let out her wings and flew up to them, before landing and fitting herself comfortable between the branches.

The bark was a little strange on her wings, but the skin across them was strong enough to cause her no discomfort even when she leaned into them. Looking out at the forest below, Kat managed to see... basically nothing. It was too densely packed to see past more than a handful of trees. \*Guess I need to keep my ears out rather than my eyes... I wonder if I should just do my meditation sleep thing... wait no first.\*

Kat summoned the system to her and started to think about the message she wanted to send everyone. \*Should I include Minor? No best not. She's likely recovering and trying to figure things out. She might drop everything to try and speak with me when she should really be taking time to work out her own situation with Major.\*

And so, as the moon started its journey across the sky, Kat composed her first message to her accomplices, keeping things mostly generic, just giving the broad strokes and explaining her issues with the mission she was seemingly on as well as the attitude of Xiang. She kept her ears out as well of course but, nothing of note appeared even long after the message had been sent off.

### **Chapter 268: Fast Pace Letter Transmission**

It was two hours later that Kat finally got a reply from both Lily and Vivian. They were mostly similar, but Vivian's included mention that Sylvie would be sad she was asleep and missed the message. Apparently, she'd fallen asleep rather early for once.

The messages were just basic well wishes as well as a request for some clarification on a few details. As Kat was composing her reply, Kat got a second message from Lily explaining that she'd waited for twenty minutes and now had to assume that Kat wasn't available any more.

This of course confused Kat greatly. She stared at the message and curled her tail into a question mark while tilting her head. \*I... I don't understand? I waited like two hours for a reply and while I don't begrudge Lily not wanting to just wait around for me. Hey system, is there a daily on these messages?\*

User Kat is correct. Messages to accomplices will have a delay unless both parties are within the same dimension.

\*But why would it be like that? I'm pretty sure that I don't lose much time when I transfer over, only a few seconds or a minute at most.\*

The full details require a higher Rank to access but User Kat can be given a basic descriptor. Essentially, D.E.M.O.N.S utilises a lower powered function to transport messages across dimensional barriers. It requires so little power to be almost negligible but has a time delay.

\*Higher Rank demons have the option to pay for fast tracked delivery, but User Kat does not have the required credentials.

\*Huh... but... why can you send me quickly across dimensions then?\*

User Kat is requesting Highly Restricted information. Does User Kat wish to use one of User Kat's special Favour Tokens.

\*No... though thanks for reminding me about those... with everything that happens they kind of slipped my mind... which is really annoying when I know I have perfect recall?? Is it still perfect if you can gloss over things though?\*

Kat shook her head, and recentred her thoughts on the message delays. \*I guess I'll have to treat them more like particularly fast letters rather than texting or a phone call.\* Kat quickly composed a short explanation for the others and mentioned the delay before sitting back and relaxing.

Kat was tempted to meditate while she waited up in the tree but decided against it. No sense messing up in the first day, and in addition to that, Kat still wasn't sure how safe and reliable the meditation was in regards to catching things sneaking up on her. She knew it worked really well against other people, but it seemed more like she was feeling their mental imprint.

Kat was working on the assumption that animals would have a smaller presence because they had less going on in their mind. Maybe with training or with additional ranks this could be solved but for now Kat didn't want to risk it.

And so she sat, quietly, on watch for another six hours, providing Xiang a full eight hours of sleep. Despite this, when Kat jumped down and poked him in the cheek, he was unresponsive. Kat flicked his head a few more times before starting to contemplate. \*Ok, so... how do I want to wake him? Extreme cold? Punching him? Slapping him? Slapping him sounds fun... but that might be construed as an attack...\*

\*Hmmm, let's freeze a stick and poke him with it. No need to dismiss the classics.\* There was an abundance of sticks lining the ground along with leaves and other such forest waste. Picking up the largest stick in eyesight, Kat set it alight.

It instantly froze over, and once it did Kat simply dismissed her fire and proceeded to poke Xiang with the chilled item. The reaction was instantaneous, he kicked off the sleeping bag and launched himself to his feet before drawing his sword and pointing it at Kat.

The speed was nothing compared to Kat's maximum speed, but it was clearly above what a normal human should have been able to do. It was Kat's first clue in that this realm might be different from the others she'd visited.

Previously, everyone who was stronger than normal had needed to empower themselves to achieve any meaningful results. Xiang however gave no indication of any such empowerment, no tell-tale glows, and his clothes contained no runes as far as Kat could tell with her untrained eyes, but that didn't mean much with her lacking experience.

