

## DEMONS 331

### Chapter 331: H-H-Harold Enters the Ring

When Evaline finally returned with Lily's father, Harold, she really hadn't managed to pull herself together any more. She'd left in hopes that it would clear her thoughts somewhat, but she still very clearly remembered Kat's new appearance, and she certainly didn't want to leave her daughter alone with her any longer than she absolutely had to.

So, it was a confused Harold, and an equally confused Evaline, if for different reasons, entered into Lily's room. What she saw, shouldn't have shocked her, but it did. Kat was sitting on the edge of Lily's bed chatting with her as if nothing was wrong... except she had her tail wrapped around Lily, who was happily chatting back as if nothing was wrong. Vivian was standing off to the side, writing something down on a clipboard and was swiftly removed from Evaline's train of thought.

Evaline cleared her throat and said. "Lily, would you be a dear and show your father your new desk?"

Kat made sure she wasn't in Evaline's line of sight as she grinned. \*Yes! She isn't even questioning the desk anymore. She's more concerned about me. Of course, that was the plan, but still, it's pretty funny how off kilter she clearly is. If we hadn't planned this out so thoroughly I'd be tempted to mess with her more, I know she deserves it more than most... aw well, we have it in hand.\*

"Sure thing dad. I mean, it's pretty much what it appears" said Lily as she stood up and moved over to her desk. "Um... Chekov is the name of the person who made this... it was made for me pretty specifically, um..."

"Hmm" Lily's father knocked on the side of the desk as he spoke. "Is that mahogany? That's a sturdy wood right there" he then continued to tap, lightly in some cases, the other areas of the desk. Due to Chekov's construction though, you couldn't hear any of the hollow spaces.

"Um... no? Dad... I... why would you assume it's mahogany of all things? I mean... I guess it could be but... it doesn't really look like mahogany does it?" said Lily rather confused at her father's antics.

Harold shrugged and went back to examining the desk. Tracing the outlines of the various people featured in Lily's library, pausing for a moment when he reached the smaller versions of himself and his wife. Harold let his hand rest on them as he seemed to lose himself in thought.

Kat just acted like she wasn't paying attention, leaning backwards while bracing herself with her arms and letting her gaze wander the room seemingly at random. Of course, in reality, Kat was abusing her superior peripheral vision to move her eyes around the room while keeping an eye on both of Lily's parents.

Evaline... seeing everyone ignore the elephant... er... demon in the room stood with her mouth open in shock. Vivian wasn't any help, she was writing something vaguely official looking on her clipboard... Lily had come with Kat and wouldn't be any help anyway having defended the girl for much lesser crimes...

And Harold, Evaline wanted to scoff at how easily distracted he was. Instead of focusing on the clear and present threat to their daughter he was busy investigating a desk of all things. Sure it was well made, but it was just a desk, or so Evaline thought. She hadn't really taken the time to properly look at the sheer detail the desk contained nor thought there might be some hidden compartments.

No, instead her thoughts were firmly fixed on trying to work out what to do about Kat. She had 'clear proof' that Kat was up to no good, and now that she'd 'finally revealed her true colours' Evaline was sure she would've been able to convince her daughter to stay away from the girl... but instead she just nodded along, saying that yes, Kat did have wings, as if that was the end of it.

Evaline felt like she needed to scream at the injustice of it all, but to make matters worse, that Vivian women thought nothing of it either. That was when Evaline got a new idea. Perhaps Vivian was spelled as well. So she just had to bring it to Harold's attention.

"Say Harold, did you not notice Lily's friend here? You seem awfully distracted not to have said hello" said Evaline, injecting a little bit of pleading into her voice hoping that he actually hadn't noticed her and ignored her wings.

Harold stopped with his investigation of the desk to face his wife, but as he realised what it was she said, he instead turned towards the bed, knowing vaguely in the back of his mind where the room's other occupants were. "Oh. Oh yes terribly sorry. Hello Kat" mumbled Harold, clearly still with his mind on the desk.

"Hello Harold. It's nice to see you" said Kat with minimal fuss.

Evaline, for a brief moment, wondered if considerable application of force via introducing her face to the desk personally would relieve some of the internal screams she had rattling around in her throat. In the end though, she stifled that thought and said politely "Now, Harold darling, do you notice anything different with Kat here?"

Harold stifled a sigh, but Kat still caught it, which made her raise her eyebrows slightly in turn. Harold looked back to Kat for a few seconds before saying. "She has a lovely kimono on. Perhaps the best quality I've seen. Old silk too, and wonderfully cared for. I imagine it's an heirloom but... considering... your... upbringing I suppose that is unlikely"

Evaline was starting to reconsider her previous idea about excessive applications of force when Kat responded. "Well, I mean... it sort of counts as one? It belonged to Gramps' wife before she passed away and he wanted me to have it. I've taken good care of it since, and made sure it stays in perfect condition"

Harold nodded "Yes, something like that should be treasured... though I do wonder if it's best to be wearing such a thing when spending such a leisurely day."

Kat shrugged "Don't worry, I take very good care of it. It's probably still going to last my entire life even wearing it like I do. It's made of sturdy stuff" Kat sniggered internally. \*Yeah it will last as long as I live alright.\*

Evaline... shaking slightly, though she hadn't noticed, looked from her husband to Kat, and back before saying. "So... you don't see those wings?"

Harold shrugged "Well of course I can but it seemed awfully impolite to point it out Evaline"

Evaline stared at her husband open mouthed while Kat thought. \*Huh maybe he isn't so bad after all. I mean... normally I only ever saw them as a pair and Evaline sort of just spoke for the both of them... I wonder if it's because he's clearly distracted or if he really just doesn't care.\*

"Right..." said Evaline stretching out the word to its limit as she tried to wrap her head further around the fact that even her husband seemed to find no problem with his daughter's only friend growing wings all of a sudden. "Are those... real?" is what Evaline finally managed to say.

Kat smiled "Well of course. Why wouldn't they be?"

To further punctuate the statement Kat flapped them a bit but didn't show off any flying just yet. For good measure though, Kat flicked her tail around and curled it into various shapes proving it too to be real.

Evaline, deciding to save what little of her sanity was left and leave. "I'm going to prepare some tea" is what she said before fleeing from the room. She didn't even have the decency to ask if anyone wanted any.

As soon as Evaline left though, Harold started to chuckle. Everyone else in the room looked at him like they'd seen a ghost. "Oh, don't look at me like that. I was quite the prankster when I was your age. Well, not you Vivian, the girls, but still my point stands"

Lily kept staring open mouthed at her father, so he continued with a sigh. "Look, you know your mother loves you. I don't know why she dislikes Kat, but I was willing to defer to her judgement before. Now though, it's more than clear she's losing you, we both are. So, what's going on."

Everyone kept staring at Harold. \*This... this was not part of the plan.\*

"Oh come on pumpkin, did you really think you got your smarts from your mother? No, wait don't tell her I said that. She did wonderfully on all of her tests really... it's just... she's a bit blind sometimes, and doesn't question things enough..."

