

Chapter 271: Distracting Questions

With the realisation that Xiang was not only an idiot who thought minor genocide was a good idea, but that he didn't even know where he was going or what towns might or might not be on the way, Kat decided to stop engaging him in conversation. It was just easier and less taxing on her mind to realise how woefully unprepared Xiang was. Kat also had to bite back her curses towards the system. She appreciated what it had done, enough to not believe she was specifically targeted for this pain, but she certainly wasn't enjoying herself.

She considered sending some messages off to everyone back on Earth, but she didn't have a lot to say. She could rant about Xiang perhaps, but it felt wrong to just send complaints back to them. During her walk she did get a message from Sylvie and Lily, but all it said was they understood that the message function was too slow to hold conversations, alongside the more general well wishes.

As she walked Kat could occasionally hear the sounds of animals but she couldn't identify any of them. It wasn't her hearing that was lacking but her knowledge. It is one thing to recognise speech or even Xiang's breathing. This was because voices are easy to differentiate even at a distance, and in the case of the breathing, she could tell where it was coming from, and was clear enough.

The various animal sounds far off though... well, without Kat having seen or heard anything truly similar since becoming a demon she had no real way to tell if they were being stalked by evil dragons or squirrels.

Nonetheless, nothing came close to approaching them before the road came into view. Kat nearly took a short fall, as she was unprepared for it. The forest just ended for a short while to allow for carts to pass. The road was a simple thing, it looked to be made of very heavily compressed stone, or maybe packed dirt to an absurd degree. It cut into the landscape slightly. It was cut around half a metre deep into the ground, and Kat thought it likely that the depth was where most of the material for its construction came from.

Hopping down to the road Kat looked back at Xiang to see how he was doing. They had been walking at a rather sedate pace for the past six hours. Kat was completely fine and didn't feel even the slightest bit tired.

Xiang looked mostly the same. He had a slight shine of sweat, mostly around the areas where his outfit met the open air, and likely much more underneath it. However, aside for a line of sweat around his hair Xiang seemed to be fine. His breathing was even, and his face had only the slightest red tinge to it... but Kat wasn't sure if that was the sunburn or not.

"So which way do we go?" asked Kat

"Um... right?" said Xiang

Kat sighed and said, "I've never been here, so I NEED you to tell me which way, otherwise it's a fifty-fifty chance"

"I ugh... don't really remember?" said Xiang slowly.

Kat looked to the sky for inspiration, hoping to find some answer to the question of how to deal with Xiang. She actually managed to find the next best thing. The sun was staring back at her, with a slight tilt to it. It seemed that the sun actually followed the path of the road close enough.

"Ok, how about this. Did you set out in the morning or afternoon?" asked Kat

"Early morning of course" said Xiang like it was obvious.

If it was obvious I wouldn't have asked dammit. Don't sound like I should know the answer when you are the one forgetting simple things. "Right, and in the morning, was the sun in your eyes, or to your back?" asked Kat.

"Oh, yeah, it was right in my face. I remember being rather irritated about that fact when I was trying to get started" said Xiang.

Kat looked up at the sun, and found that she was actually able to stare at it without hurting her eyes with just the thinnest film of demonic energy over them. Her improved vision also let her see what direction the sun was moving. It was extremely slight, but when you knew it roughly followed the road and could narrow down the directions it was easy to figure out.

"This way then" said Kat pointing to the right.

As Kat headed off, she asked Xiang another question "So, is it likely that we will run into anyone along this stretch of road?"

"No, not really. I mean, the only thing at the other end is my village. We are backed into a mountain so we have a very defensible position. That also means that traders only come irregularly because we are the only things down the road" said Xiang

"So... any idea how long we have to walk?" asked Kat

"Oh, at least a few days. Especially if that's all we are doing, walking" said Xiang.

Now... do I want to brag about the fact I could run for days and not get tired, or do I want to keep this really slow pace. I'm not sure I can really afford to waste a tonne of time... but then again, what else am I going to do.

Hey system, how long have I been paid for? You seem to always know that somehow.

User Kat does not have access to that information. It was found providing the estimated time to complete the provided request resulted in rushed Contracts and more demons Failing. Thus it was decided to prevent the any demon from finding the answer to that question.

D.E.M.O.N.S encourages User Kat to work on User Kat's own estimating ability and hone it. This is the best way to find the requested information.

Well, self-improvement is good and all, but I really did want to know. Wait is that why we don't know how much we've been paid till the end either?

Incorrect. Demons are not provided that information because it is considered one of the Summoners' Rights.

Wait Summoners have rights?

Of course. Demons have Rights as well.

Huh, I feel like I should know what they are. Can you give me the list?

Kat was prepared for a few entries, maybe a ten commandments sort of thing. Instead, Kat's entire vision was filled with exceptionally small text that read more like a legal document than a handy bit of information usually provided by the system.

An example of one is 'Any Demon has the right to complete the contract they have been assigned by the Summoner. If the Summoner wishes to cancel the contract, but the demon does not, the Summoner can in no way hamper the completion of the contract, unless otherwise specified when the initial contract has been drawn up. Exceptions are also allowed, if any of the following are met...'

Where it just devolved into increasingly bizarre and specific exceptions, such as mind control, an overabundance of something called an Overlord Duck, or, even, an overabundance of mind-controlled Overlord Ducks.

Kat simply dismissed the rest of it. She didn't want to be absorbed in reading it while she was on the road. *Maybe it could be worth checking out while I'm guarding or something but it all just seems overly specific. System do you have a simplified version of that list?*

Not prepared. However, the most basic rights that have no exceptions, are that Demons retain the right to leave the Dimension at any time, and Summoners always have the right to try defend themselves from mortal danger.

Seems reasonable enough I suppose. Kat pushed aside her thoughts on the demon's rights. She was finding herself more and more distracted since she entered this dimension... and something about it was starting to feel unnatural.

Sure I've found out about some valuable stuff, but it's... just not relevant right now most of the time. I mean, why did I end up so far off from what I was considering before? Is this a function of being rank 2? Maybe I have more mental processing and thus I'm more prone to distractions?

Kat got a strange mental image of her tail whirring about behind her looking for shiny objects and people of interest. She almost laughed at the image before remembering that Xiang was walking behind her.

She might not have minded the fact she laughed, but she certainly didn't want to be questioned on what was so funny. Kat glanced back at Xiang and it hit her. *I was trying to decide if I should run faster or not wasn't I? Damn my suspicions about getting side tracked in this dimension or because I'm rank 2 might not be as crazy as I first thought... Is that why Xiang is an idiot?*

Chapter 272: Considerations

In the end, the rest of the day past without incident, and the pair set up camp. Kat took the first shift and Xiang the second, with Kat taking the much longer shift. Kat hopped up into one of the trees beside the road and settled in. She sent off a few messages to everyone, and considered sending a message to Minor, but decided to hold off a few more days just in case.

There wasn't any news from back on Earth so Kat relaxed, and tried to flick between meditation and full alertness to see what happened. Kat found it really uncomfortable. There was no feeling of sluggishness like she was expecting, but instead, she felt as though parts of her mind were grinding against each other.

As if someone had thrown a few grains of sand into a well-oiled machine. Luckily, it seemed that her mind was robust enough to recover quickly, and it only happened if she entered and exited her meditative state a few times in a minute. I have to wonder if there is a reason this feels so strange when I try to rapidly switch into meditation. I feel like it's a skill I want for some reason, but I'm not sure why.

And so that was how Kat spent her evening watch. Swapping in and out of meditation letting her mind deal with the aftereffects as she tried to find out any additional information from repeating the action. In the end, she obtained no further enlightenment regarding the process but resolved to keep trying while she was on watch.

There was no talking when she woke up and Xiang ate. Kat checked her internal supplies to see if she needed to eat and found the answer was still no. It did give her something to think about for the first few hours of the morning though, as she watched the plain scenery pass and consider what she needed to do now to actually feel hunger, while considering that at Rank 2, she just might not need to eat anymore.

She did consider asking the system after the first hour, but quickly realised that defeated the point. She was using it as a decent distraction to avoid getting bored. The road she was walking on was so strangely consistent. It was an endless straight line as if God himself had pointed in a straight line and said ROAD.