Still, this swiftness with which Xiang moved cause Kat to narrow her eyes. \*That was actually rather impressive. Both as an instinctive reaction and in terms of overall speed. Something is going on here. This is strength beyond even Gareth... but he doesn't actually feel more powerful, I get the sense that he hardly knows what he's doing so why is he so fast?\*

"Attacking me now are you?" asked Kat with a smirk, unable to resist the easy chance to throw Xiang a curveball. She was still hoping to keep him off balance for a while longer yet.

"My apologies" said Xiang making an effort to project his voice "I am not used to such a chill. Even surrounded by the mountains as this area might be, that is some of the coldest I have ever felt"

"Well, it was simply a way to get your attention. My light attempts to wake you were unsuccessful. I did not want to escalate to full force so quickly, so taking this frozen branch was my next stage" said Kat

"Right" said Xiang firmly, but with an undercurrent of unease as if trying to convince himself that Kat was telling the truth. \*Huh... I think he knows I can't lie... right? Let's not mention it but... I'm not sure what I'd rather he knew.\*

"Well, I am going to take a short rest" said Kat before taking off with her wings and settling back into the tree limbs.

Before she closed her eyes, she heard Xiang curse not quite under his breath "By the Immortals, how am I supposed to get up and wake her once it's time to leave from down here"

\*Easy answer for you. You're not.\* Thought Kat as she shut her eyes and settled in for a nice nap. She let herself sink into her meditation, riding on the currents and watching the ripples as her mind relaxed.

It was an unknown time later when Kat noticed ripples below her. They were short and frantic. Finding this situation Kat decided to rouse herself, pushing herself from the depths of sleep. The sight that greeted her was not a pleasant one but it did answer a few questions.

Below her, Xiang was surrounded on all sides by several wolves. Each wolf had a strange fur pattern, and were crackling slightly as Kat looked them over. Kat counted five in the immediate area with two more watching from further back that were larger, with the occasional spark that flew between bits of fur. Xiang had his sword drawn and had placed himself against the tree. His sleeping bag had been put away and if he was eating snacks there was no evidence left.

\*Well, I guess that means that no, I cannot in fact detect wolves coming while I'm asleep, but I can detect someone being attacked by wolves, so small victories, I guess.\* Kat dropped herself out of the tree in front of Xiang, not bothering with her wings to slow her down, instead pushing energy into her legs to absorb the impact.

Kat slammed into the ground which cracked under her weight as she stood up. Dirt sprayed from the impact crater, mostly flying towards Xiang... something she hadn't quite intended. \*Ooops. I'll admit to that one being poor manners and bad form.\* Kat glared out at the wolves, which had started to bolt at the sight of her. The smaller wolves had turned their back on her completely and were running away at full speed.

However, the two in the back had moved up a slight amount, ready to attack her, but only if she followed up. They split their focus between the retreating wolves and Kat. Once the smaller wolves had taken off and were hidden by trees, the larger ones started retreating slowly, never letting their eyes leave Kat.

As the situation defused, Xiang spoke up, anger in his voice "I could have dealt with them"

Kat turned around and shrugged. "Perhaps, but there was no reason to take that fight"

Xiang growled "Some basic mountain wolves that aren't even true beasts could never hurt me"

Kat was about to accept his explanation, but Kat noticed that while he was speaking, his arms had yet to stop talking. Additionally, she wasn't an expert in martial forms, but Xiang was pressed as far back as he could be against the tree, his back as straight as it could be. "Oh? You sure about that? What about the two larger ones in the back?" said Kat guessing they were the real strength of the group.

Xiang twitched at that, sword darting to the side before he disguised it as putting his weapon away. "Ha, a first level true beast is also n-nothing"

## **Chapter 269: Bragging Rights**

"Sure, it isn't" said Kat not willing to make his clear lie into an issue. "So, if a first level true beast is 'nothing', as you put it, how strong are you truly? What exactly am I working with here?"

"Why should I tell you? So that you can turn my strengths to your whims? So that you can manipulate me easier?" snarled Xiang

\*And you'd think the fact that I'd saved him from being mauled by wolves not even a minute ago would have made him slightly more trusting.\* Kat looked over the large amount of dust and grime now coating the boy. \*Ok maybe it wasn't as much of a positive influence as it could have been but...\*

"Well, if you don't want to tell me how strong you are, at least explain to me the plan. I was happy to leave the temple, that was fine, but while we were walking, I'd somewhat expected some further details on what we are doing" said Kat

This statement was... true enough, Kat had been able to say it after all, but she didn't truly believe Xiang was personally going to share those sorts of details with her without prompting, but, it was something she expected of a more standard summoner. She can't very well complete the contract without context.