"It's clear you've been spending more time with Kat, despite what you've said, and it's also clear you felt it better to lie to us about it. And look, I don't fault you for it, Evaline has been unreasonably protective since we moved but... can we just talk about it?"

Everyone kept staring open mouthed at Harold.

### **Chapter 332: ... What?**

Finally, having enough of the staring, Harold gave Lily a lot bop on the head, snapping her back into the world. "Ready to chat now?"

"Um... er... um... this is not how we planned this to go" managed Lily

Harold shrugged "Well, I bet your mother didn't plan to slowly drive you away by ostracising your only friend for years as she tried to push you to find others and instead drove you to further confide in Kat and study to avoid speaking with us as well as finding other friends"

Everyone went back to staring at Harold opened mouthed.

"Can you lot just stop that? Yes, I'm not an idiot, thanks for noticing? Sorry, I happen to love my wife and daughter and are willing to let them get away with murder. Yes, I should have stopped her earlier Lily, but honestly I was happier to see you growing up and finally standing up for yourself so I didn't say anything" said Harold with his hands on his hips.

The staring continued, and Harold narrowed his eyes before taking his wallet out of his pocket and chucking it at Kat's face. She was shocked enough at the throw she didn't even try to dodge, letting it collide with her horns. Kat tilted her head in confusion at Harold, as if asking 'why?'

"Well that's because you're all just starin' at me like I've just told you magic is real or something stup..." Harold slowed as the stares intensified. "Well... shit then I guess. Now I'm the one with questions"

"I... I just... um... how?" said Lily

Harold scoffed at his daughter "I told you I'm not an idiot. I wasn't really sure what to think but that wild guess... well... you guys weren't exactly hiding your reactions. I mean, it wasn't even a guess, I was making a point. Sure it was rendered moot but..." Harold shook his head and continued speaking. "Look, maybe we should start at the beginning, or the beginning of today, what was the plan"

Lily looked over to Kat for guidance, but she just shrugged. \*I mean he's your father. I've only seen him briefly with your mom. How the hell should I know what to do here Lily?\* Lily pouted, getting most of Kat's response and looked at her dad. "Well... um... it's sort of hard to start there but... well... I have this desk, and we were tempted to just sneak it in but..."

"Well, the carvings, of um... everyone I guess? They look like them... except, well, Kat has horns, and wings and... she looks like she actually does. I thought that when you guys finally looked at that there would be... um... bigger questions I supposed?"

"So, we sort of planned to sneak both past today and confuse you both enough by just... treating it like it was normal to get by? And... um... maybe you'd just let it go? Or... be too embarrassed to ask later"

Harold nodded along with his daughters reasoning. "Honestly not a bad plan. How did you think you were going to get it past me though?"

Lily blushed and looked away from her father before muttering. "Well... you haven't really been doing much... so I kinda just worried about what mom would say"

Harold sighed. "I suppose I have been a bit distant. I mean... I think you need your space Lily, and Evaline was doing more than enough smothering since we moved, so I just sort of... took a back seat I suppose. Guess I'll have to step up again..." Harold let out a long sigh "Shoulda seen this comin'"

"Um... it's not really your fault dad" mumbled Lily.

"No, it is. You should feel safe bringing anything to either of us, even something... well ok no maybe never tell your mother about this. That's probably safer" said Harold

Lily paled significantly at that one. Harold, noticing this, rolled his eyes. "Maybe I need to teach you to hide your emotions better?"

"Why?" asked Lily

"Lily my sweet daughter. I am screaming internally right now. I want nothing more than to yell at the world in fear, wonder, joy, sadness, guilt. Why I have so many mixed emotions if you bottled them all I'm sure it'd be enough for the whole year. Doesn't show on my face though does it?" said Harold

Kat pushed energy into her eyes and looked at Harold's face. She was taking his challenge, and noticed that... he was mostly right. His skin was loose, and it looked like he was smiling slightly with barely any tension in his face. That was wrong though, Kat could see the muscles in his arms tensing and untensing, and the same with his legs. His small smile, was actually rather pinched, and his eye was actually twitching a miniscule amount.

"No..." said Lily

Harold nodded. "Right, now. Please, what geniusly stupid idea have you come up with that we need to avoid telling your mother"

Lily paled further. Kat hadn't thought it possible. "Oh no, we need to tell her? Shit, welp... um... hmm. Not it!" shouted Harold.

Lily pouted at her dad. "Nope, no way. You've got something big planned. You can tell her."

Lily groaned. "I can just... show her after..."

Harold rolled his eyes. "Whatever. Now what is this secret huh? I can see you are rather set on it, because you didn't even try and argue with not being the one to tell her."

"Imightbetryingto fbecomeamagiclcreature" mumbled Lily

"Lily...?" Harold said as he glared, trying to inject as much mocking disappointment as he could.

"I.... might be trying to... become a magical creature..." said Lily giving up on hiding it from her dad.

"Oh, like your friend Kat?" asked Harold

"No she's different" Lily said without thinking. Harold though, noticed the instinctual reaction, and had his eyes raise a fraction as he filed away that information.

"So... why are you doing this exactly?" asked Harold

Lily's eyes flashed towards Kat, realising she probably shouldn't mention the system too much, or at all if she could. It was another movement Harold caught, but, he still didn't comment. Kat managed to catch the moment he noticed them though, and filed her own note away.

"Well... I want to learn magic. Apparently... this dimension doesn't have any mana, so... I may or may not have talent for it. If I became something else, especially something with a good amount of magic in them, I'll certainly get some of my own" said Lily, careful not to mention anything Harold shouldn't know.

Harold nodded, and turned his attention to Vivian who was still writing... on the same page she was before. "I suppose you're watching over them... Vivian I believe it was?"

Vivian looked up and beamed at Harold. "I don't know if I'd say that. They are both perfectly capable of taking care of themselves. Though, I do worry for them of course"

Harold saw this and narrowed his eyes for a split second before turning his full attention to Vivian. He sent back a similar smile, beaming at her in turn, though it felt significantly less bright. "Of course, I'd

trust my daughter to make her own decisions, but don't you think it warrants a decently high level of adult supervision."

Vivian's smile got wider and looked around the room. "Adult supervision? I don't see anyone suitable for that role in here?" somehow, even as Vivian said the accusatory words, her aura only got brighter.

Harold tried to return the favour but couldn't manage the natural smiling grace Vivian had. "Well, are you saying you aren't capable?"

"I'm saying I hardly count as an adult" said Vivian with full shine. "I'm basically still a kid, and I certainly wouldn't say I'm any more mature than Kat, or Lily"

"Oh, perhaps I do need to hear what's happening after all" said Harold smiling, thinking he'd won.

Vivian's smile however, got wider, straining just the slightest bit, but her demeanour never cracking. "Oh? Someone who hasn't had a real conversation in years? Or someone who let his wife insult the only friend she has wants to watch over them now they've finally found something of their own?"

Harold reacted as if he'd been physically punched. "Well, that might be a little harsh..."