To top that off, it featured no cracks or even much dirt, and the similar trees didn't help at all. If Xiang was more worried or if the mountain in the distance was further away, Kat may have started questioning if she was moving at all.

As it stood, she felt she was making decent progress. Xiang followed behind her, and Kat walked at decent walking pace, just slightly faster than would be comfortable for a human planning to walk all day.

It was after lunch, if Xiang grabbing a few more crackers to snack on counted as lunch, that Kat started to consider her two special wishing tokens she had obtained so long ago when she scared off that guy, Berthelm, from trying to find out too much information about demon society.

So system what are my options?

D.E.M.O.N.S cannot properly process the question please elaborate.

I mean, what can I get with those two tokens?

User Kat can get almost anything. The only restriction is User Kat's current Rank. Thus, waiting may allow for access to greater treasures.

Well, the plan was always to use them to give Lily and Sylvie magic. Can you give me some more information on that?

User Kat, please define additional parameters. Such as if a Racial change at the genetic level is desired. If User Kat desires additional elements to awaken in the Entity. If User Kat desires the process to be quick. If User Kat desires the process to bind the Entity to User Kat. And other further parameters.

I'm starting to think this might be something I should discuss with the others first now. And it was such a simple idea to. I am bored, and I wish Lily was here. Simple answer, give her magic, though as it turns out, not so simple.

Can you start out explaining why additional racial changes are a thing? Like why is that a parameter? Does it need to happen?

A number of Races are inherently magically awakened. Thus, an item that converts chosen Entity to that race would awaken magic. This however, is often frowned on as Entities tend to have a strange loyalty to old race.

In much smaller letters at the bottom, the following was added.

Occasionally causes Entities mental landscape to complete fracture.

Wait, don't try to sneak that last part past me, why would that even happen?

It is rare, but some Entities resist the racial change at such a fundamental level that Entities' mind does not survive, or survives in a fractured state.

Right ok... so, I guess that's something to ask Lily about later. I don't know if she wants to be human or not but... is there anything else major I should know about the whole race change thing?

Some races, such as Vampires, require complete unique dietary measures. D.E.M.O.N.S recommends User Kat be aware of these before choosing any race change.

Kat nodded. Yup that makes a tonne of sense. What about additional elements?

Some Entities do not inherently have any magic at all. This requires forcing additional affinities on the Entity to then awaken magic.

Do you know if Lily needs this?

No. Because Accomplice Lily resides in a Dimension without any form of Higher Energy, D.E.M.O.N.S cannot scan Accomplice Lily for this information and receive an accurate answer.

Right... any reason you don't want an extra affinity though? It seems useful.

Baseline Human like Accomplice Lily is suspected to be unable to handle more than three affinities at once without spontaneously combusting.

Aaahh... how likely is that to be an issue?

Unknown. Having three affinities is rare, and as Accomplice Lily is in an Energy Inert Dimension, the chance is likely low, but without additional samples it is impossible to know if all residents of User Kat's home Dimension have even more affinities that are able to remain dormant because of the lack of Higher Energy.

So basically... more stuff I can't worry about? Plus a warning that I probably need to take Lily to Minor's dimension to have a safe place to do this so that you can test her for these things. What about speed? Is the time variable?

Yes. Most common with items that would convert chosen Entity to another Race, they can take years or centuries. Some faster acting processes may require a higher Rank to access and certainly involve more pain.

Ok... well we are going to completely ignore the whole 'bind her to me' thing, because I certainly don't want that... um... I know I can't make her a demon, I remember you mentioning that even you hadn't figured out how to do that when I was first starting out...

Um is there anything else that I really should be aware of?

D.E.M.O.N.S recommend User Kat, if opting for Race change items, considers the lifespan of chosen Race. D.E.M.O.N.S suspects that User Kat would like Accomplice Lily to remain around.

What do you mea... oh... um... is that? System when would I die of old age?

If User Kat was to remain at Rank 2 for the rest of User Kat's existence, it would take approximately...

Estimating

Examining Bloodline

Examining Soul Strength

Estimating...

User Kat would live approximately 300,000 years as measured by User Kat's Home Dimension's Earth.

Kat gulped. This... this might be a bigger deal than I thought. Can humans live that long?

Humans with access to higher energy are capable of it, however it is extremely rare. D.E.M.O.N.S suggest choosing another Race, if User Kat desires to remain close to Accomplices.

Damnit. What will I do about Vivian and Callisto? They took me in and are shockingly close to family even though I haven't known them long. I... I think I'll have to look for something to give them as well now. Dammit I didn't need something this heavy to think about. I just wanted to know if I could give Lily cool magic powers, but now, it had to come with at least some existential dread and questions I don't want to answer didn't it.

Kat sighed as she considered picking up the pace, but decided against it. She needed the time now more than ever, because it seemed that she really needed to properly start figuring out what she wanted to do with those tokens, especially knowing that they needed to be more than just a quick way to get magic, but also a way to not have everyone pass away on her in just a hundred years.

Might as well get started. System, bring up a slow-moving list of all the known Races in your database.

User Kat would require significant time to view that list.

Kat shrugged. I've got all afternoon, and maybe all of tomorrow.

Chapter 273: Day 3 of Travel

It was the third day of Kat's journey and she finally found an issue with her memory. This one wasn't quite so scary to her, but it was a relief in some ways and a disappointment in others.

When she started with the list, it wasn't so bad. Arranged in alphabetical order, Kat simply glanced over the entries looking for things she recognized, and found... shockingly little that was familiar. This was to be expected because she had asked for the WHOLE list of races... which in hindsight was a mistake in a number of ways.

She sent off a message to everyone as was her nightly routine now, and got a confirmation from the others they'd seen it and that they'd start looking at the options. Kat wished she'd warned them properly at the time.

It was around lunchtime when it finally sunk in for Kat that this might have been a mistake to do things the way she had chosen. She finally ran into the list of elves, and realised, with a horrible sinking feeling that her list was much more than thorough.

It had each and every elemental variation of elf listed, as well as all the various half, quarter, and sometimes even lesser combinations that existed and more. By the time Kat was half way through the elf section, she shut it down and tried to go over her memories of the past twenty-four hours looking through names and found it a tangled mess.

If her normal memories were like a series of perfectly organised filling cabinets with broad categories for the cabinet and more specific for each drawer, then the memories of the list of names was like someone had looked at all of the files, died slightly on the inside... and then threw them out of the window. Before finding out from their boss that they were important, and so dragged the mangled remains back inside and found that some of the papers were mixed up in the wrong folders.

So of course, instead of doing the responsible thing and trying to put everything back where it should be, they walked up to their boss, threw the files in her face, and walked out the door without looking back. So when Kat went to find out what races she'd already looked over, she knew that the information was there but finding anything specific was going to be a time-consuming process, not only to organise things, but to clean up the massive mess that had been left behind as well.

Let's just... file all that away and never look at it again. Even my slightly faded memories from when I was human are easier to look through. A bit of dust on the files is nothing compared to setting it on fire, mixing the ashes together and then saying that everything has been sorted, because it's all a pile of ash now.

I probably asked for the wrong thing anyway. I should have specified that I wanted the list of races Lily could be changed into rather than just. Kat brushed the concern easily out of her mind though. She only asked for the list to give her something to do while walking, and wanted Lily to make the final decision. Even just learning about the issue with her 'perfect' memory was a big windfall for a 'small' amount of work.

Of course, the only person who would think that reading a near endless list of names for a day straight without stopping would count as a small amount of work, was, interestingly enough, Lily, who would probably read the whole thing twice over just to be safe.

It was shortly after Kat finished identifying the issues with her memory and around an hour after lunch when the scenery finally changed. At the very edge of Kat's vision, she could see the trees starting to recede, and at the end of the road, it split cleanly in two, with one going to the left and the other to the right, preventing them from continuing forward.

Of course, Kat's eyes were extremely good, and because she wasn't even running at standard human speeds, the night fell before she was actually able to make it to the crossing she spotted. It really drove home just how much better her eyes had become. *I... I didn't realise. My upgrades are more significant than I've been thinking. I can see basically forever. When you run at super human speeds as well, you don't notice just how far away everything is.*

As Xiang sat down Kat, decided to broach the topic. "We aren't too far from a split in the road Xiang. Do you know which way we need to go once we reach it?"