"We show up and you help me kill or cripple them all. It isn't very hard to understand" growled Xiang.

Kat held back the sigh. \*As if this adorable child could kill anyone. He couldn't even stand up to some wolves. I doubt it really. He has some anger at these people sure, but I just... I don't feel the rage. It feels like he's doing this more because it's expected and not that he wants to go on some crusade.\*

"Ok, maybe we should back up a bit. Why do you want to get revenge?" asked Kat

"Didn't I tell you already? They attacked my clan!" shouted Xiang as if that explained everything.

Kat sighed and shook her head. "Ok, well, first let's get moving" said Kat as she started walking down the 'path' they had been following the previous day. Xiang frowned, glancing down at his sword once before stowing it and following behind Kat, though he did not look happy at being 'ordered' around. "So, the reason I ask is because killing them seems somewhat extreme, but you are very set on it for some reason and I'd like to know why"

Xiang gnashed his teeth and Kat could hear the grinding sound without any extra energy in her ears. \*That cannot be good for his teeth.\* "What didn't they do! They robbed us blind, crippled our guards, nobody has seen the clan head for a month!" shouted Xiang.

Kat heard a group of birds take off somewhere in the distance, but otherwise nothing seemed to be coming for Xiang's shout. "Right, I see, but that still isn't as bad as killing them. I mean, who do you even want to kill? The attackers? Everyone? Like one guy who spat in your face?"

Xiang flinched back, though Kat couldn't see it from her position. "How can you talk about the crippling of my clansman so casually? Do their lives mean nothing to you?" said Xiang

This time, Kat stopped and looked at him with a confused frown on her face. "I don't see how crippling has anything to do with their lives. It is tragic yes, but I've seen healing magic, it can fix pretty much anything if you're strong enough" said Kat

"Healing... magic? What are you talking about?" asked Xiang

"Wait... why do you sound so confused? Is there no healing magic here?" asked Kat

"There is no magic here" said Xiang confused "We have mysticism and cultivation but anyone who claims to have magic is considered a fool and a charlatan. Mostly they are minor cultivation talents that use sleight of hand to claim to be magicians. Why would we have healing magic"

\*Ok... what is going on here? How did he summon me then? Is that not magic?\* "So... do you guys not have mana?" asked Kat

Xiang shook his head "No we only have Qi, what's mana? Is that what demons use?"

\*System! What the hell is going on?\*

User Kat has encountered a Dimension that does not possess Mana. It instead has Chi or Qi. Qi has notably different but similar effects to Mana.

\*Oh great. Just what I need to here.\*

Kat let her tail press into her temple... well, slightly below her temple considering her horns prevented direct contact. She didn't have a headache, but the gestured still helped calm her mind. "No, we do not in fact use mana, demons use something else" said Kat

"Oh?" said Xiang raising an eyebrow "Is that what makes demons so strong?" Kat frowned at Xiang's question. It was asked innocently enough... but... something seemed wrong to her, she couldn't put her finger on it but she felt the need to structure her answer very clearly.

"It is part of it, that's true. However, to the best of my knowledge it is mostly biological. Demonic energy does help, and it is a very diverse energy type but demons evolved very specifically to use it and other sentient races will be driven insane with even short use" said Kat

"Biological?" asked Xiang as if tasting the word "And what exactly do you mean evolve?" Kat noticed when he asked those two words, he'd actually said them instead of it translating, like it must have been doing before.

\*Does... does he not know what they mean?\*

User Kat is correct. Summoner Xiang has no word for either subject in his language. He has a faint impression of what the words mean, but because of how Demonic Translation works it is not a proper understanding. Summoner Xiang can feel the small amount of understanding he has been supplied is incomplete.

\*Right...\*

"Well, biology is just... our bodies, or more precisely, everything's bodies and the study of such things. And evolve is a species refining itself over time, like a blacksmith refining ore" said Kat

"Or a cultivate refining his spirit" said Xiang suddenly excited.

\*Sure? Let's just go with yes sure\* "Sure" said Kat "Anyway, we are getting far off topic. Crippling, why is it so bad?"