Vivian didn't let him go on though. "Perhaps it might be, but as I already said, I have utmost faith in these girls." Vivian walked forward to place her arm on Lily's shoulder "but, if Lily really wanted to tell you about the full story, she would have done so before. I don't mind if she does in the future, hell she can tell you the moment she leaves... but you let this go on. I won't let you try and sneak into their world without doing any work for it. You left her alone when she most needed help. Allowed your wife to isolate you all, and now, you come in and say she inherited her intelligence from you?"

Vivian's eyes were practically glowing at this point, and Kat was sure, had it been her eyes they really would have been but Vivian wasn't finished. "You say you are smart yes? And I'm sure you are... but perhaps the truth is... you're just as worried about Kat as your wife... you're just taking the longer route to get there. I will not let your hurt them"

Harold's smile cracked, unable to stand up to Vivian's sunny disposition or her poisonous word. He glanced around the room once before nodding slightly to himself and heading for the door. "I suppose I'll see you later tonight Lily" said Harold as he left.

### **Chapter 333: Talking it Over**

After Harold left the room, there was silence. The three remaining were willing to let it sit, and have it assisted with Kat calming everyone's emotions. Kat realised that she'd really been caught up in Vivian's flow, and was glad that she hadn't started to leak fire or set her eyes alight during the conversation.

It was like this, that Sylvie found them when she poked her head into the room. "Sylvie?" said Kat with confusion in her voice.

"I think it's time we left for a bit. I could cut the tension in this house with a knife" said Sylvie.

Vivian frowned "There will be no tension cutting on my watch Sylvie" despite her frown, Vivian continued, her eyes sparkling. "It's dangerous to let someone as sweet and innocent as yourself play with knives"

"Well..." said Sylvie stretching out the word. "I might have tilted all of the picture frames in this house, moved aside all of the nick knacks to reveal dust spots, and put old double-sided tape on all of the cupboards."

Everyone stared opened mouthed at Sylvie, and Kat got a weird sense of Déjà vu.

"Oh, and Callisto already lets me use the knives when I help her cook occasionally" said Sylvie, poking her tongue out at the end before she left the room just for good measure. That seemed to break the spell on everyone in the room. Vivian went straight after Sylvie, and Kat, seeing Lily was thinking but not moving, scooped her up into a princess carry and swiftly followed behind them.

They left the house, following Sylvie's lead, straight back to the car and into it. Callisto yielded the drivers position, and they headed off. They stopped by just for a short moment to drop the trailer back where it belonged before heading home. Sylvie managed to convince Kat to hold her during the ride this time, though Kat was extra careful with Sylvie as she still had to sit forward so Lily wasn't being crushed by her wings.

It didn't take any longer than half an hour to pull into the garage though, and everyone was piling out shortly after. Some unspoken agreement led them all into the lounge room to take their positions. Sylvie, Lily and Kat on the couch, and Vivian and Callisto in the armchairs. Silence followed for a few seconds before Vivian spoke. "Sorry Lily... I probably shouldn't have been so hard on your father"

Lily gulped once, but steeled herself... before snatching Sylvie off Kat's lap and hugging her tightly as a form of comfort. Sylvie's eyes flickered up to Lily's face for only a moment before she snuggled into the bookworm.

"No... um... no I think you did the right thing" said Lily

Vivian bit her lip as she looked at everyone's faces, and seeing no condemnation anywhere said "Are you sure? I mean... obviously you're sure but... are you sure? He's still your father and the whole point of the plan was to sort everything out so we wouldn't have any issues with your parents... and I sort of ruined all that"

Lily hugged Sylvie tightly, and the young girl just let her head rest back on Lily without complaint. It was a little tight for her, but Sylvie wasn't going to deny Lily this extra support. Kat did notice however, the slightly pinched look on Sylvie's face, and kept a note of it. "Look... um... I guess... hmmm..."

"I don't... I don't exactly want... I mean... I don't want to say bad things about dad... but I... I'm not sure how he can say that? I mean... I was actually listening to him for the first part... um... until you stepped up I was willing to basically just forgive all the things he's done..." said Lily

Vivian's eyes narrowed, and for the first time today, a truly annoyed Vivian was taking note of the words being said very careful. "Lily... what do you mean by 'all the things?'"

"Er... um" Lily stumbled as she saw Vivian's look and loosened her grip on Sylvie just a bit before the younger girl tapped her hand, allowing her to gather herself enough to say, "Well... um he wasn't ever bad to me... I mean, my parents... neither of them have been bad to ME... but... well Kat's another story..."

"He... well he's sort of right in that unlike mom he didn't really do anything bad to her but... well... he has said SOME things... and he really let mom get away with a lot you know... I... I never really thought of it as a problem... or well... I mean... um..."

"Take your time Lily" said Vivian softly reigning in her scarier expressions, while Kat snaked her tail around Lily to add her support as well.

Lily took a long breath, and some time to organise her speech. Before she spoke next, she tried to reassure herself that she wouldn't stutter and that she'd say what she meant. "Ok... um, so in a lot of books and stories... people treat it as just as bad to watch something horrible happen as it is to do that thing...

"And even if I don't quite believe that... um... the old saying 'The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing' and... that's really what my dad was doing. He was just letting mom insult Kat and... even when I defended her, dad just let mom say whatever she wanted to me as well. So... I just... yeah..."

Vivian opened her mouth to say something but Callisto was the one who jumped in. "I know what you mean Lily. You were willing to forgive your dad for not doing anything because he wasn't hurting you and... I presume his argument was compelling?"

Lily and Vivian groaned in sync. "We didn't explain it to Callisto/Sylvie or Sylvie/Callisto" said them both with Vivian speaking Callisto's name first and Lily Sylvie's. Once they realised this, they all looked at Kat for her to use her memory to go over it word for word.

Kat happily obliged, catching Sylvie and Callisto up on exactly what Harold said. When it was over Sylvie snuggled into Lily more and pulled Lily's arms tighter around her. Callisto, leaned further back in her seat and said "That. Is rather unusual" in a somewhat hollow voice.

Everyone waited for her follow-up response, somehow feeling her silent request for the others to wait on her next words... which were, "No really, this is an extremely unusual case. I don't fully understand the scope of your father's personality Lily. I... I'm not sure I've ever met someone like that. Some of the things he's said make me believe his claim to intelligence but... some others make me question it greatly... yet he clearly isn't too poor with people, I mean he almost had you even if something like that would never get past Vivian, she's a master of people..."

"It's just a bit weird really. My best guess... is that he might be more correct than you think when he says you get your intellect from him" Lily narrowed her eyes, and Callisto raised a placating hand. "I mean no offence... I'm just... guessing that perhaps rather than a true ease with people,

"He's simply read enough books to understand the theory, and has spent more than enough time in the company of both you and your mother to apply that knowledge effectively. As we saw it didn't exactly work against Vivian, and he didn't really notice anything was too wrong until it was forced in front of his face. He can see things... but he has limited understanding, something you actually strive for Lily"

Lily sat back against the chair as well, and Kat's tail tightened around her. "You might be right Callisto" whispered Lily. "You might be right" she repeated in a slightly louder voice.