"Ah... no? Which way do they go?" asked Xiang

"Well, left and right, or North and South I guess" said Kat

"Hmmm. I suppose we should head North then. I've heard that the Shattered Flame Sect has its main base in the far North, so if we at least head in that direction we should be able to find something, even if it's just a more concrete direction to go in" said Xiang

Kat was gobsmacked. *Sooo there is a brain in that head of his. This might just be the first good idea that he's ever had since I've met him. It almost brings a tear to my eye to see such fantastic progress.*

Kat let out a sharp gust of air in place of a laugh before nodding at Xiang and hopping into the trees. These ones were a bit small, and it took some looking to find a good spot for her to rest but there was still enough to manage it before too long. Xiang, of course, had yet more crackers, and Kat started wondering if he even had any other options, but quickly moved onto composing her daily letter.

Sylvie got the standard, hello and short rundown, but Lily got a more in-depth explanation of what she was doing and her recommendation that she limit the list a bit in some way, explaining how it was beyond even her supernatural memory.

Of course, the reply she got much later on made her smile and remember that not everyone was an idiot like Xiang.

Hi Kat, once again thanks for the update. I was actually rather careful in my wording when I requested the list from D.E.M.O.N.S. I was also warned that the main reason I was allowed to even view it at all was because it was needed for that token of yours. Apparently neither of us are properly cleared for it really, or at least I'm certainly not as just a Rank 2 Accomplice.

Anyway, I didn't need to remember it all, I've started to make a big list. There are a few races I can just discard instantly, like those that NEED to live underwater or even a couple that I found out about that can only survive in the vacuum of space. So, I quickly made it so that things needed to be able to breathe air.

Then I removed anything that was taller than fifteen feet tall. I can deal with being inhuman, though I've been making a note about those, the main issue is that I'm sure I'll still be spending at least some time at home on Earth, and fifteen feet seems like the absolute limit.

Everything over eight feet I do however leave a mark signalling that as a negative against the race. Oh, and I also made sure that none of the races I could see would emit anything lethal. I didn't find any that met that description, but after the other few surprises I was absolutely sure that those exist.

Another thing, was I asked the system to make any that require more than a year of transformation time even when using the fastest transformation options. I... I'm not sure about that part. Especially if your lifespan is really what the system says, just a year shouldn't be too long but...

I don't think I really believe that myself. A full year or longer is a massive chunk of my current life, and I don't know what I'd tell my parents, or what you and the others would think. You... well, in a lot of ways you're the same Kat I've always known, but physically you've changed so much and... it kind of scares me when I think about how powerful you could become if I just left you alone for a year.

Anyway, I'm still working on the list, and it's probably going to take me a few days if not a few weeks. I haven't really gotten into it. I'll keep you updated, but I will note, I have more options than I think I need. I can probably find something perfect, or at least so close to it that the problems won't matter.

Kat sighed as she looked over Lily's message. She was already throwing herself into that list like Kat knew she would but... it seemed like such a big decision. *I can only hope Lily doesn't rush this. Or pick some eldritch horror under fifteen feet tall.*

Chapter 274: A Week?!

Kat had been travelling for a week at this point. It was a bit after half way through the fourth day that they finally managed to make it to the split in the road. They took the North path as agreed and then walked for another three days after that. Kat spent the time practicing her meditation while walking.

Kat considered trying to untangle her mess of memories and read more races off that list, but the update messages she got from Lily assured her that Lily was enjoying herself having such an interesting topic to research. She kept insisting it was like nothing she'd ever considered and much more fun because she could use it to help herself a bunch.

Sylvie checked in on her with some prodding from Kat, but instead of helping Lily calm down and pace herself, Sylvie and Callisto had jumped on the data as well and they were now worse as a trio. Kat was informed that Lily still did the bulk of the work but the other two were no slouches either. Vivian hung out with them when she got off work, but she mostly just sat around and made bad jokes.

With everyone else making progress on the list, Kat tried to get something more from her meditation, but... it wasn't going well. Kat found that if she tried to use it while walking it had an even worse effect than flicking it on and off.

Every time she took a step, she was kicked out of the pond her mind sunk into, throwing dirt and grime across her mind, causing it to stutter and instead of just slowing her thoughts down a bit and making them harder to connect, Kat felt her whole body go on autopilot for a while as she desperately grabbed everything back in place.

It was scary enough that Kat reached out to the system for advice, at which point she was informed that her specific meditation style wasn't designed for combat at the lower levels like some others. That of course opened an entirely different can of worms.

Knowing that her meditation could help her in combat later, Kat spent the rest of the week trying to walk while meditating. It was on the sixth day when she made a particular breakthrough. She was able to sort of split herself off from her body. It still walked on autopilot, but Kat knew she could take control at a moment's notice if she wanted to.

The downside was that she didn't gain any of the benefits of meditation just yet. All she had was a slight out of body experience and another way to be bored while walking. There weren't even any trees to look at. She was on a stretch of completely flat terrain. Kat heard a group of something near the road, but to her annoyance, they were hidden behind one of the very few hills she had found.

It was lunchtime on the seventh day when Kat finally spotted something new. It was clearly recognisable as a house. There seemed to be a small cluster of them at the edge of her vision. The thought of being able to talk to someone who wasn't Xiang nearly made Kat take off at full speed for the town right then and there.

Hmm, no I shouldn't. If I move that fast then Xiang might try and speed us up... but honestly at this point I've been away for a week already. It's the longest- well, ten days at Minor's hardly counts because it didn't feel like ten days but...

Well, no I guess the messages with everyone are helping, but the days have so little happening in them. Even though it's been a week, more time than I spent with the party, or going through those tunnels... almost. Ok maybe these adventures take more time than they seem at the time.

Is it just because the company is good? Maybe I should head to that town, and just wait for Xiang to catch up tomorrow? Kat glanced over to Xiang. Nope. I don't trust him not to get in trouble on a straight road. It's safer for everyone for me to just wait a bit longer.

Still, Kat mentioned the town to Xiang, but before she could say anything more other than "I can see a town"

Xiang cut her off and said "We should run for it at full speed then"

Xiang was already getting ready to run when Kat put a hand in front of him to prevent Xiang just taking off and said, "I have great eyesight. The town is still a full day of walking away"

Xiang frowned, and seemed to consider something. "Hmm, I'm not quite sure how long I can run at full speed for. Can you keep up with me demon?" said Xiang.

He knocked Kat's hand out of the way, and she let it drop, not wanting to contest with him for something so silly. Xiang took off, and as he ran a glowing white energy started to surround him. As he ran, he got faster and faster... but it was still only about twice the speed of a human runner.

Kat sprinted after him and caught up in just a few seconds, she didn't even use her wings to fly. When she pulled alongside Xiang, the boy's eyes went wide. He was already taking in large gasps of air, and seemed shocked that Kat could keep up so easily. Seeing his surprise, she started to run backwards just to rub it in.

Xiang frowned at that and tried to speed up eking out just a tiny bit more speed, but Kat kept up handily. "HOW!" shouted Xiang, which was distorted by the wind slightly.

Kat shrugged and decided it was time to show off. Kicking the ground with her leg, Kat shot off rapidly overtaking Xiang and accelerating greatly as she left him in the dust. She could see his frustrated face as he tried to go faster and keep up but he had no more speed to give.

Seeing this Kat dropped back, and saw that his white glow was flickering slightly. They hadn't even been running for five minutes at this point. Xiang seemed to notice as well, but wasn't willing to completely give up so he pushed forward.

Of course, that was the cue for what little remained of the light surrounding him to flicker and die. When Xiang took his next step, instead of pushing off, he started flying forward as his leg failed to keep up with the speed.

Kat watched him about to go sprawling forward and sped up her mind to make a choice. *Do I catch him.* Kat was already speeding around so that she was in position. Watching his trajectory, it was clear that Xiang was going to slam face first into the road.

It would be a good lesson to learn. He did this to himself. If Xiang can't learn his limits something worse might happen in the future... but if that glow is what let him run fast, it might also be something that protects him from damage.

And if he's got no energy left and takes the full brunt of it to his skull, what little intelligence he has left might be destroyed when his head hits the ground. Kat sighed realising that was the end of it. The chance Xiang got even stupider was too scary to contemplate.

