

## DEMONS 281

### Chapter 281: Random Encounter

It was late on the third day. It wasn't quite time to pack up completely, but it was quickly approaching. During the journey, Kat managed to ride the high of laughing at Xiang for the first two days, and on the third she was able to keep a mellow happiness at the whole thing. She had dropped a few hints for Xiang about limiting damage at the compound, but she wasn't sure if he was listening. He certainly hadn't replied yet.

On Lily's end, apparently their list got more complicated. Some pointed questions sent to the system revealed that while she did actually have the complete list of races she could potentially be changed into, not all of them were available at Kat's current rank, and she wasn't able to find out exactly what rank would be required.

This required Lily to take the whole second day to restructure her spreadsheet to include what transformation would need to wait. Apparently, it wasn't actually too much effort, as for the most part she could ask the system about entire groups of races and then separate them out further until she had all of them categorised correctly.

Still, Kat received a lot of thanks for sharing the story of Xiang getting run out of town. Minor was a bit more hesitant to share her glee over someone's misfortune. So she dressed it all up in a bunch of fancy language which boiled down to 'it was amusing'.

As the second day wore on, trees started to sprout up occasionally, they were distinctly different to the previous forest and seemed to be only half the size of the others, but with even more vines.

Early on the third day, once the forest started to close in on the path and become a true forest again, Kat had to tune out the sounds of animals in the surroundings. They were exceptionally prevalent in this new forest. There were birds, some smaller squirrel-like creatures Kat didn't get a proper look at, and a few others she could vaguely hear.

The noise was a little disorientating, so Kat was glad to find that with a bit of concentration she could limit her hearing. It was awkward to do, like flexing an underused muscle, but it was distinctly possible. Combining this with a good helping of focus on other things, it was almost calming.

Of course, sadly this meant that when Kat found herself surrounded it was a complete surprise. A line of ten men, in front and behind, weapons drawn, with another three behind each line with bows. Each of them was in ragged looking clothes that seemed to have more in common with a sack of potatoes than anything resembling an outfit. Still, their weapons looked well-kept enough, shiny steel swords with a few axes added in.

Finally, behind that was a guy a head taller than the mooks. He had a scar over his left eye and a shaved head. From where Kat was standing, she couldn't see if he had any weapons on his hip, but she assumed he must have something. His outfit was in better condition than the others. It was clean leather, if a bit old, showing signs of wear and tear, along with some gashes around the edges.

"What have we here fellas? Looks like a dame and her bodyguard. One with a rare bloodline too" said the bandit leader.

Xiang growled "She has no bloodline, she isn't even human. And who are you to say I'm just a bodyguard?" \*Why do I get the feeling he's just made this worse?\*

"Ah, I see, some trumped up noble scion and his demi-human slave. That makes about as much sense I suppose. I ain't ever seen anything with horns and a tail like that... but... I suppose all the better" said the bandit.

\*He made it worse.\*

Xiang let out a wry chuckle "What makes you think it'll be that simple.." said Xiang drawing his sword. As he got halfway, the bandit interrupted again. "Stop." Xiang halted "Now... we are honorable gentlemen. We just want you to empty your pockets and hand over your slave, then you can be on your way. But... if you want to attack, we don't mind taking your life as well"

\*Should I just tell him I'm not a slave? Would that help? Is he just as stupid as Xiang?\*

Kat looked down at her outfit and back up at the bandit leader. \*I mean really. This kimono is fantastic quality. It's better than Xiang's dodgy ensemble. Why would they think I'm a slave?\*

Kat opened her mouth to try and explain but Xiang cut in. "Are you sure you want to do this? My slave is more than capable of taking you all on itself"

Kat felt her eye twitch. \*Not only am I a slave... I don't even merit a HER?\*

"If that's how you want to do this" said the bandit with fake despair. It was clear to even Xiang he was getting mocked for once.

Kat saw Xiang's muscles tense, he was about to draw his sword. \*Well, I'm not going to let this go.\*

Kat let her energy explode out of her, focusing her power on her skin. Purple flames exploded from everywhere, shooting pillar of fire up around her and starting to freeze the ground.

Kat felt her flames settle into her control as she kept them around herself, keeping expenditure low. Diverting a bit of the intense flow to her voice box Kat began to speak. "Now... I'm a rather patient person, and forgiving too... but you lot" Kat turned to glare at the bandits, letting more concentrated flame leak from her eyes before sneaking back into her mouth to recycle the energy. "Seem to think attacking is a great idea. Sadly, I don't have anything valuable on me, and I don't feel particularly ready to hand anything over"

Xiang started to grin widely, but Kat turned her gaze on him next. "And YOU!" Kat's voice, distorted and curled its way into Xiang's ears. "I was willing to let that slave remark go. It's not the stupidest thing you've said recently. But IT? Really? A slave and not even a person? I feel like maybe I should beat you up first before moving onto this bandits"

Xiang gulped, and took an involuntary step backwards, keeping his front to Kat. The bandits surrounding Kat all paled and started to shiver. It was clear they were terrified. Only the leader at the back showed any sign of remaining calm.

"So you can put off a bit of fire. Just a trick of the eyes" said the bandit leader with a calm Kat was surprised to see. So, she slammed her foot into the road, and shoved some energy along with it.

The road cracked, and ice exploded from the impact crater, coating most of the area between Kat and the bandits with a thin layer of ice. "Do you really want to do this?" growled Kat, her enhanced voice lending extra intimidation.

"Just attack you idiots. She can't take all of you!" shouted the leader before bringing his arm down. Kat watched as the front line of bandits charged at her. She quickly retracted her flames, unsure if she could protect people she actively wanted to harm from the effect.

Sadly, the bandit leader wasn't keen on accepting her kindness "See! The bitch is already flagging! Strike her now!" \*This is what I get for being nice.\* Kat took in a deep breath and prepared to deal with the forces arrayed around her.

Xiang acted first though. He started to glow faintly then rocketed off. He slid between the rows of bandits before slamming straight into the leader. Kat watched as the bandit responded in kind, bringing out his own sword and matching Xiang blow for blow. Kat quickly turned her eyes away from the scene though, focusing on her own forces.

\*Now... these guys aren't magic wielding wizards, or cultivators. Just some pedestrian bandits. Plus, we have no Thyme to heal them up later... so... let's just be a bit careful with these guys. Just in case after all.\*

Kat stepped forward, still supercharged with energy. To the bandits it looked like Kat had teleported. Bringing her arm in for a punch, Kat struck at the nearest bandit's arm to test her strength... it was still overkill. As her fist came into contact with the arm Kat could hear it shattering despite the lack of power behind it. Quickly pausing her motion Kat pulled back...

Though that wasn't the end of the attack. Kat had struck the rightmost bandit with her attack. He went flying as Kat pulled back, colliding with three other bandits toppling them to the ground.

\*Shit. That was already too much power... why? Are they so weak?\*

It was then Kat realised as she thought and the bandits were standing completely still... that she was already moving so far beyond human speed that just the slight transfer of momentum was enough to shatter bones. \*Oh... right let's try a tap.\*

## **Chapter 282: Another One Bites the Dust**

Kat looked around the battlefield to plan her next move. Xiang and the bandit leader were clashing. Both had a soft white light surrounding them. They were moving in slow motion to Kat's eyes, but considering everyone else wasn't moving at all, it was rather impressive.

Turning her eyes back to the bandits. The three with bows in the back, were slowly turning around, likely trying to assist their leader. \*Well, I can't let them attack Xiang. He might be an idiot, but he's keeping the leader busy so this might be fine.\* Kat kept up her speed and appeared next to the line of bowman.

They had no chance to react before Kat reached out and tapped one on the shoulder. She made sure to stop herself complete and apply the barest of force with her finger... it didn't reduce the impact as much as Kat wanted. In fact, it hardly reduced it at all. Kat once again heard the crack of bones and the bandit went fly straight into other two bandits next to him, sending them flying.

Kat winced, before turning back around, letting Xiang 'guard' her back. Kat scoffed at the thought and moved back beside the seven remaining bandits from the front. \*Ok. Now how do I want to do this? Even a tap is too much because of how fast I'm moving. I could drop the increased perception and

speed... but at the same time... I'm not sure how dangerous these guys are to Xiang. They seem a bit too use to killing, and I'm pretty sure I can see dried blood on their outfits.\*

Kat considered her options for a few more moments while in suspended time. Xiang and the leader were clashing still, and Kat could see the bandits making the smallest of moves in reaction. Mostly just turning their heads in the direction the people she attacked had come from. Of course, those two sets of three were currently suspended in midair. Kat was tempted to catch them and soften the fall... but they seemed to have lost most of their momentum slamming into the extras.