"I'm sorry I have to head off to punishment soon Lily... I don't really want to just leave you here" said Kat



Lily shook her head "I've still got everyone else. And I think we can all agree that my parents don't really have anything against me... just Kat. Even if I need to defend you a bit Kat, it's not that bad..."

Kat shook her head "I just... kinda feel like this is my fault. It's me they have a problem with and I feel like I should deal with it not you"

"Kat, my parents are being idiots. That is not your fault it is theirs" said Lily

"Besides" said Vivian "While Kat is out her bedroom is free. I'm sure she doesn't mind right?"

Kat nodded instantly "Of course. Heck, even when I'm here Lily is always welcome. She might have to compete for space in the bed with Sylvie if I'm here and we all need to share it but it's fine really"

Vivian laughed, and said. "Surely with two beds between the three of you, we can work something out. For now, though, we should relax. Kat is heading off soon and we don't want to be caught up on problems. Kat, do you know if you can send us update messages while on your punishment?"

Kat shook her head "No I don't. I will if I can of course... but I don't think I'll know till I'm already gone"

### **Chapter 334: Another Succubus?!**

Kat was meditating in bed when she felt herself being pulled into a waking state. It felt urgent, but not like an emergency, so Kat pulled herself together carefully, but without wasting too much time. When her eyes opened and she saw the burning red symbols floating beside her bed she knew it was time to leave.

Carefully removing her arms and tail from around Sylvie wasn't enough, because as she did so, the little girl's eyes opened and look straight into Kat's. "You're going then?" asked Sylvie, her voice even softer than normal.

Kat nodded. "Yes. I'll try and be back soon but... this time I don't really think there will be anything I can do"

Sylvie nodded "I know. Good luck Kat" said Sylvie as she gave Kat a wave.

Kat got up, careful to walk around the portal, to pick up her fans, before remembering they were still on her. Patting the spot where they were hidden in her sash, Kat stepped into the fire and said, "I'm ready"

The transfer was fast. Not instant, but much faster than normal. Flames of all colours rushed past her eyes for barely five seconds when Kat found herself back on solid ground. Before she could even really look around, she heard a voice. "New arrival, straight through the door and line up!"

Kat looked around stunned. She was in a small, undecorated room. It didn't seem to have anything in it at all, and there was only just enough space for her when taking her wings and horns into account. Heading for the door as she'd been told, Kat found herself walking into an auditorium.

Really, it was just a big room with an exceptionally high ceiling, but it was slowly filling up. Lining the wall Kat had just came from was a number of other doors of various sizes, with a similar set on the opposite side. In the middle of the room, a bit further to the left and facing the raised section, was a crowd of demons.

Kat started heading towards them, even as she examined the rest of the room. Other than the one large door behind the podium, and the podium itself just as bare as the one she'd left, with the only variance of course being the large number of demons. Each demon looked rather drastically different from each other, though some shared at least a few similarities.

Kat recognised a beholder, or more accurately, she recognised that one of them was a beholder, instead of just an unknown type of demon like the others. There was one off to the side, near that beholder that had a long snake tail and snake hair, which made Kat think they must have been a medusa, having remembered a bit from Kara.

The other demons were less easy to guess the species of. There were what looked to be living shadows, with little pinpricks of light for eyes. A mass of tentacles that, at first glance looked similar to a beholder, but closer inspection revealed a complete lack of eyes. A seemingly normal looking goat that's only questionable feature was the fact that its beard was on fire. A group of three demons that looked to be pumpkin heads with cloaks. They weren't really wearing the cloaks, because Kat could see their heads bobbing, and they lacked any limbs, having only a pair of gloves and a pair of shoes for them.

Kat settled into the back of the line, as she looked over the sheer variety of demons around her. Kat found herself next to a very solidly built demon that looked a lot like a tiger that had been squeezed into a suit. Unlike the pumpkins though, they actually looked to be wearing it instead... but it just seemed so out of place Kat wasn't willing to actually bet on that.

"Hi there!" said a peppy voice from beside her. Kat turned, to the voice and found herself faced with what, in her mind, had to be a succubus. She looked similar to Kat in some ways, and very different in a few others, but to be accurate she looked like this...

Instead of Kat's deep red hair, the girl, no woman, seemed to have almost neon pink hair, that was tied up into a bun on either side of her head. Each bun seemed to surround a horn that just barely poked out of her hair. What little of the horns Kat could see, made it seem like they were made of the same smooth black material her own was.

The woman's face was heart shaped, that seemed to defy attempts to identify the owner's age. She had a sharp chin, and jawline, but, what Kat had to assume, were very squishable cheeks, and even Kat was finding it hard to resist pinching them, though she'd never seen something like that done before. Her nose was small, but slightly sharp, and her lips were exceptionally thin, but in a wide smile.

Her eyes though, were her most unique features so far. When someone said 'you have stars in your eyes' it normally wasn't meant so literally. Whoever this woman was, she had stars in all four corners of her iris with a cross shaped pupil in the centre. The colours were also spectacular, with her eyes trending from a similar pink to her hair at the bottom and working their way to a deep blue at the top. The stars were a piercing white, and the cross in the centre was as well.

The woman's ears were a little strange, but compared to the eyes it was nothing much. They were very slightly pointed but that was all, and if Kat wasn't currently taking in so much of this stranger's appearance, she wouldn't have bothered to note it at all.

Her outfit, was where Kat's questions of age resurfaced. It was massive. Now, this girl wasn't terribly short by any measure, just slightly shorter than Kat herself, without including Kat's horns of course. The

outfit the woman had though, would have been large on Kat, let alone her. The white top's sleeves were so long that they hung down near the woman's ankles and puffed out significantly making Kat think she could make a full extra dress out of each sleeve individually let alone combined.

At her waist, was a large red bow that also wasn't doing her any favours. At its largest it stretched from her elbows until, two thirds of the way to her knees. It seemed to be part of the whole outfit, with the rest of the red material running around her waist.

Finally, the skirt, which was really the only reasonably sized part of the outfit, just barely managed to cover her feet. She wasn't likely to tread on the ends as she walked, but they hid whatever footwear she was wearing underneath.

At her back were wings, though they weren't really anything like Kat's own. Instead of Kat's own massive wings that took up most of her back and could easily extend out past her arms, the woman's wings were really tiny and positioned slightly lower down her back. They were pure black similar to Kat's but there was not even a touch of other colours.

Her tail was the only thing that Kat could say was almost the same as her own. It was a little bit shorter than Kat's but, that was likely due to the woman's slightly shorter stature rather than anything else.

"Um... hi?" said Kat confused. Nobody else was talking at this point and she wasn't exactly sure if she should be.

"Oh, it's so nice to see another succubus here" said the woman throwing herself at Kat and hugging her. Kat could've dodged, but was unwilling to fight the bright smile on the woman's face.