Kat prepared herself moving back to the side, Kat let Xiang fall into her arms instead of straight onto the ground. As he fell, his body tried to keep moving forward, so Kat just sidestepped a few times as Xiang's body slid across her own arms. *Guess he counts as dirt and bounces right off.* Thought Kat with a smirk as she followed him along for a few paces.

Once the momentum finally bled off, Kat dropped him to the ground. She was careful to lower him first, but she had no desire to hold the fool longer than necessary. He landed with a light thud, and was coated in sweat. Xiang tried to push himself into a sitting position but his arms gave out before he even managed to flip himself over.

"Sleep. Th-that is a good thing. I think" said Xiang as his eyes started glazing over. Kat sighed and watched as Xiang's eyes closed and his breathing stilled. Picking the trouble maker up Kat put him down next to the road and sat down. It was still early in the afternoon, but with Xiang passed out that didn't matter much.

Kat looked out at the town and felt another sigh make its way out her throat. Xiang's mad dash hadn't really gotten them much closer to the town. In fact, an afternoon of calm walking would have likely gotten them closer. Especially if they pushed on a little into the night. *Guess this was as complete waste. Aw well, at least we can still get to town tomorrow.*

Chapter 275: Welcome to town

Kat was now approaching the town. It was the following day, late in the afternoon, and it was becoming rapidly apparent that it wasn't quite so much a 'town' but a small collection of buildings. For the most part two buildings dominated the view, making it hard to judge what was behind them both. Kat could

make out the edges of at least a few more buildings, but that was it. The entire settlement was just a few buildings directly attached to the road and hadn't spread out in the slightest.

In broad strokes, it was clear that the buildings had been made by the same individual, or team of people, that created the roads. The buildings, at a first glance, they were exceptionally simple buildings. The roofing was what gave it away from Kat. Even from a distance she could see that it was made of the same stuff that the road was. The simple smooth brick with a bit of grip to it. The walls had been painted since, but with the knowledge that they were made by the same person as the road you noticed things.

The first was that, the windows were clearly cut later. The details were still a bit hard to see for Kat, but with a bit of energy she was able to make them out. The corners were smooth, as if they had been vigorously sanded down. They weren't so much corners, as they were rounded edges where the wall terminated.

The windows on the other hand, were a hack job, in more ways than one. Kat could, if looking really closely, see the chips in the wall where someone took some form of cutting tool to it to make the windows. Every single window she could view, from this position, which was a full dozen on both large buildings, bore the unmistakable pattern of destruction.

That was the other thing. The windows didn't have any glass. They did have a crossbar, but didn't immediately pick up on what it was for. *There's no glass, so why bother with the bar? It's not like you are holding anything in place. Plus the windows were clearly added later, so the structure can clearly support itself with them added in...

Then again, maybe they needed some extra help to hold the wall up? But a simple crossbar, in a literal cross, doesn't exactly scream structural integrity. I mean, the building is square as well, so maybe they haven't uncovered the wonders of triangles...*

It wasn't until Kat saw a figure pass by the windows that it clicked. They weren't to hold anything IN place. They were to keep things OUT. *That's it! They are to prevent people just using the windows as an easy entrance... though, even Xiang is probably strong enough to break in if he wanted to. Maybe it's just a matter of alarm then? Have to break the crossbar to get it potentially waking other people up.*

The windows however, were where the standard appearance stopped. The rest of the exposed walls had a large mural on them. Present on either side. The building on the right's mural looked worn, perhaps by some non-existent wind, or just fading from the sun over a really long time. Kat didn't know enough about paint to say. The faded mural looked a bit more like a mix of four different paintings than a single mural. There might have once been a through line, perhaps with colours or some small detail now lost to time.

What was there though, didn't really explain much more. The bottom right of the wall was the most destitute. It hardly had anything left of it. There might have been some plains with clouds above them but Kat wasn't sure. They could just as easily be patches of paint that had peeled off revealing the stone underneath, it was about the right colour, but not quite.

The bottom left was a mountain. A very simple one, more a triangle really but someone had gone to the effort of actually giving it some details. They weren't accurate, nor did they make it look anything more like a mountain. But additional details were present. The top section seemed to be painted all at once. It

looked like a hellscape. Kat wished she could say she knew that from experience, but, well she was still hoping to avoid it.

The walls almost seemed to bleed red, with smatterings of black paint, and it just didn't gel with the bright paintings below it. The only thing making Kat sure it was the same person, was that it was faded as the other was, and the 'style' if you could call it that looked very similar.

On the opposite side of the road, was a painting sure, but one that was still being worked on. Now, Kat couldn't see anyone working on it right now, but considering there was a sun and mountain in the corner with half a man looking towards it, Kat was willing to take that bet.

This painting, unlike the other building, seemed to be done by a professional, or at least someone with practice. The paint was fresh and the details were such that even with Kat's eyes, she was making more and more out every step she took towards the encampment. The figure of the person was extremely underdeveloped. He was almost cut down the middle, and didn't have any of the detail that the other sections had.

As Kat got closer to the town, she started to hear people walking around. And that was something that really hit her. When she was back on Earth, she was sure her ears were never this good. And even when she was exploring the forest, sure she could hear for a long distance but... it never seemed real.

Now though, she could make out distinct people. She could tell that there was one person in the building with half a man on it. They were on the bottom floor and didn't seem to be moving much. In the building directly across, with the fading mural, had significantly more people. However, once Kat realised that she could hear snippets of private conversation, she started to ignore the sounds. She didn't want to spy on random people.

I wonder if I'm not being paranoid enough. Just because it's a town doesn't mean we are safe but... I also don't want to be a peeping tom. I didn't hear anything incriminating, but, there are way too many ways that could go wrong if I over hear something less than enjoyable.

Xiang, at this point, spoke up unprompted, for what was perhaps the first time, in the entire trip.
"Simple outpost I think"

"Right and that means?" asked Kat

"Nothin'" said Xiang "We can just grab a room and spend the night here"

Did you already forget about trying to figure out information about that fire clan? Why are we just getting a room? Kat pursed her lips. *Plus... for some reason I get the feeling that we'd actually be safer from bugs just in the grass. At least then I can freeze everything without worrying about it. *

As they really entered the 'town' proper, Kat couldn't help but hear shutters slamming. Looking around, Kat found that some of the windows now had wooden slats covering them. *Well, if that doesn't spell trouble I don't what does.* All the now shut windows were from the right side building.

Xiang didn't even react though. Kat wasn't sure if it was because he didn't hear, or if he just decided it wasn't worth mentioning. Kat realised, she didn't really know how good her hearing actually was as a human. She never really measured it for comparison.

As Kat started to walk between the first two buildings, she saw a few smaller buildings but ignored them for now. The front of the buildings were even more colourful than the ones that she saw coming into town. However, they had even less reason to them.

To both her left and right, it looked more like someone had just thrown paint at the wall and hoped for the best. Kat could see where paint had built up and overlapped, and, on closer inspection, once Kat got curious, even saw where it started to drip. The colour was mostly a dusty red, but there was some yellow and green mixed in. Quite frankly, Kat thought it was a complete mess on both sides.

That didn't stop Xiang at all though. He didn't even glance around as he walked to the door and KICKED IT OPEN. Kat's jaw dropped. *I can't believe he did that. Why would he do that? Who does that? What person just kicks open a door? Actually why did that work? I doubt-* Kat shook her head and followed behind Xiang. She hoped to soften the... impression... he was making. As she stepped inside, Kat started to look around, and it was about what she was expecting...

Chapter 276: Welcome to the Tavern

The room wasn't dusty per say, but a feeling of not being clean seemed to sneak out and cower in the corners. Almost as if it was hiding from the gaze of the bartender sitting behind the large counter wiping a glass. Still looking around, everything SEEMED clean, Kat just couldn't shake the feeling that it wasn't, and she was unsure how to reconcile the feeling.

Distracting herself, she looked at the tables and chairs. The room was large and held space for plenty of different sets of tables and chairs, however it was mostly bare at the moment. There were exactly four sets of tables, two on either side, with an unbelievable amount of space in between them all. Kat was sure she could fit her entire bathroom from Vivian's in between the tables and still have room for a few couches.

The missing space, was clearly for the extra tables and chairs that lined the walls, somehow stacked in such a way to not obstruct any of the windows. The chairs had been stacked up and around them, while standing on top of a few tables, making it so that the chairs ringed the windows letting in a bunch of light on both sides.