Eventually, Kat's thoughts picked up another thing to test. \*What about my demonic energy trick that lets me pick up things I really shouldn't. That should let me disperse the attack throughout their entire bodies and hopefully not shatter anymore bones. The only risk is if the dispersed force is still enough to cause serious damage to say... the brain or something.\*

Kat lined herself up once again, stepping carefully around the falling bandits, not wanting to cause them even more damage. She charged her energy towards the end of her finger and lined the bandit up with the rest of his teammates.

Kat let her finger hover just a hair above the bandit's arm. She watched as the energy went out of her finger and coated the bandit faster than even she could see, no matter the advanced perception. Satisfied that the bandit was covered, Kat once again got ready to tap the bandit. Keeping her whole body completely still, Kat moved her hand so it was just barely above his arm, then lowered her pointer finger just a fraction more.

The impact was instantaneous. The bandit was flung sideways, and the film of demonic energy unraveled and slunk back into Kat's finger. After that instant though, there was no awful cracking, and he hadn't exactly moved that far.

Kat stood back to take a good look and saw that he was about to fly into his companions. Kat smiled and checked her reserves, purely out of habit, to find them two-thirds drained. Kat's eyes shot wide open. \*Holy shit ok... what the hell?\* Kat then took a round and saw the barely moving figures, and realised she had to be moving at a ridiculous speed for any of this to work. Shit. Checking her reserves again, Kat could see them burning away before her eyes.

\*Ok let's get to work quickly I don't want to be out of energy.\* Kat moved to the last few people that were in the first line of bandits. She brought out her tail for speed and hit the three furthest to the right to ensure that all the bandits would be taken out. She made sure to let her film of energy settle over them before tapping, and then moved onto the row behind them.

Kat didn't have time to take it slowly, and so she shuffled through them as quickly as she could. Spreading out her two arms and tail, Kat waited for her film of energy to appear before giving them a slight tap and moving on.

It took only a few relative seconds for Kat to get through the other thirteen bandits that had shown up behind her. Kat breathed out and let her mind return to human limits. Once she did there was as grand explosion of air all around her. If the bandits hadn't been tapped, they would have likely gone flying from that alone.

Winds whipped at Xiang's outfit, trying to throw him off his game, luckily, this affected the bandit leader as well, putting them on even footing. Minimal dirt went flying, on account of just how clean the road actually was, so there were no additional projectiles.

The bandits all went flying. The first line of them were thrown to the left side of the road all in a neat pile, and only a few more odd crunching sounds. The back row was all blown back and out. They each hit the ground hard, rolling once or twice before settling onto the road, hardly moving.

Kat felt her breath hitch for a second before her ears picked up the faint sound of breathing coming from the entire group the best she could tell. This let her calm down and face the battle raging between Xiang and the bandit leader.

Their once bright white light was starting to dull on both sides. Kat watched as Xiang got an attack in past the bandit leader's guard... only for it to collide with the white light, turning it into nothing more than a grazing cut as it slid off him.

They were moving fast, perhaps slightly faster than the human eye could see, but Kat found it easy to follow their movements even without the mental acceleration. Checking her reserves for confirmation Kat found them hovering just barely above empty.

\*I've got... at most maybe one attack left in me. A few moments of bullet time maybe. I can't do anything else though, and summoning any more fire would knock me out completely.\* Kat watched the fight before her, keeping her attention on the pair, and it seemed Xiang was winning.

It wasn't by a lot, and Kat really didn't know enough about swordplay and combat to tell who was winning that way... but the bright light that surrounded the two was fading faster around the bandit. That was something she could easily tell with the power of her eyes alone.

The fight continued on. Kat didn't really know what she was seeing despite it happening in front of her. Oh sure, her eyes could keep up, but they did a bunch of feints, strange foot movements, and Kat was pretty sure Xiang nearly bit the bandit leader at one point, but she was more focused on their arms at the time so she can't be sure, even going back in her memories.

Then, Xiang took a step backwards, and tripped on the cracks in the road. The same cracks she'd just made earlier when she struck her foot down into the road. Kat's eyes widened, as she readied herself to go in.

The bandit leader's eyes gleamed, his sword arm coming down, straight towards Xiang's midsection. Xiang's arms flailed as he fell, then all of a sudden, his eyes went hard. Kat paused her dash before it got started and watched a second longer.

As the bandit's arm came down, so too, did Xiang's 'flailing' arm come up, sword still in hand. Xiang bent further backwards letting the bandit's lunge go over the top of his chest, brushing against his white aura.

Xiang's sword collided directly with the bandit's arm. His aura flickered and died, before Xiang's sword bit hard into his arm. This didn't last long however, as once the light died the bandit went flying. His body spun around mostly in place, as it collapsed to the ground. This seemed to be some sort of signal as the light around Xiang started to splutter, and the kid went down on one knee to start drawing in big gulping breaths of air.

Kat smiled slightly seeing that Xiang was mostly unharmed. There was, of course, a few cuts on his attire, but that was nothing major, and Kat didn't consider it worth mentioning. Turning around, she made her way over to the pile of bandits that included those she first tested on, hoping they weren't dead. She was pretty sure she could hear their breathing... but better safe than sorry.

### **Chapter 283: No Words**

Kat was standing next to the most injured of all the bandits. On one hand, he was still breathing. On the other, he certainly wasn't conscious. On the tail, his arm was not in good condition. \*Hmm... on one hand that is a good deal of blood... on the other... he doesn't seem to be losing any more blood?\*

To be safe Kat grabbed both sides of the bandit's shirt ripping it in two and then tied it around the arm where it was thoroughly destroyed. \*Surely that's fine right? Let's go with that.\*

Kat found that she just didn't really care all that much. The guy was alive, and they did attack people for a living with swords. \*It's not like I have medical training either, so I can't exactly fix this up any better anyway. I feel like I should maybe feel a bit worse about this though...\* Kat shrugged and moved onto the other bandits that she had attacked first.

The guy that she poked with her finger already had a nasty bruise... but he wasn't bleeding anywhere she could see. \*Guess I can call him good? I really have no idea what I'm looking for here. I mean... that's a nasty bruise and I'm certain I heard the bone crack... maybe it isn't broken just fractured though?\*

She heard a groan from the pile of bodies. \*Yeah yeah everyone's a critic.\* Kat quickly checked the rest of them for damage. They all seemed to be breathing... and the ones she struck with her energy field around them seemed to be dotted with bruises in random areas... but everyone was certainly still alive, and Kat found she could accept that.

That was, until she heard Xiang scream out. Kat whipped her head around and was shocked at what she found. Xiang had clearly just finished standing up, except now he was twisted over like a pretzel with a sword sticking into the leather he wore across his chest. The bandit leader clearly had taken his defeat well.

Kat could almost see how it happened. A quick overhead strike from behind that was really more of a side strike coming from a halfway standing bandit. Xiang was dropping, and seemed to be in pain but that wasn't the real surprise, it was the retaliation.

Xiang's sword had come down hard on the bandit leader. It was unclear what Xiang had been aiming for. Perhaps it was to intercept the bandit's sword, or maybe landing his own cut across the bandit's chest...

But for the kneeling bandit it was a death sentence. Xiang's slightly glowing sword went straight through the bandit's neck and the body collapsed where it stood. Kat let her mouth drop open. \*Well what the fuck am I supposed to do here.\*

It was shortly after that thought that Xiang collapsed as well. He at least was clearly still breathing though he made no effort to stand up. Kat swiftly walked over to him and asked "Are you alright?" with genuine emotion in her voice for once.

So of course, Xiang didn't take it well at all. "Don't patronize me demon. It's just a flesh wound" said Xiang.

Kat's eyes narrowed. \*I finally try to show you some concern and now you think I'm patronizing you, you little shit? You just killed a man in... well I guess it wasn't cold blood because he attacked first, and then he attacked after the fighting was over but... I... I don't know how to feel about this to be honest.\*

Kat turned her back on Xiang and walked away as she tried to get herself in order. Things didn't exactly feel real. She'd been attacked by bandits, honest to god bandits... and now one of them lay dead on the ground behind her. Kat felt her throat go dry, and she purposefully looked away from anything.

\*Fuck.\* Thought Kat, and let the words hang in her mind. She wasn't normally one for real swearing, it just never seemed necessary. Until now. \*Fuck.\* Kat really wasn't sure what else to say either. Her emotions seemed to have decided that leaving temporarily was the best course of action, and she just felt... normal was wrong but... close... like she was slightly left of centre.