As she collided with Kat, she felt a noticeably squishy sensation that revealed that the woman in question possessed somewhat sizeable assets that had been hidden by just how oversized her outfit was... and perhaps a little bit of the bow as well. What was weird for Kat, was that the woman's tail hadn't been included in the hug, and Kat was unsure how she wanted to deal with that, returning the hug but also not moving her tail.

\*I wonder why that is? Is it not a thing most succubi do? Does it perhaps have a special meaning? Is it rude maybe? I just don't know... seeing how... 'enthusiastic' this girl seems I really can't be sure.\*

"Yeah... I guess so? Um... are you a full succubus? Is that rude to ask?" asked Kat

The woman separated herself from Kat and pouted. "Well, it isn't that rude I suppose, but you didn't even ask for my name"

Kat winced, embarrassed at that fact, and at the fact that she'd needed that pointed out to her. "I'm so sorry about that. My name's Kat, what's yours?"

"Kamiko!"

### **Chapter 335: Maō Shoujo Kamiko!**

"Hi... Kamiko..." said Kat suddenly feeling really awkward about the question she'd just blurted out. Deciding to change the question and hopefully just forget about the whole thing, Kat continued with.

"You seem awfully happy to be here for your punishment"

Kamiko stuck her tongue out at Kat. "Naw, I just don't see any reason to mope about. Besides, this is the kiddy punishment. We basically get the whole sales pitch... er... I mean, we should do... this looks like a lot more people than normal so maybe they will be splitting us up? Hmm... this is for your rank one debt right?"

Kat nodded "Yes. It is..."

"Great!" shouted Kamiko, latching back on to Kat. "We can be partners then. They normally make us pair up anyway and they like partners to be similar races so we should be fine" Kamiko made sure to wiggle her eyes at the end proving she hadn't forgotten about Kat's question, but she didn't seem upset.

So Kat couldn't help but ask. "So... are you a pure succubus then? I know I'm not, but nobody will actually tell me what I am"

"Oh, you poor thing" Kamiko reached up to try and pat Kat on the head, but Kat's horns were in the way and Kamiko's massive sleeves managed to get caught on Kat's wings, so Kamiko aborted the attempt.

"Well... I'm not really sure. I mean... in my family we just don't really care?"

"I know I'm at least a half. I mean, both my parents are at least halves as well... but I dunno what mix I got from either of them really. I mean, I don't have anyone's horns, these are all mine in the family... then there's the eyes. My mum also has fancy eyes, but not like mine. Sis has similar eyes to me, but still, not quite right. Actually, my eyes are kinda like a combination of mum and Sis, but... obviously that's not the case.

"Everyone has wings like mine though... or well, all of my immediate family. Cousin Hekresh doesn't. but we don't like to talk about him. Inherited a bunch of old recessive traits and suddenly thinks he's too good for us cocky little shit..." Kamiko trailed off, shaking her head as if to clear the bad memories before looking back up at Kat.

"So sorry about that, I mean... I'd love to say that I don't know what came over me, but I do... I'm a bit of a rambler really. It's a real shame you don't know what kind of succubus you are, you have beautiful wings, much nicer than mine. I know I might fly with them one day, but not before Rank 5. You however, they look like the just might be good enough to..."

"Oh but you don't have to tell me of course, I mean. I'm sure that's very personal. And of course, your horns." Kamiko shivered in place. "If you have any brothers, you have to send them my way. The colour is just... breathtaking. The power they must be able to help sustain. I bet a Rank 3... no Rank 4 would have a hard time snapping them..."

"Sorry, am I making you uncomfortable? I didn't mean to do that. People say I'm a little full on... but I mean I really see that as a good thing don't you? I get to talk enough for both of us really. I get to chat more, and you get to save yourself the trouble... or just ignore me if I'm being annoying. That way I don't even have to notice!"

"Hey" Kat said softly putting a hand on the, what Kat was starting to consider, young girl. She may look mature, but it was clear her mind was anything but. "It's alright. I don't really mind. It's... well it's a bit different to what I'm used to but I'm listening, and my perfect memory won't let me forget"

"Ooooo" said Kamiko excitedly "You have a perfect memory? That's AWESOME! How functional is it? My father actually has filing recall. It's not the best memory ability, and it takes some real time and effort to get the most out of it but it's still cool! Why..."

Kat jumped in to actually answer the question before Kamiko got on a roll again. "I don't know really. I... I have to sort of know what I'm looking for? It's hard to say exactly but I have it all there in my head, but I have to call it in some way. Either by going through related stuff or just asking for it... oh and if I try to read anything too fast that doesn't interest me it starts to blend into a tangled mess in my mind. The memories aren't... gone per se, but they are so tangled as to be useless"

Kamiko nodded her head vigorously. "That's so cool! I think that might be better than my dad's... though maybe less organised... then again, I guess you can sort of still forget them if you have no reason at all to remember while dad can stroll around looking for stuff when he's bored... still that's so cool!

"Hey so, now that we're partners" \*When did I agree to that...? Oh whatever she seems nice enough so I won't correct her.\* "We can talk about our other abilities! We can go one for one, exchanging as we go, and demonic fire doesn't count cause everyone has that and it's BORING!

"So, first thing's first, I can shoot lasers out of my eyes. They only burn things right now, and are more like a concentrated version of my demonic fire but IT STILL COUNTS! I think I'll get a more options in the future but at the moment that's all the lasers do...

"Though mum is really cool. She actually has healing lasers. And those are like... super rare. She's the only one I know that has it, and I'm pretty sure one of the only people who has something like that in the entire hub and I really really hope I get that ability one day. She won't tell me what rank she got it though... says it should be a surprise...

"But I think that's silly, I want to know so I can try really hard to unlock it myself when I get to that rank. Of course, lots of people say that trying for a certain power doesn't really help, but I mean... it can't hurt right? And mum does have it already so I should be somewhat likely..."

Kat, seeing an opening, decided to jump in. "Yes, that's possible I suppose. I managed to get a dream walking ability when a... summoner? Friend? I dunno, anyway, they needed my help and their grandmother cast a very powerful spell on me during my rank up. It was an emergency beacon, so it just sort of happened... and I got a dream walking ability instead of the spell working. Sure it was never going to work at all because it wasn't designed for demons... but it did its job"

"Woah" mumbled Kamiko, the stars in her eyes, actually twinkling. They moved ever so slightly as she smiled and were emitting light similar to when Kat was particularly emotional or empowering them fully "Dream walking is really rare at a low rank, I never thought I'd hear about someone my rank that has it! Wait you are Rank 2 right?" Kat nodded, but Kamiko was already ploughing forward "Great to hear, that's so cool. I mean, it's a little specific but it's really neat...

"Um, so another one of my abilities... um... well, I bet you have the good skin package right? Dirt just slides off us, which is really nice, especially when you also get it for your hair. Not everyone does you know? I mean, my family was lucky, we all got it but... I've seen things Kat... horrible things... you do NOT want to know what happens when you miss out on that"

Kat actually felt herself swallow unconsciously at the truly haunted look in Kamiko's eyes so she just nodded along. "Ok, yes you do... so that doesn't really count... um... did you get the nail poison? That's pretty standard as well, and everyone except dad has that..." Kat shook her head. "Oh? No nail poison? Huh... that's normally one of the firsts... it's really useful and scales super well as we rank up... you might not get it at all if you don't have it yet. I think rank 3 is your last chance.