Xiang continued, forward eyes on the bartender, and Kat followed his gaze. The counter was large and sturdy. It was made from the same stone as the walls with a large chunk of wood rested on top. It was split in half, with an exposed flat area coated in varnish. Behind the counter was one large barrel, about Kat's own height in diameter, with a set of shelving on either side.

The shelves were actually rather bare. Only maybe every second space had anything in it, and a large number of the glasses that were present were close to completely empty. Kat could see labels stuck onto them, but she didn't recognise any of the names. Aside from that, there was the bartender himself.

He was a strange fellow. A mix of unassuming yet bizarre. Kat could almost feel her gaze slowly sliding off his figure to the more interesting background, but he had plenty strange things going for him. His hair was slicked back, and puffed out at the front. Kat wouldn't recognise the style, but it was a pompadour cut, more tame than standard, with the hair only slightly raised at the front, but just enough to classify.

His robes were standard. A dusty grey, which was likely only 'dusty' in colour because of the years of real dust that had built up on the garment. It was only the fact that the grey was so evenly coloured across the whole thing that convinced her it was intended to be that colour.

His face was plain, largely symmetrical, with a slightly prominent chin. The strangest thing Kat saw on him though, was his eyes. They were sharp, and even though she was meeting his gaze, there was an intensity to them she rarely saw. Well, that and they were completely crazy.

His eyes had what looked to be a long scar running across the both of them. However, it seemed too natural to be a later wound to truly believe that. A jagged line ran across his pupils, splitting them in half and held a faint tinge of purple that bled into the white part of the 'scar' which joined up extremely neatly when looking at both eyes, as if there wasn't anything in between.

"Welcome to outpost 72 My name is Gaston. How may I be of assistance" said Gaston.

"We have come seeking a room and information" said Xiang and Kat felt like slapping him. *We don't just announce that dammit. My whole spying knowledge comes from the two times Lily spent a week researching it then offloaded onto me and I still know that.*

Gaston carefully put down the glass he was cleaning and turned fully to face Xiang. Despite that, Kat felt his eyes on her instead. "Do you possess the coin for accommodation? If so, I can provide you with a room. What would you be looking for in terms of size?" asked Gaston

"Single room, single bed" said Xiang without hesitation. Gaston's eyes flicked to Kat, but this just reaffirmed to her he was watching her instead of Xiang, even with the motion of his eyes she never felt his gaze waver.

"I am not one to question customers, but what about your companion?" asked Gaston slowly turning his eyes back to Xiang as he spoke.

"What about her?" asked Xiang, as if he genuinely couldn't see the problem.

Gaston furrowed his brows and said "I suppose I can allow you both to stay in a single room, but that will cost you extra"

Xiang shook his head grimacing as he said "Of course not. Why would I want that? The room is for me alone"

Gaston paused. Body stopping almost completely, Kat could still see the minute twitches every person went through, and with her gaze so focused on him, she missed nothing. "Highly unusual... does your companion have anything to say about that?"

Now, in that moment, Kat knew she could answer first. Xiang couldn't stop her. She had better reaction time, more time to just think. Hell, she could prep an entire set of answers, but she felt like he could put his own foot in his mouth without her help.

"She's just a demon. I don't see why it matters." Said Xiang like it was a universal truth.

Gaston flinched at that, "I see. Would you like to be shown to your room now in that case?" asked Gaston, though Kat could hear it wasn't really a question, but a polite command.

Xiang however, didn't know the word subtle, or polite, and said "No, I'd like some information first"

Gaston's eyes narrowed. "What would you like to know?"

"The Shattered Flame Sect. I'd like everything you know" said Xiang.

Gaston got a strange look about him. The silence stretched. Xiang started to tap his sword at the ten second mark. It didn't seem aggressive, but Kat wasn't sure how polite it was. *I mean really. Are you trying to threaten the guy? I sure hope not because I'm more than willing to stop you.*

"I can't really tell you anything" said Gaston, the picture of honesty. "I am but a humble bartender of this small outpost. I was assigned here when my family had some issues, and I've never left since. I don't get a lot of information"

Well, if that isn't a lie, I don't know what is. However, he says it so well, I'd almost believe him if it made even a shred of sense. He must have caravans come through. Probably a whole bunch of Shattered Flame Sect members as well.

"Sorry for your trouble" said Xiang, unaware he'd just be lied to. "I guess I should rest then. Do you have water for washing?"

Gaston nodded "Yes, we have water seals. It's all cold of course, so I hope that is no concern"

Xiang shrugged "That's fine"

Gaston nodded, and got out from behind the counter gesturing for Xiang to follow him towards the side where a door lay. As he left, Gaston gave Kat a subtle gesture to take a seat, and Kat nodded.

Well, if that wasn't an indication Gaston would rather talk to me than the kid, I don't know what else would be. Taking the seat that she'd be gestured towards Kat took a moment to turn on her meditation. When she did, she could see the two ripples, likely made by Xiang and Gaston.

This however, confused Kat. *I thought this was based on my hearing. I wasn't paying attention but I know there are people in the other building nearby and I could hear them. Is my range limited? Or is this not a way to sense sound at all. I mean... after the wolves I suspected but this is still strange.*

Kat casually watched the ripples move around the pond of her mind until she saw one of the ripples start making its way back. She waited until it was back down on her level, before opening her eyes.

As Gaston walked out of the door, he looked over at Kat and made his way to her table. Taking a seat across from her he said. "How restrained are you? I am aware of demons and their contracts. He is a fool, and while you seem more in control, if he orders you into idiocy I want to know if it can be prevented" asked Gaston.

Kat nodded "The terms are more than loose enough to prevent me needing to follow his commands"

Gaston relaxed into the chair but still kept his intense gaze. "Good. Then we can speak, not as a fool and a bartender, but as an information broker and a demon" said Gaston, with a smile that made Kat wonder who the real demon was in this situation.

Chapter 277: No One Serves Drinks Like Gaston

Kat nodded, fully aware she had no idea how to actually deal with an information broker of any kind. "So, I guess I should ask what it is exactly you want?" suggested Gaston

Kat smiled "Well, you know how it goes" *Because I sure don't* "Do you really want me to just give away that kind of information straight away?" *So glad I could get that through my whole "truth" issue. Saying he knows how it goes is completely true, what he takes from my implications is his own fault.*

Gaston returned Kat's smile easily and said "Now, how can I possibly help you without knowing what you want? This might be an exchange, but if I don't know what's on the table how can we even start?"

Kat shrugged "Well, I can give you something. I can't pay you in coin. I don't have anything hidden under my kimono here. Though... I suppose I can say that I'm not terribly pleased to be here at the moment"

Gaston flicked an eyebrow up for just a moment "Here in front of me or on this world?"

"This world of course. Well, I have no particular hatred for it of course. More that I detest the lengths Xiang desires to go to, and he's an idiot" said Kat

Gaston let out a whistle "That seems like a good deal of free information there. Are you sure you aren't starting the trade already?"

Kat shrugged. *I have no idea what I'm doing. I'm not sure of anything at all Gaston* "Surely you don't mean to tell me you hadn't figured that out for yourself? Perhaps I overestimated your skill"

Gaston just sighed. "Do we really want to play that game..." Gaston left the sentence hanging and gestured towards Kat asking for her name, which she provided. "Right Kat. I'm sure we could dance around the issue for a time longer, but perhaps we should address it"

Kat sighed. *I don't know if this is the right course of action but dodging around the issue has gotten me exactly 0 pieces of useable information.* "Well, Xiang" said Kat carefully, implying she considered this only Xiang's quest "wants to attack the people who decimated his village."

"Shattered Flame Sect I assume then?" said Gaston

"Of course." said Kat

Gaston let out another whistle. He leaned further back in his chair but he seemed to have gotten tenser if anything. Kat could actually hear his muscles as they constricted in his arms as he fought to keep them at his sides. "I bet he doesn't even know which branch did it does he?"

"Nope. Doesn't even know where any branches are either" said Kat

"Of course, of course" said Gaston nodding "and he doesn't know this is a Shattered Flame trading outpost, does he?"

Kat felt her body starting to react the information but sped her cognition up to the max and let her surprise happen in an instant, faster than any human should be able to see. She made sure that her muscles didn't twitch in the slightest, instead pushing her smile to the perfect place to seem natural. Kat expected to struggle with the last part, but some instinct guided her to the perfect place.