"Ah..." said Xiang, face instantly falling "Well... I guess... if what you say is true, you seem to not know the ways of cultivators. To cripple a cultivator is widely considered to have the potential to be worse than death"

"Why only the potential?" asked Kat

"Well, there is crippling, then there is crippling I suppose. To cripple someone is to destroy their foundation, or, to remove the progress they have made in cultivation making them a mortal once again. This normal means that they lose years, decades, centuries, and perhaps even millennia if the stories are true about some of the strongest cultivators.

"If this wasn't bad enough, you can also completely cripple someone, destroy their dantian and not only remove their progress, but even the potential for them to ever cultivate again." Xiang took a large breath as if to steady himself "Some renowned alchemists insist that even that can be cured with the right medicine, but I have never personally witnessed it, nor do I know anyone that has"

"Right... but is that really so bad? Surely better crippled than dead right?" asked Kat

Xiang laughed, it was a hollow laugh somehow tinged with rage and sadness. In this laugh, Xiang could tell that the demon in front of him was truly alien. She just did not understand what she was asking, but was willing to humour her. Convince her she was the one who lacked understanding.

"A cultivator makes cultivation his entire being. It becomes his true purpose in the world, as they seek to reach the true height of cultivation and achieve immortality. That is the final goal... and so... to be brought down to a mortal, to have your power stripped away from you, and then to know you have to give up on everything you spent your entire life doing... it is more than most men can take" said Xiang

Kat pursed her lips but started moving once again. \*More than most men can take, huh...\* Kat could see it, in some ways. She didn't believe that death was preferable, even a few more years would allow you to do plenty of things, rather than give up but... \*What do I know really? I'm just seventeen. It's these guys life's work, sometimes multiple lives... is it multiple if it's the one person living for a long time? Doesn't matter, the point is... I can actually kind of see how that would break someone. Spend a hundred years cultivating only to have it all destroyed in an instant... I guess that's why Xiang wants revenge but... wait how is he even going to get it? Are these guys he's attacking a few hundred years old?\*

### **Chapter 270: Kill them all?**

"So... how powerful are these people from the Shattered Flame Sect that you are trying to get revenge on? Or is it all of them still. You weren't totally clear on that part" asked Kat

Xiang didn't say anything as he followed behind Kat. The silence hung in the air for a few minutes before Kat flicked her tail into a tree, making a loud thump and bringing Xiang back to reality. "Ah... well, truth be told that's actually a matter I haven't decided yet. You see, the Shattered Flame Sect is just as the name implies, shattered, or, more accurately it is made up of a few smaller clans"

"Truth be told... I don't actually know enough about their internal politics to know which branch attacked me" said Xiang

Kat groaned, not even trying to hide the sound from Xiang. She let out a long sigh along with the noise and glanced over her shoulder with the most disapproving look she could manage. "You swore revenge and summoned a demon without even knowing who it was against?" asked Kat

Xiang glared back "The guardian of the place insisted I could do it and he was right. I summoned you, didn't I? Plus, I can just take on them all, or rather, you can" said Xiang

Kat shook her head "Regardless of can or cannot, it's ridiculous to try and go into this with so little forethought. Tell me Xiang, is there a town in the area? Perhaps some village we can pass through and try to find information. If we can narrow down who is responsible, it saves us a lot of time, and potentially a number of innocents"

Xiang shrugged and said, "Is it so important? If you are capable of destroying their entire sect why not?"

Kat let out a long sigh. \*This boy clearly knows nothing about politics.\* "Well, even if we ignore the power vacuum destroying such a large sect, if it is as important as you seem to think, we still have the issue of revenge."

Xiang looked at Kat strangely as she continued on "Yes revenge, think about it, you are one boy from a rather small village who has sworn revenge against the Shattered Flame Sect. Imagine how many enemies that same boy would garner if you attacked the sect and destroyed it in turn?"

"Well we can just kill them all then it will be no problem" said Xiang with the same tone as someone stating they could just pick up the eggs next week when they went shopping.

Kat shoved as much energy as she could into her mind to let her deal with what she'd just heard without reacting too much. \*What the hell!\* Kat let out an internal screech, screaming into the mental void to try and relieve some of her anger. \*How can a child even say that. I... even if he isn't quite as young as I think of him in my head, Xiang cannot be much older than me if I'm very generous.\*

\*So that means there is a, at the very most, twenty-year-old trying to tell me that killing is ok. And not just one person, or maybe a group of people directly responsible no, he wants to kill them and anyone that might want revenge for them. Plus, he's still half convinced we need to go after the entire organisation... what the hell do I say to him?\*

Kat let her perception of time keep her suspended as she ran through a number of options as to what to say. She didn't want to shut him down too hard because she did need to change his mind, and a kid like Xiang would just dig in his heels if he thought she was ignoring him. Eventually, she settled on a bit of a gamble.