A groan sounded out behind her as Xiang brought himself to his feet. She purposefully didn't turn to him, but he spoke anyway. "Let's continue for a bit. Get away from them" said Xiang.

Kat nodded, and started walking, pointedly not looking behind her, or at Xiang. She kept an ear on him to make sure he was following, but nothing more than that. Kat just couldn't find it in herself to look at his gash and a reminder of what had just happened.

They walked in silence. Even the steps on the cold stone bricks seemed to have been halved in volume. Kat could still hear the sounds of the forest, and knew it wasn't just her hearing dulling. The mood was somber.

Eventually, Xiang spoke out. "I need to rest now demon. We camp here"

Kat bit her lip but paused. \*Is this ok? The angel said three days of walking... and I guess I've somewhat managed that... but not completely. Did the angel know about the bandits? Does it matter?\*

Kat turned to find Xiang moving off the road. Once he made it to the first tree, he slumped down against it and started looking through his storage. \*Dammit. I just wish I had a sign this was the right way or something!\*

"YES" shouted Xiang.

Kat froze, looking at the boy who wasn't bleeding as much as she'd expect from a chest wound. \*Did... was that what I think it was?\* Xiang pulled out a box from his storage item and began to open it. Seeing he was occupied Kat turned around and sunk back into her thoughts. \*I mean... there is no possible way right? Sure Hashi could guess our walking speed but bandit attacks and even the outcome should be beyond anything's capability right?\*

"NO!!" shouted Xiang slamming his hands into the ground.

"What?" asked Kat, keeping her voice from shaking. \*Ok fine angel or God, or whoever Hashi was. I admit it. You win.\*

"I found a lunchbox that I forgot I packed. I was looking forward to some good food for once... but it's all empty. I must have eaten it already" said Xiang.

Kat opened her mouth. \*What.\* "What?"

"I just explained it to you? What else do you want?" asked Xiang

"I just... I thought it was a box of medicine? You know for your chest wound?" asked Kat

"I'll be fine. It's just a light gash" said Xiang smiling, as he did so, he twisted a bit clearly breaking the scab over his chest that had formed and a bit of blood dripped out. Kat narrowed her eyes but decided that if he didn't want help, she wouldn't offer.

So, Kat nodded and jumped to the top of the nearest tree. It required a bit of help from her wings, but not much. Settling in, Kat hoped to let the bottled emotions she was sure she had wash over her... but nothing was forthcoming. \*Fuck.\*

Kat sat there, unmoving for over an hour, completely still. At a few points in time she slipped into meditation, but it always shattered before her mind could spread out and relax. The first sign of movement from Kat came after an hour and a half... and she wasn't even responsible for it.

She was so still that a bird came in to land on her unmoving form. Kat felt the corner of her mouth trying to rise up at the sight but she forcibly pulled it down. \*I don't think I should be enjoying nature right now. Then again. I guess I don't really know what I should be doing at all.\*

\*I... I guess I'll send off a message to everyone?\*

Kat looked at the short message she'd written out. It had taken her another thirty minutes just to eek out a few words. It seemed so wrong to write anything else. Despite the fight being such a huge thing... all that was said was.

"Someone is dead. Xiang killed them"

Kat bit her lip and dismissed the message. \*I can't just tell them that. I mean... there is so much context. Xiang didn't have a choice? No... well... I mean... maybe he did but... dammit. I didn't see what happened... and that's part of the problem. I should have been paying attention... but everyone... well I THOUGHT everyone was out cold.\*

Kat chewed the words over in her mind. She still didn't know what to think... and that only made the fact that she had to report in to everyone back on Earth even worse. \*I don't think I can hide something like this... I don't think Sylvie should know... I need someone to talk about it... I don't know what to do.\*

## **Chapter 284: A Few Words**

Kat didn't sleep. She didn't meditate either. When the early morning came around and Xiang woke up, Kat just informed him he could go back to sleep. Kat had sent off a message to everyone, just to let them know she was fine. It might have been stretching the truth a bit, but it wasn't a lie certainly.

Kat didn't really know where her thoughts wanted to go. They seemed to hover around the events of yesterday, but do everything they could not to address the elephant in the room. Kat, at one point after insisting Xiang get more sleep, tried to force herself to confront the problem. She replayed the scene over in her mind half a dozen times... but it didn't really help.

It didn't hurt either. If asked, Kat would have said it was like watching a movie. Sure, she was watching someone die over and over again. But she didn't know them, and she just couldn't find it within herself



to considering it important. \*I have no idea how to deal with that fact though. Is it strange that my mind is telling me I should be feeling worse about something? I'm not sure?\*

To compound the feeling of unease, Kat felt, for the first time, like she could actually eat something. Sure she could always eat, but now there was that faint desire she remembers having back when she was human. It wasn't a gnawing or all-consuming hunger, more like a gentle reminder sitting on the edge of her mind, urging her to get around to it... eventually.

\*Hey system? How badly do I actually need food? I haven't eaten for... two weeks now and I think I'm just now starting to feel it. I've got at least a few more days here though? Should I be looking for food?\*

Unknown. Based on data already collected about other similar demons it is suspected that User Kat can continue operating at peak levels for another two weeks without issues.

\*Oh... that's... well that's a lot better than I thought. If that's the case though... is there an issue with eating too frequently? I mean, I don't let my figure bother me too much... but I have no idea what would even constitute an acceptable level of exercise if I started to get fat and I'd hate to have my weight slow me down.\*

User Kat is likely fine. Consumed food is burned by demonic energy and absorbed into the body. Excess is expelled through breathing normally. Breaking down the entirety of food means most of it can be used. Demons require only minimal nourishment outside of Demonic Energy unless they are Gluttony related.

\*Good to know?\* With that Kat let her mind continue to wander until Xiang got up for real. After he pulled himself out of his sleeping bag and had yet more crackers. \*Seriously, how is he able to just eat those? Surely he needs something else right?\* Kat asked about his wounds.

"I should be fine. As a cultivator it is only a minor issue to damage my body in such a superficial way. Still, that bandit had a bit of qi on his sword at the time, and it will take me some time to remove that. I suspect I shall be healed before the end of the day even if walking for so long will drain me somewhat" said Xiang.

\*Huh... that's... wow, he answered like a normal human being. Who are you and what have you done with Xiang?\* Despite her joking thoughts Kat nodded "We need to turn into the forest here. Apparently if we continue in that direction, we will reach the compound" said Kat.

\*An interesting note, is that this confirms Xiang is using that weird energy to keep up with us even when we can't see him glowing. I don't know what the broader implications of that might be right now, but I feel like I should keep it in mind.\*

"Ok" said Xiang, pulling himself up to his feet. He winced slightly, presumably as the wound gave him a sharp dose of pain. Kat turned around to head off into the forest, and she felt her smile twitch. \*Should I do something about? I mean... he hasn't and surely someone who lives a life here would no better than I would about first aid... the again they don't have the benefits of modern medicine... but they do have magic qi shit to deal with it, so maybe he does know what he's doing.\*

It took Kat two steps to remember, that this was Xiang she was thinking about, he wouldn't know careful if it smashed him in the face. \*Should I ask? Yes... yes I think I should.\* "Will you need to bind your wound Xiang?" asked Kat as she walked, assuming she could just stop if necessary.

"This? No, of course not. This is just a scratch" said Xiang, sounding so sure of himself Kat was almost willing to believe him.

Of course, a quick glance backward dissuaded her from that course of action. Even her brief glimpse let her see that his chest was bleeding and soaking into his outfit... which still had a massive hole in it.

\*There is no way that's in any way acceptable. Maybe... MAY BE it is when you don't have qi injected into, if I take Xiang at his word about that anyway... but clearly this particular wound isn't fine, or at least, he's bleeding a lot and it might be a problem.\*

"Are you sure? That's an awful lot of blood-" \*Do I say it? Keep up the act? Yeah might as well throw it in\* "for a human to be losing" said Kat

Xiang glanced down to his chest and saw the clearly blood-soaked leather. "It's fine" said Xiang, but it was in his overconfident voice Kat now recognised as his act... or maybe he did believe it, Kat wouldn't actually bet either way.