"No clue. And I will thank you for not spreading that information where Xiang can hear. The consequences would be... disastrous perhaps. Unless you can stop him?" said Kat hoping to get some idea of how strong Gaston might be.

Gaston just smiled and said "I'll be sure not to mention it"

I wonder if he knows what I was fishing for? I don't think I gave any tells, but I suppose even if he just wants to pretend to be a normal bartender, stopping a crazy person with a sword isn't likely an enjoyable way to spend his time.

"So what is it that you want then? It seems your goals don't align neatly with your summoner" said Gaston, trying to unwind his taught muscles.

I think this is where I play hard to get maybe? I can't just give him that. I mean I can... maybe, I don't really care that he knows but I need his information. "Now, Gaston, you can't just come out and ask a lady something like that" said Kat as she scoffed internally. *You can't ask a lady that. Perhaps when I meet one she'll be able to tell me why that is. Vivian might know!*

"How forward of me. I apologise Kat. Well, of course, does Xiang seek to attack the entirety of the Sect?" asked Gaston.

"That one will cost you something, even if it's just a minor bit of information" said Kat as she continued to rave internally about having no idea what she was doing.

"I can accept that, but you first" said Gaston.

Kat stared and Gaston, and he returned it in full. It was clear he wanted this information, or at least, Kat could see that he wanted to hear her speak first for some reason. *I have long since lost track of what is going on here. Just... hmm.* Kat let a little of her aura leak out, just subtly, and let it brush against Gaston, but never actually making contact with his frame. Still, she got a reaction. Gaston froze, for just a moment.

Kat grinned, with her full mouth, making sure to bring her smile to an uncomfortable level. She herself hadn't noticed yet, but her teeth had sharpened with her rank up. Only slightly, but they had a decidedly deadly bent to them now. "I'm not sure Xiang fully understands that the Shattered Flame sect... is well, shattered" said Kat "I'm convincing him to limit himself a bit, no sense in wasting so much of my time, but... he doesn't really know the difference"

Gaston tsked lightly. "I should have seen that coming I suppose. You even gave me that one for free earlier. Right, in that case, I suppose I shall comply. The Sect, is about as broken as it can be in the area. It's the major power of course, but... it's more like someone glued a bunch of annoyed cultivators together with enough force to keep it together. Trying to go after the whole thing is a fool's errand. None other than the branch that ordered the attack would even know it happened" said Gaston.

"Good to know I can try and direct him without misleading him. It's so much easier that way" said Kat. *As if I'd know.* "Would you happen to know which branch is responsible?"

Gaston sighed long and hard. He glanced around the area as if he wasn't sure they weren't being watched. This was actually confirmed when he said. "Are we being watched?"

Kat was taken aback a bit. Focusing on her hearing she mapped out the rest of the people in town. Based on what she could remember, nobody she could hear moving about seemed to be looking their way, as best she could tell. Or at the very least they weren't only looking this way. Ducking into meditation, she checked and found that it was just the three of them in the building.

"We're clear" said Kat

Gaston nodded, and pulled at the collar on his robes. He pulled it down until half of his chest was exposed. On it was a brand, that had clearly been burnt into his flesh that glowed with power. "I can't tell you that" said Gaston, flicking his eyes to the brand.

Kat almost couldn't stop herself from asking 'why not'. She was assumed it took her a few moments to realise the seal was magical in some and stopping him. It was so clear it bothered Kat it took so long. *On the other hand. I haven't been around magic enough to know.* "Of course. And if we happened to be continuing onwards, would you wish us well?" asked Kat

Gaston smiled but shook his head "I'm afraid it doesn't quite work like that. Too close I'm afraid"

Is he telling me that yes, I'm close to the compound? No it doesn't work like that because we're going the wrong direction, or just that the seal is good enough not to spoil that. "I understand" said Kat

"Will you be staying the night? I suppose you have no way to pay, and I'm afraid I can't allow you to stay otherwise" said Gaston.

Kat got the memo that it was another imposed limit. "That's fine, I can manage well enough on my own" she said standing up. It was clear that Gaston would start getting in trouble if she started asking more questions, perhaps deadly trouble. *Still, I wonder how he actually brokers information if that seal limits him. Maybe I just happen to ask the right... or is it wrong? Questions.*

Kat waved as she left the tavern behind, as she considered which roof she wanted to commandeer for the night. If there weren't any trees, a roof would do just fine. *novelNext.com*

Chapter 278: The Painter

As Kat left the building she turned and headed further into town. Except, she was stopped instantly when she ran into a small girl. Kat, being as strong as she was, hardly felt the impact but the girl was already falling backwards.

Kat's perception slowed as her tail started to move trying to grab onto the girl and prevent her from falling. Kat stared, taking in every detail of the poor person she'd run into. The girl was young, she looked to be around six or seven. She had a large sunhat that had a few small holes in it that let her hair been seen. Said hair was bright red, similar to Kat's own, though it was a bit darker, and looked more natural than Kat's own. Her eyes were a dark blue, and they were wide open in shock. Her mouth was clenched shut, and she was currently wearing what amounted to little more than a grey tarp with sleeves in it. Kat was initially concerned, until she noticed further details.

The tarp was covered in paint splatters, clearly unintentional and built up over time with use. In the girl's left hand was a bucket of paint, and in the other was a paintbrush and a second bucket, clueing Kat into the fact that the garment was likely to prevent other clothes being covered in paint.

What am I going to do now? I can't just wrap her up in my tail, or at least, I might not be able to do it safely without spilling the paint. I could move at max speed and grab both buckets but... would that break her fingers? I can 'take it easy' but if I'm moving so fast that alone might be too much for her joints.

Hmm, could I move behind and slide my tail around her hands, keeping them... straight enough? Maybe... Kat looked at the handles, and saw it would be close. Her tail was very flexible even at the tip... but she wasn't sure if it would bend before it cut into the girl's hands.

Why is this decision so hard! I mean... I guess I can just let the paint spill a bit? Kat started moving, shifting herself to the side before moving forward and around to the girl's back, Kat was careful not to make any too sudden movements directly in the girl's direction, moving at odd angles so that the air she displaced wouldn't cause the girl any problems.

Is my tail long enough to wrap around both buckets maybe? Kat measured with her eyes and found she should be able to make it. The girl wasn't exactly wide, so she should be able to manage it. Moving her hands into position to support the girl from the shoulders, Kat let her tail wrap around the paint buckets, taking care not to touch the girl.

Finally, time returned to normal and air exploded around Kat, ruffling the tarp the girl she was holding but doing her no damage. The paint stayed firmly locked in place and the girl fell into her arms stunned.

"Sorry about that" said Kat.

The painter girl whipped her head back and stared Kat in the eyes. The painter's glazed over for a split second before returning to normal and saying "Thank you pretty Nee-san"

Kat smiled and lifted the girl completely back on her own two feet. As Kat took a step back though her own eyes went wide. She hadn't noticed, so focused was she on helping the girl she had accidentally run into, but above her was a faint figure.

Despite looking faint, Kat could physically feel the power radiating off it. *Well if that isn't an angel, I sure as heck ain't a demon.* And Kat was right. The figure before her had long golden hair that simply disappeared at knee height on it. Its hair didn't so much end, as it phased out of existence, giving the impression it went somewhere else. The figure had three sets of pure white wings flaring out from its back that happily stretched into the wall of the building beside her.

The rest of the outfit the angel wore was the same colour as its hair. The figure's face was completely obscured, there was a faint haze around it preventing Kat from seeing it. *What! I have true sight... why can't I see it?* Oh, and it had completely blue skin. A pale blue that looked like the sky behind her.

"Ah- ah, yeah no problem" said Kat addressing the girl, as her brain restarted. Kat's gaze couldn't help flicking to the figure above the girl. "Can I ask for your name?" asked Kat, using her increased perception speed to move her eyes to the figure above the painter when she started the words 'your' and 'name'

"Oooh? The little demon can see them then?" said the angelic figure. Its? Her? voices were strange and somewhat distorted. It was like the echo of a choir Kat could only remember hearing. "Come find me later. You will know when"

The angelic figure spoke the instant Kat flicked her eyes at 'name' so that she could hear the voice during her slowed perception. Kat paled slightly, but with her already porcelain skin, it wasn't noticeable as the painter said "My name is Kikuchi, what's yours?"