"So, Xiang, I'd like you to consider something" said Kat, glancing back to see Xiang's nod. "Are you always in your village, or clan compound or whatever?"

"Of course not" said Xiang

Kat nodded "Yes, yes entirely reasonable... now, IF your plan was to kill everyone, you'd need to make sure everyone was in the compound when you did it. You've already admitted a smaller clan like your own has at least a few people out at any given time. Imagine how many would be exploring in the entire Shattered Flame Sect"

Xiang hummed, before saying "Yes I can see that becoming a problem. I had not considered that. What do you propose demon?"

"My name is Kat, by the way. And I propose that you do it all as stealthily as possible. Maybe have only me do it if possible. As long as nobody knows you were the one to take revenge you and your clan should be completely safe from any sort of retaliation" said Kat.

\*And, if I'm the one who has to go in, I can make sure that whatever I do isn't nearly as bad as Xiang off the leash. I can destroy a bunch of things, maybe burn some crops and I can say "I burnt the crops" or some such without it being a lie.\*

"No" said Xiang firmly.

Kat let out a long sigh. \*Why! It was so easy! Even if I couldn't manage to do it all myself, convincing him to go stealthy would let me limit the damage somewhat. It's perfect, and even sounds reasonable.\*

"Why do you find that objectionable?" asked Kat

??I need them to know who is responsible for their suffering. Even if it is as they die" said Xiang.

\*So morbid kid. I thought I was talking you out of the whole genocide thing. Nobody is cool with genocide. You just don't do it.\* "Why?" said Kat genuinely confused.

"Clearly a demon doesn't understand anything about face" said Xiang

"Face? No I don't. Like, I have no idea what you are talking about in the slightest" said Kat as she sliced through a tree branch that had fallen over the path and kicking the pieces away clear the path afterwards.

Xiang clicked his tongue. "That was the expected answer and yet I cannot help but find myself disappointed in your species"

\*Suddenly it's my whole species under attack huh? I find myself liking Xiang less and less. I wonder if everyone in this place is crazy. Hey, and he didn't answer me about finding a nearby village either.\*

"To have no concept of face is a shameful thing" continued Xiang clearly not noticing Kat's discomfort, despite the fact she was knowing slicing any foliage that crossed her path rather than just brushing it aside. Xiang wasn't taking the hint. "To have no concept of face is to have no honour. To have no honour is to fail as a cultivator. You must have a creed, and it is only right to follow that creed even if death would stand in your way"

"So you have a something against being stealthy?" asked Kat

"Well... er no, I mean... not especially" said Xiang suddenly put on the back foot.

"Then why do they need to know?" asked Kat

"Because!" said Xiang "They marched into my village as if they owned the place, thus the only way to pay them back is to do the same. March into their village and let none stop me"

"Well I'm going to stop you right there" said Kat "Regardless of if I can fight an entire sect on my own. I certainly can't fight an entire sect and protect you at the same time. So how would you propose I manage both of those things? Surely you didn't want to die for your revenge?"

Xiang bit her lip and said "If that's what it takes?"

Kat sighed. "Have you never heard the say- proverb 'The best revenge is to live a fulfilling life'?" asked Kat

Xiang scoffed "How is that any kind of revenge? Such a cowardly way of thinking about the future. If you must die in the pursuit of glory and honour so be it"

Kat blinked tiredly. \*You know. I thought knightly honour was an outdated concept when I heard about it. Now I realise, that those guys were at least more intelligent than the people in this dimension. I mean seriously, is fight all they do? Is that it? Have they been taught that the only answer to a problem is punching it?\*

Recognising that she wasn't getting anywhere with trying to talk Xiang down at this time Kat decided to ask about nearby villages again. "So, is there a village or town nearby, somewhere we can get information?"

"Oh, I have no idea" said Xiang.

Kat stopped and looked at Xiang horrified.

"I mean... there is a road if we keep going? And I'm sure we'll find a town or something if we follow it long enough?" said Xiang as if it was a question.

\*Note to self, never get into debt again. The inability to just not do a stupid contract is a much larger punishment than it seems.\*