"Right... but if you pass out then I want you to know I helped as much as I could with your revenge and you died to your own foolishness" said Kat. \*I hope this convinces him to look at it. I really don't think that amount of blood is healthy, and I'm pretty sure even these few extra steps have caused him to pale noticeably.\*

"I-" Xiang said, but stopped and frowned. Looking down at his outfit, Xiang ran his fingers over the wound and winced as he poked said open wound like an idiot. "I guess if it worries you" said Xiang

\*Idiot.\* Thought Kat shaking her head, but she stopped. Xiang then proceeded to take off his armour for the first time. Kat had to suppress a wince as the layers came off and he had to pull open the scab on his chest and separate the clothing layers from all the dried blood. It was when Xiang got to the shirt layer that Kat's eyes narrowed more seriously.

Xiang had a plain grey training shirt that was likely once white. That however wasn't the issue. The issue was that a good chunk of said shirt was IN the wound. Kat felt like slapping the boy. \*I should have known really. I haven't seen him take off his armour even to sleep, so why would he take off his shirt.\*

Kat suppressed a grimace as Xiang realised the issue and started to extract the various fibres of cloth from his now certainly bleeding wound. \*Well... what the hell do I do about this? I know we need some water...\* "Xiang do you have enough water to wash your wounds?" asked Kat

Xiang tilted his head from one side to another. "Maybe? I have four bottles for travel that I refilled in the previous town, but I've already gone through two of them. Had to drink extra because of the fight."

Kat clicked her tongue. "Can your qi deal with that? I can't help you if that gets infected. Washing it out should help, but I don't know if you can afford it" said Kat

Xiang glanced down at his hands. The shirt had now been mostly removed, but it was clear the wound was still rather dirty. "It... it should be fine?" said Xiang, clearly a question even to his own ears.

"Alright" said Kat. \*I don't want this brat killing himself... even if he did kill that bandit...\* Kat shook her head. \*No, I don't want him killing himself from dehydration or from infection. Let's hope that there is a well or something at this base. That should help right?\*

Kat sighed. \*This might be the first time I wish my fire was a bit more like real fire. I could cauterise the wound... well no that's probably a bit gruesome even for me... but I could at least... well no I couldn't melt ice that I made because I wouldn't be able to make it... and is demon made ice safe to eat?\*

## **Chapter 285: What is Worse?**

After Xiang put his clothes back on, being careful of his wounds once Kat glared at him, there really wasn't anything else to that day, and soon the moon had taken its place high in the sky.. Kat once again debated over telling the explicit details of the death the other day.

And she was still unsure about that. She knew she still didn't feel bad, and that thought was starting to stick in her mind. She wasn't sure if the fact she had that concern at all meant she was alright... or if it was making things worse, acting a stopgap so she could feel a little bad instead of completely horrible.

The temptation to tell just Vivian was strong. She didn't want to share this with Sylvie certainly... there was Lily as well to consider, and Minor. As she stood guard over Xiang, Kat let herself consider that particular problem. \*So. Telling Lily. That sounds kind of horrible if I'm being honest. She's my best friend. I have to tell her... and I will. I don't want to hide something like this, even if that fact that I don't feel guilt makes me a monster... Lily is in the process of voluntarily giving up her humanity... or at least that's probably what she will do.

How though? I think... well maybe I should just tell her first? Then Vivian, and maybe skip Sylvie. Now... I think I have to tell them in person. I don't want this sort of thing to be done over the extremely slow demons messaging system... I can see so many ways that goes wrong. Now what about Callisto? Hmmm...

On the one hand, Callisto is likely to be the one to make the biggest deal about it. But she is also the least likely to have the whole, thing change her opinion on me. She'll probably write a five page essay of course, but once that's done I imagine it would just be another data point.

Well, let's just send of a standard message then. I walked for a day, and didn't do anything else. Finally starting to feel hunger, but apparently have two weeks left... yeah I'll have to tidy it up a bit by that sounds good.\*

Once Kat composed a more eloquent way of explaining, she did nothing, but should be close to their destination, and hopefully home soon, Kat turned her mind to the issue of Xiang's revenge. Now that she's seen him kill a guy, in combat sure, but still, she now knew he was very serious about getting... permanent revenge.

\*I wonder how likely he is to be able to go through with it. He doesn't seem shaken off by having to cut someone's head off... but he never said much before that and I'm not sure he'd tell me if something was going wrong anyway.

So the question is. How do I want to deal with this? The plan was always to soften the blow of his revenge... but I never actually did much of that, I hardly even talked to him. Sure, I said a few words

while we were working... maybe... 12? Max? Still... he doesn't seem as angry as he was when he summoned me...

Though, I've heard the terrible stories of cold slow burning vengeance. I doubt that he's really given up if he truly believes that what happened to the people in his village was worse than death... maybe I could use that? Convince him to cripple instead of kill? Is that even right though? Would that be better for me to suggest?

Sure, it might help me sleep at night. Not that I really have an issue with that, I'm sure I could sleep if I let myself... but is it right for me to push for what Xiang thinks is actually the worse punishment? I could probably get him to change that to his goal rather easily... but is that right?

I'm not sure that crippling could really be worse than death... but if Xiang believes it, and insists that all cultivators would agree with him... is it less humane to do that instead? Kat bit her lip as she turned the thought over in her mind. I never really considered what the worse thing I could ever do is.

Xiang clearly has a list, with crippling as the worst, and maybe death beneath that, and who knows afterwards... but I don't. Sure, I know that thieving is a lesser crime than murder but... nothing so specific.

So what do I want to do? Well... I could ask Xiang... but I don't know if I trust his answers. He might lie, and he also might not have the mental capacity to realise that not all people think like he does. So... maybe I should think what I'd vote for as the best outcome.

First. Theft. If I can get away with just stealing, or destroying a bunch of their stuff as revenge, that would be the best. I'm sure they have more stuff than Xiang had in his village... so it would be considered revenge. Plus, this way nobody has to be seriously hurt. Oh, and not getting caught. I'd hate for them to know Xiang was responsible and head back to his village as vengeance.

So, steal things, destroy things. Don't get caught, because talking him out of it completely when we are so close is impossible and that is the best I can hope for. Next would be... I suppose going in myself. Setting up in the middle of their outpost and just unleashing as much fire as I can, give it all the energy it could ask for.

I'd make sure that there is no attempt to harm at all within my fire, and hopefully, just like how I could use it near Minor... nobody dies. They will have to deal with the cold from coating the whole area in ice, and depending on the specifics, maybe abandon the whole place. This would also be really good.

Downsides... I might have to kill people... but if I'm careful... maybe less people would die than doing it Xiang's way... and I think I can live with myself if things went that way. I'm not killing anyone specifically, and, once I've shown off I can just duck out and take Xiang with me... so it comes down to control really. Can I be sure that I won't kill anyone this way. No, obviously not... but it might be the best I can do.\*

\*Right... so...\* Kat let herself hover around her second option for a while. With the weird not quite guilt she was feeling for not feeling bad, Kat had kind of hoped that she'd feel worse about planning for murder, or accidental homicide. The problem was, she still couldn't see the idea as that bad. It should SAVE lives theoretically, and it wasn't like she wanted to do it... just that she genuinely felt she could live with herself if she did it anyway.

\*Then... there is the worst case scenario. Xiang runs straight up to the front door, kicks it in, and challenges everyone. Then I have to help him fight off everyone, and if it actually comes to blows, I can't see Xiang letting them off. They will be either crippled or killed... and I still can't decide which is worse or which I should advocate for should the worst come to pass.

Actually... what should I do if we run into someone during plan one? Choke them out? I've... well I've seen it done in movies... but I don't know if you can actually knock someone out that way. Especially not before they can raise the alarm or something... I... hmm.\*

Kat tried to remember if she had that information anywhere in her memories. She sunk into them for over half an hour scouring for any mention or proof that the technique would work. \*Dammit.\* Kat cursed internally. \*Nothing. That would have been a great option honestly. I could sneak in, and just knock them out along the way. Nobody has to die, Xiang can rob and destroy and feel like a big boy that's got his vengeance, and then we can all leave.\*

\*Hell I doubt Xiang's hearing is as good as mine. If I can knock someone out, Xiang might be stupid enough to just assume they are dead... hmmm... that is looking like a better idea the more I think about it. As long as Xiang is never implicated... but...\* Kat's thoughts flashed back to that mark burned into Gaston the bartender.

\*Maybe it would be better to do them some more permanent damage. I... dammit. I didn't even think of that. Sure vengeance is stupid, but what if these guys go on to do even more damage after we let them off easy. Or worse, if we destroy all their stuff and they go on a rampage to rob and pillage to get their supplies back...

Shit this might be even more complicated than I thought. Killing or crippling might horrible treatment of our targets but... what would the other people who have lost their homes or loved ones say. Xiang surely isn't the first to be targeted... maybe I should help make sure it is the LAST though... but that would require the more permanent solutions...