"Kat. My name is Kat" said Kat (obviously) in response.

"Interesting. To see a demon, give its true name so freely in my presence. I suppose it is of no real consequence but it is a surprise to be sure" said the angel. At the same time as Kikuchi responded with "That's a nice name. You even saved my paint. Thank you very much"

Kat felt the overwhelming urge to pat the girl's head... but wasn't sure if she should, considering the angel that sat above it. That was until said angel gave a firm nod. Kikuchi smiled as Kat rubbed her head, then pouted for a split second before putting her paint buckets down and taking off her hat.

"Now you can pat my head properly" said Kikuchi.

I feel like I missed something but whatever. Thought Kat as she patted the girls head as requested. After about thirty seconds Kikuchi smiled, jumped at Kat to give her a hug, before grabbing her paint and taking off. "See you around!" shouted Kikuchi as she ran.

"Yes indeed" echoed the choir of the angel as it disappeared as well stuck above Kikuchi's head.

Well that was... something. Kat looked at the place Kikuchi had just been standing. She was unsure why she didn't take the time to think things through before the girl ran off around the corner, presumably to work on her half-finished mural.

I kind of want to watch her paint while I wait for whatever time that angel was telling me I should wait for but... It was clear they didn't want to talk NOW and I'm unsure if that means I shouldn't watch. Hmm, I'm going to get Lily's opinion. This is already crazy, and I can wait for a response.

"Hey Lily, I managed to find someone with... well I think it was an angel... it's super weird... I don't... honestly I don't understand what it was. I'm not sure if I should talk to it later. It's sounds like a church choir when it speaks and it's super weird."

Kat pushed the system to send the message off but...

Error. D.E.M.O.N.S cannot allow for the messaging of Angel locations.

Excuse me what? So you can confirm that was an angel?

D.E.M.O.N.S cannot confirm that was an Angel.

But... but you just said I couldn't send it because it was an 'Angel' so I mean... isn't that confirmation.

D.E.M.O.N.S must uphold The Treaty. What information User Kat gains from obeying it is no relevant to D.E.M.O.N.S.

Right... could I ask it for permission to send that letter then?

Loading...

Analysing Treaty of @#@!#(\$*%

Analysing...

Consideration being given...

Upon review, if User Kat request permission from the entity User Kat suspects is an Angel, and receives permission, the message may be sent.

Right... Kat moved off between the buildings and off into the plains away from the town. She looked over in the direction of the painter and whispered. "Can I tell me friends that I met you? I don't really know what I am doing"

Kat was somewhat hopeful she wouldn't receive an answer. She was a good distance away and hardly made any noise when she spoke. Alas, a response was quickly given "That is acceptable Kat"

Great. The super ghost angel has great hearing. Of course it does. So does that suffice to send the message?

Yes. Sending Message.

Thanks system. Thought Kat as she sent off the message. She just realised... there was a minor problem. *Lily won't be able to respond will she? She won't have permission to tell ME about the angel so it won't send.*

User Kat is correct.

Kat groaned and put her head in her hands.

Chapter 279: Painter

Kat did eventually get a reply from Lily, but not until it was much darker outside. It also didn't really contain anything she didn't know, and cited that she was in fact prevented from discussing the angel in question as Kat had guessed. There was however, a bit of unique information that she provided.

Angels are one of the only things that don't show up on the list at all. Demons are another one, and maybe some stuff I've never heard of, but when I asked, it was explained that anything that transformed someone into a demon unnaturally would drive them insane and then kill them. It did worry me a little, but apparently your transformation was natural? So... that worry was dealt with quickly. Anyway, unlike some races that only have halves or quarters listed, or just full blood races, there is nothing about angels.

I asked D.E.M.O.N.S expecting it to say that it couldn't tell me that. But it just said it was impossible to make anything into an angel. So... be careful? I guess is what I'm saying. If demons are real, and clearly so are angels, I have to imagine they are strong in similar ways. I don't know how strong exactly, but you can't take them lightly.

Hmm, that is rather interesting to note. So system, just to confirm you can't make an angel right?

It is impossible to turn anything else into an Angel.

*Right. Ok fair enough. Now... should I go to this meeting... I mean probably... and I wasn't really thinking about it before but... is that angel a good person? I mean... she? Let's go with she, seemed to have the

matching assets anyway. She, didn't seem hostile, and she sounds... nice if a bit weird... but I'm not some evil soul stealing demon.*

So what does that say about angels? Are they actually the bad guys? Nah, I doubt it. Imagine, a whole race of endless monsters. That would be horrible. These were the thoughts running through Kat's head immediately after she received Lily's message. None the less, Kat decided it was worth going. The worst that could happen was a bit of banishment, and she wasn't too scared.

There was a bit of idle wonder, if getting banished still lead you to being paid, but Kat didn't pursue that logic for long. Shortly after Lily's message, the darkness came in full, and Kat was left to admire the moon while she sat on top of the inn and waited for whatever signal the angel was going to give out.

It wasn't until exactly midnight, or near enough that it didn't matter, that Kat thought she understood the signal. The sound of a series of church organs was coming from one of the rooms in that other building across from her.

As Kat turned her gaze back to the ground, she saw a glowing light coming out of one of the windows. Giving her wings a light flap, Kat let herself glide over to the window in question and look in. Inside, she found a very small bedroom. It contained nothing more than a bed and a closet. On the bed in question was Kikuchi. She was sprawled out, taking up as much space as humanly possible on the bed.

The angel was sitting nearby on thin air and looking out the window at Kat. "Please come in. The window shouldn't be an obstacle, as it is not real at the moment" said the angel in all her choir's glory.

Kat looked at it strangely, but listened anyway. Stopping her wings, Kat grabbed onto the window sill and pulled herself in, going right through the bars as promised. She was secretly very grateful for that fact because if the window crossbars were still in place, she would have smashed right through them with her strength and momentum.

Once safely inside, Kat stood up and brushed herself off, despite the fact no dust would cling to her, it just felt right somehow. "Hello. Thank you for inviting me here, I think?" said Kat

"Please lower you voice. I do not wish to wake Kikuchi. Also, for the purpose of this... please call me Heshi" said Heshi with the slight giggling of church bells.

Well that's weird. Kat could feel the name resting upon her mind. She could feel her translation ability trying to make it into another word to let Kat in on the joke, but it was as if something was preventing her. *Then again, with the an- I mean Heshi in front of me, that might not be too farfetched.*

"Sure thing Heshi" said Kat more quietly.

Heshi nodded. As she did so her hair somehow remained a constant length, disappearing more at the end as her head was lowered, and returning when it was raised. "I have called you here to ascertain your mission, and potentially provide help" said Heshi.

Kat's eyes threatened to narrow but she forced her perception to speed up and silenced the motion. Nonetheless, in that brief moment of stopped time Kat was certain she saw an even briefer smile flicker across Heshi's face. "Why help so readily?" asked Kat

Heshi tilted her head, as if not expecting that answer. "Very strange... hmmm... yes I see. All right then. I shall bless you with this small piece of knowledge. I am an Angel" when she said the word, the choir seemed to double in voices, but not in volume "and yet I am more limited than even yourself. The power we wield is simply too great. As such, we split off fragments, of which I am one. These fragments assist certain individuals in certain tasks to help maintain the stability of dimensions" explained Heshi.

Kat further tried to suppress her reaction but found herself gulping anyway. *That's... that's rather impressive.* "So... why does that mean I'm allowed to get help from you?" asked Kat

"I have ascertained that your presence will be a boon to this dimension. Only in a small way of course, but it takes me almost no effort to speak to someone who can gaze upon me without additional effort. The fact you aren't a quivering mess on the floor is testament to that" said Heshi.

Wait what! I... why am I fine? System why am I fine?

User Kat's true sight is likely responsible. Further study would be required. Further study cannot be authorised. Answer cannot be authorised.

Well... just great. "Ok... thanks? I think? But how do you know that whatever I'm going to do is beneficial?" asked Kat

"While I am not capable of truly seeing the future, even as my full self. This fragment is more than enough to take in the information nearby and ascertain what actions you will take in the future" said Heshi.