"Really it's great. I mean, it's nothing special compared to dream walking but it's a solid ability. It lets you pick from, well, I CAN pick from paralysis, internal bleeding, and one that stops cuts from clotting. You can either have it come straight out of your nails when you strike, or, dragging your nails along a weapon, you can apply the poison to it instead.

"Sis, actually has really neat ones. I mean... she's only Rank 1 and she has more poisons than I do... though she doesn't have the lasers..."

### **Chapter 336: You can do What?**

Seeing Kamiko finally slowing down a little, Kat knew it was her chance to jump in again. \*But what should I mention? What's actually standard here? We both have the dirt repelling skin but she said the poison nails were really common.

Do I talk about my enhanced speed and better sense? Or are they just default when you rank up? I think they have to be... but I also think I might be ahead of the pack... um... Oh I know.\* "I have True Sight" said Kat

Kamiko's jaw dropped. "You have TRUE SIGHT? Like real honest to god TRUE SIGHT? Not that cheap knockoff stuff... um... what was it called... I think it was something like illusion breaker? No not that that's another one... um... truthful sight? No... I mean yes I think that might be one but not that...."

"It's real True Sight" said Kat "The system was pretty clear on that one. I haven't really seen the limits of it but... it's been useful a few times"

Kamiko nodded repeatedly, and Kat got a little worried that Kamiko's neck was about to give up. "That's AWESOME. People just don't have that anymore Kat. I mean, I guess they do because obviously you have it but... you have no idea how rare something like that is do you?

"I hardly even hear about people with some minor illusion breaking sight, or area of effect abilities. I don't even know anyone with the more basic forms of that ability. I'm not sure anyone in the whole HUB has real True Sight. I mean sure, some people will say it because true sight and True Sight, aren't quite the same thing...

"But if it is real... my god. We learn about that in textbooks about rare abilities. It's not the rarest of course, but practically nobody gets it at all. I mean... when you get to higher levels of power and climb the ranks it becomes less important because they can still see through illusions but...

"True Sight is automatic. It takes a completely ridiculous amount of power to trick someone with True Sight. You have to be... like... thousands of times stronger. It isn't even remotely close. You have to waste sooo much energy to get them to believe in the flimsiest illusion. Also, also, apparently it does some things later on.

"Like... apparently once you get more powerful you can tell when people are lying. And you can just... see where you are supposed to go. Well, I'm not too sure about that second one, but I've heard it said. We don't really, or I guess just I don't really know how true that is because it really is that rare!" finished Kamiko, finally looking slightly out of breath.

"She is right you know" said a deep voice from Kat's other side. Turning to see the lion suited demon, he continued. "Sorry for overhearing but your... friend? Isn't exactly quiet. Still, it is a truly rare thing. I'd recommend not telling too many people about it. The biggest shame is that it's somewhat hard to disguise. You start seeing through old illusions and everyone will know"

"Um thanks?" said Kat

The lion man shrugged and said "No problem" before turning back away from Kat and Kamiko, clearly not all that interested in the pair of them.

Kamiko, looked suitably chastised, staring down at her feet and kicking at the ground uselessly. This lasted all of five seconds before a bright smile returned and she continued. "Um, so... I only really have one more ability and that is that I can teleport short distances. When I say short... I mean really really short. Like...? you can probably run faster than I can teleport because I have to stop completely for it to work.

"I'm... not really all that proud of that one. I know it can get better but it's kinda just dead weight at the moment. I do have it though, and that's really all that matters." Said Kamiko, slightly diminished, but not really. It was clear she was still very happy with the ability whatever her words said.

"I have high level succubus regeneration." Said Kat "Just to add on, I also have enhanced physique, but I'm not sure how standard that is compared to everyone else"

Kamiko shrugged "Yeah, everyone has that to some extent. Some people are stronger than others so that one is sort of hard to tell without testing it. I mean, I got stronger when I went up a rank. Honestly it was at least double my strength and it was a huge improvement, but from nothing to Rank 1 was basically no change.

"Regeneration though, that's really cool. It's not super flashy but I'd love to pick it up. Um... what makes it succubus regeneration though?" asked Kamiko

"No scars" said Kat

Kamiko's eyes bulged in their sockets "No scars? Like... none what so ever? Not even if you were to lose an arm or something?"

Kat shook her head. "Nope not even then. Well, I'd need to get the arm back apparently, but it would reconnect and there would be no scars after I did that"

Kamiko gulped. "I know I talked up True Sight but... if I'm jealous of anything you've got it has to be that regeneration. I mean... it isn't SUPER rare, and if you have the smooth skin like we do, it's harder to scare a succubus... but it isn't impossible, especially if the scar is meaningful"

Kat tilted her head "What do you mean?"

"Um... so... I guess you won't have to worry with regeneration like that but... do you know what the difference between a scar and a Scar is? You can hear the difference right" Kat nodded "Good. So, normal scars are just things you pick up over time. One large nick here, a deeper gash there. Just damage over time. A succubus won't really pick stuff like that up. Our skin just sort of... smooths over it"

"It's... we're not really sure because it doesn't seem at first to be a property of that ability, because some other succubus seem to have it as well but EVERYONE with the ability doesn't get scars. Callouses especially, they behave the weirdest.

"Your skin... it just sort of knows? It stays smooth but it will let your grip weapons properly. Really weird stuff. Anyway, Scars, are more emotional things. Things that even with perfect healing or a skin graft or regeneration tend to stick around.

"Like... losing your arm would leave a Scar even if you put it back, or... something extreme like getting stabbed in the heart, or like... if your best friend gave you a slight cut on the face. That wouldn't heal. You however, can shrug it all off."

Kat nodded "Yeah. I'm certainly glad for that. I did not enjoy getting stabbed through the heart... twice."

"WHAT!"

Kat winced at Kamiko's shout but, to her surprise, most demons nearby didn't even blink at the noise.

"Yes... it's... a bit of a story but I was stabbed through the heart when I was weakened the first time. And the second, I let it happen to hold him there for someone else to attack."

Kamiko shivered. "That sounds really dangerous Kat. Maybe I am glad I don't have regeneration. How far apart did that happen?"

"Like... ten minutes maybe? Twenty tops" said Kat

Kamiko winced visibly. "I... I don't know how you could just... do that. I mean... regeneration doesn't stop the pain right?"

Kat shook her head. "No it doesn't. Well... it does once the nerves have been destroyed. Though it comes back with a vengeance once they get repaired. And that time pushing gravel out of my throat was NOT fun"

Kamiko shivered again and said. "Let's... let's not talk about that if you don't mind... I mean... I'm sure it was cool but... I don't think I want to picture someone as nice as you going through something like that."