Kill or cripple...\*

## **Chapter 286: The Silent Zone**

In the end, Kat did manage to get some sleep... well it was meditation, but Kat was more than willing to accept that as 'real sleep' now that it seemed to be her only option. Her mind was able to more easily wrap itself around the problem, and even though she couldn't think about it directly, Kat would wake up more sure of herself than before. She may not have yet reached an answer, but Kat now felt that she could live with whatever she did choose in the end. Only time would tell if these assumptions proved true.

When Kat woke up, she dusted herself off and jumped down to Xiang, abusing her exceptional vision to take a look at his wound without bothering to ask. Kat knew it would save her some time and attention. To her surprise, it was mostly healed. The cut in Xiang's outfit was still present, confirming that he did in fact only have one outfit, and through that gap Kat could see fresh pink skin.

\*Hmmm, so his healing is fast, and truly exceptional for a human. But he isn't human anymore... or not base human anyway. He is a cultivator with qi, and really that means he heals decently fast.\*

"Are you ready to leave?" asked Kat

Xiang put away his sleeping bag and turned to Kat "Yes. I believe you said we'd be close. I would like to get to them sooner rather than later. I will have my revenge, and I'd hate for them to get time to run away"

\*Pretty sure that they are going to be in their base, so I doubt they plan to run everywhere... Does he think they are scared of him or something? Surely not right...\* Kat shrugged and turned away, ready to start walking again.

It didn't take long for Kat's thoughts to turn back to Xiang's regeneration though, and how maybe it wasn't that great. \*Am I just spoilt?\* Kat remembered all the times she had been able to heal back from incredibly deadly wounds. That one time she carved her front up with gravel, or the time she got stabbed multiple times in the chest.

\*Ah, good times really. I suppose his regeneration is rather impressive by any other standard than my own. You know. I wonder how good my regeneration is comparatively. Hey System, how good is it?\*

User Kat's regeneration is considered to be a higher tier mostly due to the lack of scar tissue generated, the fact that it will scale well with increasing Ranks as the cost is mostly fixed even when repairing stronger skin. Finally, the fact that it allows for the reconnection of limbs is considered powerful. User Kat's regeneration may lack in speed at the higher end until Rank up.

That being said, most other higher tier regeneration is cheaper, is accompanied by stronger skin and muscles, or in some cases such as high tier Gluttony regeneration, is completely instantaneous and free as long as the demon contains enough bio matter. Furthermore, while reattachment of limbs is considered high tier, User Kat does not seem to be able to completely regrow them, which is also a sign of high tier regeneration.

\*Huh... well, I'm still pretty happy with it. Though... how does Xiang's regen compare?\*

Without direct details, it simply appears to be a slightly increased healing factor. More examination would need to be done to determine if scarring is possible, and what the upper limit is. With current information, it would likely be considered to be the lowest form of regeneration.

\*Ok. I'll keep that in mind.\*

With that, Kat let her awareness settle into the surroundings. She wasn't sure where the base would be, but running into it blindly would be a problem. Kat started to pay more attention to what she was hearing and even boosted her ears. Kat's first attempt was to supply her ears with as much energy as they wanted to try and hear everything in the forest.

This turned out to be a horrible idea. There was too much she could hear for her to sort out individually. It was fine if she was just searching for a specific noise, or if she was trying to ignore it, but trying to actively parse the sound of everything in hearing range was too much.

Kat tried to slow down her mind to compensate, that way she could hear each sound, mostly separate from anything else. This actually worked for a bit, and Kat was able to get a decent idea of what was going on around her... the problem with this method became quickly apparent... though mostly due to luck.

Kat spent a few perspective minutes in this mode, hardly moving, before giving a quick glance to her energy levels. They had dropped a good chunk, and she had only really taken two steps as she was making sure to keep her body moving at more normal speeds.

\*Shit. This is actually a large drain on my reserves. I'm not sure I can afford this sort of expenditure. It's not too much I guess, but time wise, it probably has only been five seconds at most... and that IS a lot of energy for five seconds even if it feels more like two minutes.\*

Kat completely dismissed her enhancements and went back to trying to investigate with her ears in more standard operation. It was still pretty good, but detail was lost alongside range. Kat was tempted to try to apply only a bit of energy to her ears, but decided to wait until she had completely restored her demonic energy.

It only took a few minutes for this to be true, and when Kat applied a small amount of energy to her ears, she instantly noticed an interesting detail she'd been overlooking. Normally, the clarity of what she was hearing wasn't quite high enough to pick this out, and when she was in her slowed state, there was still so much information she didn't notice.

At this midpoint, Kat could tell that somewhere, around one or two hours ahead of her, was a square of complete silence. It wasn't super obvious, as sound travelled around and through the area. Kat was sure she could hear things from further away and to the side, which should have been impossible if the area blocked sound completely.

The main thing that gave Kat pause was that it was a perfect square. Once she focused on the wind whistling through the trees to the exclusion of all else, this fact only became more clear. \*Well now. I bet that has to be our destination. It's... smaller than I expected. I think it's only slightly larger than the outpost we found. Which is a little strange... surely that can't be right?

Hmm, no I think I'm just bad at estimating the distance using only my ears and NO sound. It has to be larger. Unless... well if they can make something to make the noise completely silent... maybe it has a lesser effect around the edges? Just because the square is obvious doesn't mean that's the absolute limit. Maybe the square has to be silent.\*

Kat tried to focus her hearing a bit more, letting it take in the sounds around the square, and found that she was completely correct. Now that she was looking for strange things it was clear that there was a second square around the original.

\*I see, so there's a weaker version of it around the edge. Must be something important in that silent compound, with the more standard stuff in the larger area around it. I can hear things which I had thought was the wind and maybe some birds because they were too quiet to be anything larger...

That's probably wrong though. With sound dampening there is a good chance I can't hear the wind, but I can hear people yelling and moving around. A shame I can't hear what any of them are actually saying because that would be a massive help.\*

Kat let herself slow down, in an attempt to move next to Xiang, and when she made it to his side, she whispered. "We are only an hour or two out now. What do you want to do?" asked Kat

"Well, obviously we should make haste. We can assault their compound right now!" said Xiang

Kat shook her head. "Well, first off, it's still a good deal of walking. Second, we don't know what the place looks like, and third, have you given any thought to simply stealing from them as they have you?"

Xiang grit his teeth. "Just theft is not enough. With the damage done to the village I'm unsure if we could even survive the year. Their punishment must be substantial and swift" said Xiang.

\*Come on... surely, I can work something out right?\* Kat's desperate mind managed to latch onto a decent idea.

"Ok... look I understand that Xiang" said Kat "But hear me out what about if..."

## **Chapter 287: The Plan**

"But hear me out what about if I go in myself" said Kat

Xiang went to argue but Kat held up a hand to silence him. This... didn't actually work, and Xiang just continued speaking anyway "No. I might have summoned you for this but I will not let you take all the glory!" hissed Xiang.

\*Well at least he's smart enough not to shout. Sadly, he thinks there is glory in revenge for some reason. Hopefully I can at least get him to let me scout the area? I can use the fact that I can fly to take that option. Plus, if I can convince him to wait, I can use my night vision.\*

"Xiang, at the very least allow me to fly over the compound and try and survey the area. Surely you can wait for that correct?" asked Kat

Xiang's eyes narrowed "Wait you can fly?"

Kat flapped her wings very intentionally but didn't quite take off with them. "So? I thought they were just a decoration or something like your tail" said Xiang.

Suddenly, Kat felt a massive ball of red-hot rage explode from somewhere in her chest. Her aura activated and collided with it, slamming into the feeling and wrapping it up in a ball of calm, keeping it in place. Kat grit her teeth and let her perception slow.

\*What the hell was that?\* Kat could feel the anger and indignation radiating from her chest. It felt much too extreme for her it to be her own anger... and yet it was certainly familiar. \*Why am I so angry? And why can I even hold it off? I don't think I could do that before?\*

\*It has to be the fact he insulted my tail and maybe my wings as well? But why? Sure I do feel like I should be mad at that, and I can almost feel some indignation, but most of my anger is being trapped in that ball of feelings around my chest. Hmmm...\*

\*It seems to be mixed in with demonic energy as well, so it isn't just anger. Is it an appearance thing? System are succubi really vain perhaps?\*

User Kat is somewhat correct. All demons have something that will trigger an instinctive 'attack' response. It is exceptionally hard to suppress, and varies from demon to demon. It is normally an inherited trait. It is considered the one of the gravest sins to specifically try to target this trigger as a fellow demon.