"Um... if you know what I'm going to do in the future why didn't you know I'd be here? Because that's sorta what it sounds like" said Kat before she could convince herself to hold her tongue.

Heshi smiled. "That is a simple matter, and... well perhaps it is not common knowledge. Hmmm" Heshi stopped speaking to stare at Kat. Seconds passed, but they felt like minutes, and were perhaps an eternity from Heshi's perspective. "Right, it seems it will be fine to tell you. That system of yours is greater than this fragment. I cannot deduce who will be summoned from a ritual. I knew that one would happen, but it was hard to plan around, as I did not know what or who would answer"

"Oh... um... right... thank you? I think..." said Kat.

"It is of no consequence. Now, the information you seek. If you continue passed this town for three further days at walking pace, when you stop for camp at the end of the third day, you should then head directly east. At this point, you will decide to run, and make it to the compound that you are looking for in only one day. Inside will be... no it seems that is all I can tell you" said Heshi

"What do you mean?" asked Kat

"I mean to say that I must say no more for the ideal outcome of this arrangement. I apologise as calculating the actions of demons is hard, especially when they are capable of speaking to me directly. Every word I say changes the calculations a bit" said Heshi.

"So... is that all the future is? A set of predestined calculations?" asked Kat

Heshi shook her head "Of course not. However, with sufficient enough data it can be plotted out exceptionally reliably especially if you can take additional outcomes into account and plan for them as

well. It is easier when working in broad strokes of course, or when working within the very immediate future. For example, a human might what decide to eat breakfast, but in many ways the choice was made before they went to sleep. These things can easily be changed though" explained Heshi

Chapter 280: Run Boy Run

After that last bit of information, Kat was dismissed, and Heshi vanished. Well, Heshi teleported so that she was looking down at Kikuchi, and Kat could still see her, but after a short staring contest, it was clear she wasn't saying anymore.

Kat considered taking the floor nearby as her bed, but decided that would be rude and she didn't want to see what Kikuchi would say when she woke up and found a random demon on the floor. As such Kat climbed back onto the roof. It was flat enough that she didn't slide off. There was still a bit of surprise considering how fast dirt and grime slide off, but it was clear enough that there was a more selective power.

Kat let herself relax completely and tried to get some sleep instead of just meditation. However, it seemed that no matter how hard she tried; she would always end up in the lake. Eventually, when she relaxed a bit more, she felt her mind sinking into the waters and spreading out. As this happened, she forgot that she was trying to see if she could still sleep and let her mind instead spread out into the water.

There were faint ripples, signalling other people, but they weren't moving, just disrupting the water nearby. As such, Kat, in her dispersed state didn't feel the need to act on this at all. This was how Kat passed the time peacefully... until she was rudely awakened early in the morning.

"HEY! DEMON IT'S TIME TO LEAVE" shouted Xiang, though Kat didn't recognise it at the time.

From Kat's perspective, it was like someone dropped a massive stone into her water. Kat's mind instantly snapped together and her eyes shot open. Flames leaked from every limb including her wings and horns as she made it to her feet.

Then the words caught up with her, and she realised what was going on. As she looked towards the centre of the road, she heard a clamouring from below her. A moment later someone yelled out a response "SOME PEOPLE ARE TRYING TO SLEEP"

"WELL SOME OF US HAVE THINGS TO DO" Xiang shouted back. In response a pot flew out of the window aimed straight for his face. Only Xiang's reaction speed stopped it from colliding with him.

Kat's eyes went wide as she watched the dumbfounded look on his face. That was when the other utensils started flying. Other people must have gotten in on the idea and were now hurling things from the windows nonstop. It wasn't much with just a person, but with a whole building full of angry residents it was more than enough.

Xiang bolted off at his full speed, hurrying out towards the exit of the outpost. Kat finally couldn't hold in the laughter anymore and broke out in giggles on the roof. When she recovered enough to stand back up, she looked down the road and saw Xiang still running out of town at max speed and broke out into laughter again.

I can still catch up. It should be fine. Thought Kat in between fits of laughter. When she finally recovered. The first thing Kat did was send off a message to everyone detailing what just happened. She even sent it to Minor, with a very brief explanation of what was happening, and insisting she was a much better summoner than Xiang... even if it was her mother that did the summoning.

Well, I suppose I should catch up to him. Jumping down, Kat looked over the random cooking utensils on the ground. Should I... yeah, yeah, I should. I feel somewhat responsible for bringing that idiot into town. Plus, if I do this first I don't have to deal with him for another few minutes.

Kat took a deep breath before speeding up her thoughts and flooding her limbs with demonic energy. First, she grabbed all the pots and pans, putting them to the side and stacked together for easy access. She left a few of them unstacked to be used for the next stage, which was picking up the large number of wooden spoons before dumping them into the waiting pot. Next, she sorted out the distinct cutlery sets where she could. Most of them lacked designs and were too hard to pick out, but there was one that had a nice floral engraving on it, so she put in their own pan.

After that, there were a few random plates... that did not survive impact. Kat decided to sweep them up together and put them to the side. She left them because she was worried, she'd be blamed for breaking them. Then she remembered that she was about to leave town and likely never return, so she might as well do a bit more good and just clean it up.

Finally, Kat picked up the other random items. A few rocks, a hammer, a couple books, a set of wine glasses that somehow managed to remain intact, a metal teapot, and a few other things. Once they were distributed, Kat took a glance over at the neat piles of random stuff and then up at the windows. Should could see various faces, ranging from confusion, to joy and even on with anger.

Kat just shrugged and took off, making sure to keep her speed down until she made it out of the town before breaking into a full sprint. *Hmm, I wonder if I should fly... nah. Xiang might not know I can just yet. I mean sure, if he took a second to think about it he probably knows... but I'm not sure he could manage that.*

In the end, Kat caught up to Xiang in less than five minutes. She found him on the side of the road huffing and puffing and trying his best not to pass out. When she skidded to a stop, Xiang glared up at her but didn't say anything.

Kat decided, it was only right she act with dignity, and be the bigger person. So she just stood there staring down at Xiang with a big grin her face. "Why... why weren't... you ready... to leave" said Xiang puffing between words.

"You never gave me a time to leave, or a clock" said Kat in a completely innocent voice.

"What about when I was attacked. Why didn't you defend me? What about my honour?" asked Xiang, slightly recovered, but still puffing.

"Defend you from a bunch of random household objects? Surely you aren't so weak?" said Kat *Yes, focus on how it's you who is in the wrong please. Why should I have to defend you from your own mistakes?*

"Then... I must return and show them my superiority" said Xiang trying to stand tall and stumbling.

Kat almost paled at those words. Luckily she was already so pale, the difference was negligible. *That is not where I wanted him to go... um... um... maybe... I hate that I'm about to say this but.* "Is it right for a cultivator to go and attack civilians? You say you are showing your superiority by going back and attacking them, but it's a massive waste of our time. Surely your time is more valuable than that right?" asked Kat praying it would distract him.

"Yes. Yes you're right. They are beneath me and I have no need to waste my time educating peasants. Still... we don't yet have a destination..." said Xiang

Ok... I can give myself 70% marks for that. Managed to stop him attacking people, but now he's calling them peasants. Which... might be actually true on a technical level depending on how the laws work here... so maybe I should let that slide. "Don't worry. I found the location we are looking for. It is down this road some days travel, then a short trek through the woods" said Kat

"Great job minion. I see that you used your time wisely. Congratulations. I might just reward you for your efforts once this is all over" said Xiang taking a step forward... or well... back towards the town.

Kat sighed. *Whatever I'm getting paid. It's not enough.* Kat put her hand on his shoulder "That's the wrong way" said Kat

Xiang performed an about-face, without even acknowledging Kat's presence and headed off down the road. Kat just sighed again. *At least he is heading the correct way this time.* Kat started walking behind him.

Of course. They only made it about ten minutes before Xiang needed to take a break. He was back to trying to regain his breath. Clearly, he hadn't actually recovered from his run properly. *This is going to be a looong day I suppose. Hopefully he has the patience to make sure it doesn't turn into a long week as he tries to rush it like an idiot.*

After about a minute of recovery, Xiang pulled out a bottle of water, took a long swig and then started walking again. Clearly trying to ignore the fact that he was completely exhausted just a few seconds ago. *It's gonna be a long week isn't it. I can only hope that angel knew what it was talking about.*