"You think I'm nice?" said Kat with the tilt of her head.

"Of course. I mean, you were willing to let me ramble, and it's clear that you're actually listening to me. I mean... not even my family does that a lot of the time. They just abuse how well they know me to guess what the topic is and pretend. I... I don't point out that I know about it though... they all have a tell.

Mum's eyes dim noticeably, Sis starts to tap her foot, and dad... his is really weird, but he starts to breathe through his mouth instead of his nose like normal. Took me forever to figure that one out, but when he grew his moustache a bit more, I finally caught notice."



Kat sighed and patted Kamiko on the head, making sure to be careful of the girl's horns. \*Why do I get the strange feeling that I've adopted this girl? I just listened to her talk for a bit right?\* A picture of a pouting Sylvie came to mind. \*Shit. I'm being double teamed by my own mind!\*

### **Chapter 337: Competing Flames**

As Kat was patting Kamiko on the head, the shorter succubus released a content sigh, before leaning in to hug Kat. Kat for her part, also let out a sigh, but one filled with semi-reluctant acceptance. It would seem, that instead of a partner for the task, she had picked up another little sister somehow. The constant flashes of a pouting Sylvie in her mind imploring her to take good care of the girl didn't help... because the first one was more than enough for Kat to accept her fate.

"Is there anything else to go over?" asked Kat

"Hmrrh?" mumbled Kamiko

"I think I've gone through all of the abilities unique to me. What about you?" asked Kat

"Um, yeah I have as well..." said Kamiko "Um, I guess there is just your demonic flame and aura if either of them have any weird effects..."

Kat groaned internally. \*Weird effects are basically my life.\* "Yeah, both of mine fit under that category."

Kamiko turned her eyes towards Kat, and Kat was certain they were larger as they gazed up at her with hope. "Really?" asked Kamiko, putting a shocking amount of weight into the question.

Kat continued patted her head. "You know none of us can lie right?" asked Kat.

"Well... yeah but... my parents really needed to help me with that, a lot of people aren't as honest as me despite that fact and I was tricked quite a few times by creative wording. I just had to make sure you know? I mean... not that I don't trust you of course it's just... um... I also have strange effects on my aura and demonic fire..."

"The fire one isn't so rare, it's cold instead of hot, but it's still really unusual. Nobody else in my family has that power and I can't really practice it with them because they don't have my cold resistance so it's actually really dangerous to test it with them you know? I mean... I tried to practice when I can but yeah... and they can't even really show me because the heat gets to me really quite fast so..."

"We just sort of have to awkwardly try to balance the temperature in the room, which is horrible because I don't really have the control for it and neither does my sister so it has to be my parents and they are rather busy so... yeah"

Kat's hand froze on Kamiko's head. "Um... I'm sorry" said Kamiko after a few seconds of silence.

"Oh, no, no I'm sorry you didn't do anything wrong... it's just... I'm a bit confused" said Kat

Kamiko tilted her head to the side bringing Kat's hand with her a bit. "Well, see, actually I have cold fire as well... but I also know I have resistance to heat"

"Really?" said Kamiko, confusion leaking into her voice "I'm not sure I've heard about that..."

"Well, I can prove part of it" said Kat, summoning a small ember of purple fire and moving it towards Kamiko, inviting her to make her own judgement. Kamiko raised her hand slowly, but with a confident set to her face. It looked rather adorable, but her shaking hand made Kat feel kind of bad for some reason. As Kamiko's hand touched Kat's flame she held it there for a few moments.

"Can you turn it up a little?" asked Kamiko

Kat nodded, and pushed more power into it until the flame engulfed all of Kamiko's hand. "Hmm, yeah I can feel the cold. It's nothing major to me. I'm sure you can make it colder of course but... yeah I don't see why you'd have any heat resistance when you clearly have cold fire like me...

"I mean, I guess it's possible but I wonder if it has something to do with your fire, or maybe your race? I mean it's clear that you aren't quite a normal succubus, or maybe I'm not? Either way, you aren't quite the same mix as me, we have enough major differences to make that clear...

"On the other hand, it might just be another one of your abilities? I don't know if I've ever heard of someone just having resistance to both hot and cold though, that's rather unusual? Or is it... I guess I never really asked because everyone I know has hot fire and the corresponding immunity..."

"Kamiko" said Kat, but there was no response, and Kamiko continued to speak.

"Am I the weird one then? Maybe it's stranger that I have cold fire and no heat resistance. I mean, everyone I know has it, but... they also have fire that burns you so I just don't know what is actually the outlier..."

"Kamiko!" said Kat, dismissing the flame as she did so.

"Oh" said Kamiko snapping out of her rant. "Um... sorry? I... I just get really excited you know? I didn't mean to ramble so much... sorry" Kamiko was practically wilting before Kat's eyes and it left a bitter taste in her mouth.

\*I just wanted her to stop thinking that she's the weird one. I had a feeling she was going to go down that route and start insulting herself, she does it shockingly frequently for such a cheery girl.\*

"Hey, it's ok. I just didn't want you to berate yourself. Please don't feel bad. I wasn't trying to stop you speaking just... not bad things about yourself" said Kat

"Ok!" said Kamiko saluting towards Kat. \*Why does she know how to salute? Is this just a universal thing?\* "Sorry about being a downer. I don't normally get caught in a downward spiral like that I just got a little downhearted about my fire. It's a major hang up because I can neither practice nor control it"

Kat nodded. "I understand. I don't really know what I'm doing either, and my practices were few and far between really. What... um what colour is your fire by the way?"

Kamiko smiled and summoned forth a soft pink flame. It was lighter than her hair by a significant margin. It looked like those pale pink roses that have just the slightest dash of colour in them preventing them from being white. Kat smiled as well "It's a beautiful flame Kamiko"

Kamiko blushed and shifted but kept her smile. "Nah, mine is nothing special really, it's still a red derivative and it's so close to white because of my frost affinity. It's not as cool looking as your powerful

purple fire. I mean sure technically it's still a red derivative but really everything is more or less, and it's such a deep colour"

As Kamiko gushed Kat enhanced her eyes. Kamiko had yet dismiss her flame, and Kat looked at the details. Nothing she could see made her feel like it was less 'full' of a colour. There was a slight difference in colour between the base and the edges, as if the pink bled of slightly towards the edges, but as Kat put her hand in it and carefully moved it around, she could feel no difference in temperature.

\*Which... honestly isn't that glowing of a recommendation considering I hardly feel temperature differences anymore but... hmm, I don't actually know if there is a difference in my own either... it's not like I can test it really. I can't feel my own flame and I don't feel very comfortable asking my friends to feel the difference.\*

"As I already said. I think your flame is a lovely colour. A bit like fresh roses" said Kat

"What's a rose? I mean... I get from the translation that it's a plant of some kind, and I can like... almost get a picture of it in my head but not quite, because it sounds like it's a cross between two others sort of, when I hear it... if that makes sense?" said Kamiko with a pout.