\*So... what? Why is this a thing then? And why can I hold it off?\*

The more powerful the demon the more powerful the response. However, older demons also have a better ability to suppress this instinct because of their more refined mindsets. It is one of the few negative effects that demonic energy aggravates in demons.

\*What do you mean?\* Asked Kat as she locked down that feeling of rage and tried to crush it with aura. She wasn't having much luck. Now that she knew it was unnatural, she wanted it gone.

It has been tested and shown that the response is both more apparent, and more controllable in demons with more demonic energy. It is considered a trait of a demon and not a trait of demonic energy.

\*Can I get rid of it somehow?\*

No. There have been no known cases of demons removing it. The best is transferring the feeling to a separate trigger, but it is exceptionally rare. This is because the trigger is related to the demon's own thoughts. It simply takes something that aggravates that demon the most and amplifies it.

\*Wait... so because I like my tail so much, and I find it to be the thing I am most happy to have gained from becoming a demon... if someone insults it I get a bunch of unreasonable anger?

...

System?\*

Saying it is unreasonable is not entirely accurate. The anger is well placed, and only appears when the User takes real offence. If Accomplice Lily had said the same words it would not trigger this response. Additionally, if anger infused demonic energy is used, the effects of that energy is normally amplified

\*Ok fine.\* Kat tried again to crush the feeling of anger, but found it stubbornly resisting.\*Ok, well why can't I get rid of it?\*

Because it is User Kat's anger. It is not a foreign influence. Some of it must be experienced.

\*Fine.\* Kat checked her reserves of energy and found that despite the internal conversation she wasn't actually that drained. Letting her perception speed up and a bit of anger leak out, Kat wished she was surprised when the energy went straight to her tail.

Kat quickly moved it to hid it behind her back, but she could feel her flames burning around the edges of the limb and it was ready to strike out at Xiang. The burst of anger that came along with it made it very tempting to allow the strike to happen, but Kat pushed it down, with willpower as well as her aura and found herself calming quickly.

Once the flames died out, Kat flicked her tail to the side, and slashed a deep cut in one of the nearby trees using the remnants of the energy still in her tail. Xiang actually had the good graces to pale at that like Kat wanted. "Nothing of mine is for show" said Kat

Xiang huffed and turned away, still pale but he couldn't seem to resist saying "Bet your nails aren't. A warrior should keep them out of the way" under his breath.

Of course, this was still well within Kat's hearing range. The fact that Xiang hadn't figured this out yet was actually somewhat disappointing. Kat found that she wasn't even angry in the slightest though, and found a surprising amount of comfort in that. \*I wonder if the reaction was so strong because it's the first time someone has insulted my tail. Hmm, maybe I should find a way to test it. I'll bring it up with Callisto.\*

\*Now... let's just pretend we didn't hear him. No use giving away the fact I'll be keeping an eye on the fool as I scout the place.\* "Now, is it acceptable for me to fly over their base and trying to see where everything is?" asked Kat

Xiang clicked his tongue but nodded "Fine"

Kat nodded "Great. Now, we should wait till nightfall-"

Xiang's hand flew up into Kat's face, "No" said Xiang. "I'll allow you to scout, but waiting for nightfall is too much"

Kat frowned "Well, it will take me a while to scout regardless, so we probably won't attack until near or after dark anyway. Is it really an issue to wait a bit longer?" asked Kat

Xiang growled "Yes it is. I've waited long enough for this. You should be grateful I am willing to wait any longer"

Kat nodded, but internally she was cursing. \*Dammit. Now I've made him mad. I wouldn't normally care about that, but I want him to listen to me when I suggest we just destroy some things instead of going in guns blazing... I'll have to bring it up now though because otherwise he won't listen when I get back.\*

"Right... well one more thing before I go," Xiang looked remarkably unimpressed she wasn't heading off instantly "Have you given some real thought to not killing them all?" Xiang grit his teeth but Kat continued "No, look hear me out. We can steal stuff for your village, get in, get out, no chance of getting caught, and no chance they will take revenge on your village"

Xiang visibly tried to pull his anger back into himself, as if he was insulted at the mere idea that Kat was right, or that perhaps not just killing could be a good idea. Sadly, it wasn't enough. "I'll think about it" said Xiang.

Kat pursed her lips. \*He isn't though.\* Kat looked at Xiang's face, shifting from anger to surety, with the slightest hint of a smug smile when Kat tucked her wings in and bent her legs as she prepared to leave. \*Dammit. I'll have to see what I can do later.\* Kat kicked off the ground, using only a bit of enhanced strength. When she reached the top of her jump, she flared her wings to stop herself from losing height and started flapping.

\*Hmm, how high is high enough. I should make sure that a normal human wouldn't be able to tell I wasn't a bird... but these won't be normal humans.\* Kat kept climbing, her eyesight more than good enough to still see the ground as she climbed. \*Maybe that can be my goal. Wait till I can only just see the compound and then use my energy to survey it all.\*

Kat kept her wings beating at a steady pace as the ground fell away. The air started to get colder, but not in a way that was really noticeable to Kat herself. The air was thinning, but her experience with

simply not breathing underwater meant this was nothing as well. Kat climbed until she hit the first layer of clouds... and realised a problem.

\*Shit. I can still see fine, but what I can't do is use my totally real x-ray vision to see through clouds. Shit, hmmm, maybe I can find an angle where it isn't so bad?\* Kat grimaced at the unforeseen obstacle. \*The issue is, I can hardly hear Xiang now, even with the boost to hearing... I just hope he doesn't do something stupid.\*

## **Chapter 288: The View**

Luckily for Kat, the forest didn't spontaneously combust, nor did trees start falling like dominos. In fact, from what she could see of the compound from a quick glance, Xiang hadn't stormed the place as soon as she left. \*Well, at least he can meet those extremely low expectations.

Now what am I supposed to do here. I can maybe hover behind some clouds and poke my head out... but if they can manage to see me at all that would be super weird. Another option is just fly in the clouds and look out... but once again, if they can see me, it will be very obvious, especially if they can spot my horns. The deep black would stand out against these white clouds.\*

Kat clicked her tongue. \*Then again, if they actually have eyes that good, I realise that maybe I should have been more careful when I flew up. I CAN see the compound, and if I'm using myself as the standard, they certainly could see me as I flew up.\*

Kat sighed, \*Well, nothing I can do about it now then.\* Kat sighed again before settling into a slow glide, flapping her wings on the occasion to make sure that she didn't lose any height and hoped she looked more like some exotic bird than a person with wings. Sure, one of them was more accurate, but really, when you think about it, the other is more likely.

And so, Kat looked down, and saw the compound in its entirety. The first thing she noticed, was despite the square that blocked out all sound, and the slight fade away after that remaining in about the same shape, the compound itself was not a perfect square. It was clear that it had been made in stages, slowly spreading out inside the forest, and yet it never belonged, even though it spread slowly.

It looked more like some giant had dropped a couple of different sets of building blocks, flattening the nature around it, and broke the pieces where it was unnecessary. Kat started with the set of buildings she thought were likely built first. What may have once been the entire outpost, she guessed was now an inner compound of sorts. This feeling grew stronger, when Kat used her eyes to see some more details, and noticed it was, in many ways, just a smaller version of the entire thing.

The next thing Kat noticed, was that none of the buildings were higher than the treeline, in fact, all of them were likely nothing more than single story houses but the angle made that hard to determine, as windows were hard to see. Across the entire left side of the walled inner compound, was a large building, it had a strange strip of wood in the middle of its two halves, and made Kat think that it was once two separate buildings joined together, perhaps when the compound was expended beyond its walls.

This little detail, made Kat guess it was a residence for whoever was in charge, and perhaps their family as well. Little details supported this assumption, as the building had two small sets of tables and chairs

out the front. Another point in favour of this, was the small clothesline attached to both the bottom and top walls of the compound, however Kat didn't see any clothes on them now.

Letting her eyes move to the top of the wall, Kat found a training ground. Well, that wasn't true, if one was using technicalities. The whole central courtyard was used for training, she could even see a few figures meditating, but Kat didn't worry about them for the moment. At the end of the area, was a series of targets on the right side, and an obstacle course on the left. There was one person indulging in some archery right now. Kat eyed them closely, but didn't let her gaze linger.

She remembered Lily's complaints about how annoying and unrealistic it was that characters in books could always tell when they were being watched. Kat, knowing now that people had auras, magical powers, and dimension hopping systems in people's heads... well she wasn't willing to take the chance someone would spot her if she let her gaze linger too long.

The remaining three buildings in the compound were a series of three smaller square buildings. Unlike the flat roof of the large combined building, these smaller ones instead had peaked roofs, and looked much like a child's version of a house. However, Kat managed to catch a glance at the front and could see the whole thing was just one big door.

\*Must be the warehouses then. So they've got family houses, training areas, and warehouses. I wonder if those are where they keep the more important things or the daily supplies? Could be either I suppose.\*

Kat let her gaze leave the inner compound and stretch out, and realised she might have undersold the wider compound. Now that she was actually taking a proper look at it, there was quite a few extra buildings.

The first and easiest to identify, was a series of buildings near the edges, half blended in with the trees, the only buildings that didn't have any area around the clearing. It was a stark contrast to the rest, but it was instantly clear why the decision was made in just a glance.

They were greenhouses. The glass was tempered, and at this distance Kat couldn't see the specifics, but it was easy to see they were all full of plants. Kat noted it as a place to burn down, or at least something out of the way enough to distract Xiang with. \*They're even in the right direction for me to get Xiang to run into them first... as long as he didn't decide the compound is the better target. But he seemed to grow up in a place that farms things so he should know the value of crops.\*

To the right of the greenhouses were two rows of buildings. The set closer to Kat matched the joined pair from the inner compound almost perfectly in size and design, if one ignored the join work that had been done. This further solidified the idea that they were likely dwellings. They were packed together closely, and the one at the far left, closest to the greenhouses had a lot of clotheslines attached to it. These actually had a large number of outfits hung up, a few bed sheets, and one disciple, though Kat wouldn't call them such, hanging up more clothes from a nearby basket.

Kat then moved further upward and saw another loose collection of buildings. She had the perfect angle to confirm that they were a set of warehouses and a mess hall. Or really, it was more likely the building was just a kitchen because Kat could see all the tables and chairs spread out of the front.

The only other thing in the compound, beside the people, was a large training field that covered the rest of the silent square. There was an archery range, but nobody was using it from what she could see. In fact, other than the people she could see in the inner compound, and the one doing the washing, the place was remarkably barren.

Kat frowned slightly at this. She was about to curse her luck over the limited number of people actually present when she realised this may be a good thing. Of course, reality had decided that if this contract wasn't bad already, it could be worse.

Kat eyed the tables again and noticed multiple meals, or rather the remnants of them. The meals themselves had been eaten, but the plates remained, and Kat would have to assume crumbs as well. Even her eyes weren't quite good enough to count the number of crumbs on a plate from around two thousand metres up. \*But where are they?\*

Kat scanned the place again. She could find two people meditating, or just standing really still, in the inner compound with the third practicing archery. The one guy that was finishing up with the washing, and nobody else. \*What's the point of a giant training field if you aren't using it for training?

Why are there meals clearly eaten and nobody had the decency to clean them up? How many people are there? I can spot quite a few plates... but from up here it's unclear how large they actually are... and most tables have at least twice the number of plates as they do chairs... so they can't indicate a full meal each... but how many people does it indicate?\*

Kat let out a long sigh. \*Do I have to try and sneak in now? And... do I have to get Xiang first? I'd really love to handle this all myself but I know he won't let me... but maybe I can get away with scoping things out, and just finding out how many people there are. Besides, if I happen to knock a few unconscious as I go... well... that's just me being a nice demon and starting early... totally not preventing any untimely deaths noooo not at all.

Still... not sure Xiang will wait that long... decisions decisions.\*

### **Chapter 289: Idiot on the loose**

In the end, Kat let herself fall out of the sky towards Xiang. It wasn't ideal, but she'd rather check in on the idiot than let him run free outside of her view for too long. So of course, as Kat reached the ground and noticed that he wasn't even in the clearing, Kat felt the strong desire to slam her fist into a few trees just to see how they shattered.

\*I can't believe this. I just needed him to wait a little bit. I hardly even took half an hour looking over an entire enemy compound. I cannot believe he already got bored and wandered off. I mean really.\*

Kat shoved as much energy as she could into her head and ears, already wincing at the cost of what she was about to do. Sounds hit her like a wall, and she focused her mind on sorting them all out trying to find where the heck Xiang had managed to sneak off to. Luckily, it didn't take too long to find the idiot in question, but Kat was already down a small chunk of energy on a completely useless expense.

\*And now I need to waste more energy catching up. At least he hasn't gone that far, but... I just can't believe he's so stupid.\* Kat sprinted off towards Xiang, making sure to step as quietly as possible and also refraining from going so fast as to cause the wind to make undue noise. Her wings were tucked in

close, and her tail was wound tightly around her stomach as she ran, limiting herself to slightly less than twice human speed.

As Kat started to approach Xiang's position, she started letting up on her speed as a horrifying realisation came to her. Xiang was much too far away. He had to have either left as soon as she hit the sky and let her focus leave him. \*And she really hoped he wasn't that impatient.\* However, the alternative was that he boosted himself with qi. A very finite resource that Xiang would need shortly. \*And that is terribly stupid isn't it. At least he can't have been going at full speed if that's what he did but... it's just so dumb.\*

Kat let herself glide along the ground as she covered the last few steps, using natural grace, since she didn't really know she had to flit between the trees and over roots while keeping quiet. Despite her quick approach, Xiang didn't so much as twitch when she appeared right behind him. In fact, he was still moving forward, hunched over, sword held tight against his side as he ran from tree to tree.

Kat put a heavy hand on his shoulder. In response Xiang tried to whip around but she flexed her fingers, digging them in and warning him not to try anything funny. Instead of backing off, and analysing the situation, the idiot went to wrench his arm out of her grip. If he had tried as things stood, either his shoulder would have been dislocated from the movement, or her nails would have caught and shredded the armour he wore.

Kat, however, was used to the idiocy at this point and was watching for this exact response, so she just sighed and lightened her grip on Xiang. This meant that he had nothing to wrench against and now found himself being thrown forward by his own weight. He tried to correct and remain upright but was failing.

Kat's first instinctive response was to wrap her tail around him and stop him from falling. Then that stray spark of anger came back, as well as a little disgust for some reason, and that let Kat decide that watching him fall over was actually the right course of action.

Xiang hit the ground, but he wasn't completely hopeless. He rolled forward with the momentum once he realised it was hopeless, before throwing himself back to his feet, and around to face Kat.

His hand was already in the process of drawing his sword, when his eyes met Kat. When their faces met, Kat didn't know what to make of the expression. There were so many contradicting messages in the young fool's face, she hardly knew where to start. Anger, mixed with fear, mixed with relief, and then more anger, and a very small piece of shame Kat missed when she stared back at him and held his gaze.

Xiang gulped. "Um... hi?" said as his face morphed more firmly into that of a little kid being caught with his hand in the cookie jar. Which Kat thought was rather apt.

\*If you are going to act like a child maybe I should start treating you like one. Sylvie is NINE. NINE dammit and she's smarter than Xiang by far. Now of course, that might be unfair because I think there's a good chance she's also smarter than me... but still, all the older kids in the orphanage at least know that when I tell them to do something, they DO it, and I wasn't a powerful demon back then, just a slightly taller kid for most of it.\*

"What were you thinking?" Kat hissed, letting a bit of demonic energy sink into her vocals. "I just needed you to wait for a few minutes. The base is right there, we've been on the road for two weeks. Was giving me thirty minutes so hard?"

Xiang frowned "There is no reason I couldn't get closer. I wasn't going to be spotted" said Xiang starting to raise his voice a bit.

Kat with her exceptional hearing, wasn't going to let that slide. "First off. Quiet. I want you doing nothing more than whispering. If this whole thing is ruined because you can't wait for an hour, you will only have yourself to blame.

"Secondly, what was your plan? You say you aren't going to get caught, but how will you prevent that? You are just running blindly through the woods. Sure you happen to be going the right direction, but you didn't know that did you? You just took my word for it. I could have been generalising, or I-" Kat felt herself get cut off when she tried to say she could have lied. \*Gee bit strict on that one.\* Kat shook her head. "Look, the point is. This was a stupid risk."

"Well what else was supposed to do? This is MY revenge! I won't have you do everything for me!" hissed Xiang, proving he was at least smart enough to keep his voice low. He may have raised it a little on the 'my' and Kat's eyes might have started glowing in response... but neither would admit that when asked. Kat mostly just because she didn't notice.

"Wait" said Kat "That was what you had to do. You summoned me because you didn't think you could do this by yourself, and perhaps it's only now dawning on you how much stronger I am, but Xiang, you are the one being stupid here. Do you really have so little patience?"

Xiang's eyes narrowed and he said, "I have plenty of patience. I waited weeks to get here, but I'm so close, I can't just sit around doing nothing anymore"

\*This kid... he thinks he was 'waiting?' as we travelled all day at the fastest pace he could manage? If I knew he was going to be such an ass about it I'd have just carried him, even if that would leave a bad taste in my mouth.\*

\*The whole point was to take it slow and convince him to tone it down dammit.\* Kat cursed herself internally. \*Ok, sure I probably failed at that. No I certainly did... but I mean... he's just such an idiot, he's annoying, and I'm almost sure that if I'd magically teleported us here he'd still complain about the waiting. He's just like that.\*

"Listen here Xiang. I have been more than cordial with you. I have tried to keep things professional. But it needs to be said Xiang, you are an idiot. You need to actually take a few seconds and THINK. Now what I'm going to do, is tell you the layout of the base we are assaulting, and then, we are going to sneak in, properly, together, and NOT engage in combat unless we have to" said Kat

Xiang glared at her, but Kat glared back, eyes flashing with purple light and Xiang was sufficiently cowed. "I understand" he said, though he sounded more aggravated than understanding.

Kat took a deep breath. \*System give me strength.\*

D.E.M.O.N.S is incapable of doing that on short notice and without the use of Favour Token.

\*It was an expression. Can't be asking god for help now that I'm a demon.\*

D.E.M.O.N.S knows.

Kat made sure not to sigh. It wasn't a sigh, just a long exhaling of breath. "Ok Xiang, this is the basic layout. I'll even make you a little diagram in the dirt. So first is..."

### **Chapter 290: Sneaky Beaky Like**

"...and that is the layout of the whole compound do you have any questions Xiang?" asked Kat

"No" said Xiang, much too quickly in response. Kat glared back at him, unimpressed. \*I bet he forgot it all. Dammit, how am I supposed to make sure that he remembers anything. That answer was so fast I have trouble believing he was doing anything other than reacting to his name...\*

"Are you sure?" asked Kat wearily.

Xiang went to shout a retort, but Kat could practically feel the derision before it happened so she moved quickly to slam her hand over his mouth... then decided hitting in the back of his head was preferable, and did that instead, clipping him over the back of his head lightly. Xiang grimaced, and went to complain more, but Kat glared him down, and that silenced any further complaints.

"Ok follow me" said Kat, turning towards the compound and expecting Xiang to follow. Kat kept low, and made sure not to make any sudden movements as she stalked through the trees. Xiang looked like he couldn't understand why she was out in the open for so long, but Kat didn't explain it to him. Instead, she could only hope that human eyes were always designed to spot sudden movements.

\*Hmmm, I'm not sure how stealthy I actually am. Even ignoring the fact that it's the middle of the day, the trees provide good cover and I have a dark outfit... the problem is, I'm not naturally pale, I'm practically a walking spotlight. I'll just have to abuse my hearing to make sure I'm never in sight lines... unless... shit will there be guards? I didn't see any but... depending on if the silence area is actually two-way, there might be some on the edges of it.\*

Kat strained her ears to try and find evidence of her guess, focusing on that short strip with strange muted and distorted sounds. Sadly, nothing managed to stick out. At the very least Kat was sure that if there were guards, they weren't moving around. That meant she needed to be careful when looking around, but that she wasn't going to be snuck up on.

\*Still, at this speed we are a way's out. I think we should be safe for a while. It depends on how many guards there are, and where they are positioned. I can say at least that they aren't too far away from the base, because otherwise I'd be able to tell. It's only where the sound is so funny that I can't be sure.\*

And so, Kat stalked through the trees as quickly as she dared. She wasn't too concerned about being identified from this range yet, because even she couldn't see too far in the mass of trees, so unless they had radar, they'd be fine. Of course, if they did have that, they were screwed anyway.

Once Kat entered what she assumed would be just barely out of a standard human's observational range of the strange distorted area of sound, Kat held up a signal to stop. Xiang glared a bit but stopped in place.

"What?" he hissed, making sure not to raise Kat's ire by speaking loudly.



"We are close to their base now. I can't hear inside of it, and the area immediately around that doesn't sound right. I'll need to make sure there are no guards" said Kat

Xiang shook his head "I won't have you going off on your own again. We are so close, let's just charge them"

Kat sighed. "Look, do you really want an all-out attack?"

"Yes" hissed Xiang "I've been telling you this the whole time"

Kat narrowed her eyes. "Ok, how about you think of it this way" \*What way? Quick me come up with an idea. Why can't he fight them... bandits! I'd been putting it out of my mind but that's it\* "you couldn't even fight the bandit leader, and now you want to take on the compound?"

Xiang scoffed "I beat him fair and square. Besides isn't that your job? To keep the riff raff busy?"

\*I really don't know that it is Xiang.\* "So you're saying that some random bandit is stronger than everyone in that base? And that you will have no problems?"

Xiang tried and failed to suppress a wince as he said "Yes I do"

Kat shook her head and said, "Look, you can't honestly be that obtuse"

"What does obtuse mean?" asked Xiang while narrowing his eyes.

\*Ooh, looks like little Xiang can't understand... well I was going to say basic English but I guess he probably doesn't speak it... wait. That doesn't make any sense then... how does the translation work if he can't understand me? System?\*

Summoner Xiang has heard the equivalent word at least once in his life and should understand it. The fact that he doesn't is not a flaw of the translation tool, but a problem with Summoner Xiang's own ineptitude

\*Wow even the system is getting in on this.\*

"Look" said Kat hoping an order will work better "I am going to check, and you are going to wait. If you move from this spot I'll" \*I'll what? Um... shit uh...\* "run you back to town and give you another half a week's journey to learn to think a little"

Xiang raised an eye as if challenging her and tried to convey 'that the best you can do' with his eyes.

However, Kat had already turned away. First, she leapt up into the trees, and then let her flexibility and surefootedness carry her as she balanced across the branches and hopped from one to the other. She wasn't as careful about not getting spotted, not willing to risk Xiang jeopardising her completely, and praying the elevation and tree cover would be enough to stop anyone spotting her.

This turned out to be a worthwhile gamble, as the closer Kat got, the more the strange area of sound cleared up. By the time it was only a few hundred metres away Kat could definitely hear someone breathing. Focusing on the sound as she ran, Kat tried to see if she could find multiples. She couldn't be certain with the distortion, but at the very least there was only one nearby.

Once she was only a few metres away, Kat managed to spot the figure through the trees. The person in question was sequestered away in one of the trees ahead of her. There was a line the middle of the bark, and Kat could see the person's eyes sticking out.

\*Hmm... guess I can just bust my way through, right? The sound distortion should actually be helpful.\* Kat watched the eyes, and whenever they looked away from her hiding place, Kat moved herself closer and closer.

When she made it to the tree, Kat examined it for just a moment, and realised that the whole bottom was actually a door. \*Well... I don't even need to break anything then.\* Moving swiftly, Kat pulled on the door, and heard a crack anyway. \*Woops must have broke the lock.\* The poor guy didn't have a chance.

Kat's hands flew into his hiding place, and she covered his mouth and pinched his nose closed. He tried to struggle in Kat's grasp but she gave his head a light tap against the wall, which seemed to daze him. That compound with the lack of oxygen, meant that in just a few more moments the guy was out cold.

\*Cool. Now I just have to manage to do that to the rest.\* Kat bit her lip as she shut the door on the unconscious man. \*Now... what else should I do? Leave him? Tell Xiang? ... Kill him? No... I don't want to responsible for more death than I need to be. Hopefully if Xiang can get his revenge this little gang of thugs will be forced out of the area.\*

Sprinting back to Xiang, Kat was pleasantly surprised to find that he was in fact in place. Sure, he glared at her and bared his teeth, but he was at least in place. "Ok let's go. I've taken out the guard" said Kat

"Did you kill him?" asked Xiang

\*What sort of a question is that?\* "No" said Kat

Xiang scoffed "Why not? He deserves to die"

\*Quick. Think of something mildly convincing, and potentially true you can tell him so he won't finish the job or force me to. I can decide what to do with them later if I have to.\* "Well, what would we do if they could smell the blood? This way anyone who found him might just think he fell asleep on watch" said Kat.

Xiang frowned, but didn't contradict Kat anymore. He just set off towards the compound at a light jog. Not exactly stealthy, but Kat did just say she took out the guard, so she'd allow him this much. \*But not a metre more. Once we run into the greenhouses he'll be moving at a slow, sedate speed. I just hope that they contain something rare enough that I can convince him to just steal from them instead.\*