Kat just shook her head. "Sorry I don't really know why that is the case. They are a very nice flower from my home dimension"

"Huh, I didn't know you lived outside the Hub. That's a bit unusual is it n- oh..." Kamiko trailed off slightly.

"What's wrong?" asked Kat

"D.E.M.O.N.S told me not to ask about it. Which... is a little weird not going to lie... but I guess that's just how it is if you live outside the hubs? I bet that means it's somewhere really cool with all sorts of neat things" said Kamiko happily.

\*Well, I think Earth is pretty normal but... maybe it would be cool? I mean... do these guys have projectors? Entertainment? Surely, they must... then again, I haven't exactly looked around and whose department would that be anyway?

Maybe it's a mix? Or Greed just sells whatever stories looks good? I never really thought about what they do for entertainment? Is that horrible of me? Should I ask Kamiko? Would that be a really stupid question?\* Kat bit her lip slightly as she considered the question, and debated asking.

### **Chapter 338: Happily, Aura, After**

Before Kamiko could notice Kat's concern though, she redirected her thoughts and instead asked about aura, explaining her own. "Hey, Kamiko, you said you had a unique aura right? Well, mine's also a bit different. Mine apparently has a calming effect on people. I'm not sure if that's exactly what it does, but it helps others think clearer, and while it doesn't... remove your emotions I've heard it puts them off to the side or something"

"Ooh, that sounds much more interesting than mine. Show me. Show me!" said Kamiko, bouncing around.

Kat gave a light smile and applied a bit of her aura, but Kamiko grimaced instead, like she'd been punched in the stomach. "Kamiko! You alright"

Kamiko raised a shaky smile. "Yeah... I'm... I'll be alright"

"What happened Kami?" asked Kat

Kamiko's smile lit up upon hearing Kat call her by the same nickname her parents had given her, but other people had refused. Kat was just confused at the sudden attitude shift and was considering the idea that her aura might not work against demons.

"Sorry, I just wasn't expecting your aura to be so strong Kat" said Kamiko

Kat tilted her head "What do you mean? I only used a bit"

Kamiko choked on her words and whipped her eyes to match Kat's. "What? What... what is full power like?"

Kat shrugged "Not really sure I haven't used it in a while."

Kamiko's eyes darted from Kat's to the floor and then back to Kat. "Do it"

"Do what?"

"Use your aura at full power" said Kamiko.

\*Is that really a good idea?\* "Is that safe? You seemed... a little put out before when I used a bit"

"I'll be fine I swear" said Kamiko "I just... well... I'm very aura sensitive. It's not technically an ability, and it's more connected to my aura and my great control over of it even if it isn't the most useful one... so when I felt yours crash into me it was like getting hit in the face by a Wrath demon. I was looking for it you know? Um... maybe that was a bad example..."

"I suppose it would be like if I went right up to your mouth expecting a whisper and you shouted in my ear instead. It wouldn't have been so bad if instead I'd just stayed standing but I moved right up to you and made it worse."

Kat was very tempted to tell Kamiko off for putting herself down slightly with the example, implying it was her own fault. \*But I'm not sure she even noticed... and it might be an accurate example... so I'll let it go.\*

"Alright. I'll do it if you're sure" said Kat

"Go" said Kamiko.

Kat let her aura surge. She hadn't noticed but at some point, she had started to keep it around just herself, stopping it from reaching out towards anyone else, and controlled somewhat tightly. Now that it had a direction and it was the full power, Kat could feel it exploding out her.

It was obvious once the aura hit Kamiko, because she dropped instantly. As soon as the wave hit her eyes closed and she started dropping. Kat shoved all the energy she could into her system, slowing her perception, and moving at full speed to catch Kamiko before she hit the floor.

Of course, Kat managed to catch her before she'd fallen basically at all, so swift was her movement, but Kat was currently panicking somewhat badly. She kept her enhanced cognition running as she tried to work out what she should do about the girl in her arms.

\*She's fine right? Should I get her to the hospital? Is she even going to be ok? Wait is she still breathing?\*

Kat strained her ears to try and hear the sound of Kamiko's breathing and heard nothing. Of course, she had slowed her perception so much that it was much more like, Kamiko hadn't needed to take in another breath yet... but that didn't help Kat's thoughts.

Luckily, a complete disaster was averted by a large hand being placed on her shoulder. "Your emotions are exploding. It's fine, the girl is just asleep"

Kat snapped out of her enhanced cognition as the surprise shattered her concentration and stopped the energy circulating through her head. As soon as this happened of course, Kat heard Kamiko breathing, and saw her curling up slightly and burying her face into Kat. "Um... woops" said Kat, turning to the lion guy. "And thanks... I uh... didn't know this would happen or... what 'this' was going to be"

Kat just received a grunt for her explanation, as the Lion guy once again turned back to the front. \*Huh... now that I think about it... kind of weird we are still waiting in this room.\* Kat looked around and saw that it was still filling up though, with a new cast of colourful demons slowly filling in behind her. It also seemed that other people were chatting, she just couldn't hear them. \*Which is really weird... even more so than the fact we are still waiting. I guess we are waiting on more people but... why can't I?\*

Kat pushed a bit of energy into her ears and then a whole auditorium's worth of sound smashed into her. Kat yanked the energy out of her ears swiftly, silencing the noise once more. \*Ok now that's weird... is it like... enchanted or something? We can only hear the people directly next to us unless we want to or something?\*

It seemed though, that Kat's jolt had an unexpected side effect, as Kamiko started to stir. "No mummy, I'm not sleeping in. Just fi- er t- er, eventually. I'll get u- apparently I won't"

Kat failed to suppress her laughter as Kamiko's inability to lie forced her to not specify a time that she'd get up. Of course, the laughter shook Kat's body further and Kamiko's eyes fluttered open. "Oh" said Kamiko

Quickly shifting in place, Kamiko wiggled out of Kat's grip and set herself down back on her own two feet. "I'm very sorry about that. I... well no I did sort of expect that. Well, maybe not exactly. I knew that your overcharged calming had to do something. Based on how it happened, I'm not quite sure how that is connected to the primary effect of sharpening the mind and... let's go with distancing emotional responses."

Kat shrugged. "I don't really use it all that much. I don't exactly understand it either"

Kamiko nodded. "That's more than ok. I'd love to teach you if I can!" said Kamiko with a brilliant smile. "I might actually be able to do a bit of that because you don't just have the standard 'Rargh Imma keel you' aura so many demons have"

Kat and Kamiko heard a snort from the lion demon beside them. They chose to ignore it. "Well, what is your aura actually?" asked Kat

Kamiko beamed. "Mine makes people happy. Also maybe a little bit of contentment. Not really sure about the second thing. It's hard to tell, because you get one alongside the other and I'm not sure if the second follows from the first, or if it's actually a secondary part of my aura. Unlike you being able to put people sleep, I haven't found anything really cool I can do with my aura...

"Even still it's nice. I can use it to help people when they are sad, and I'm happy to report it works EVEN BETTER, on them! Which... I don't quite get how that works. Maybe it's because I don't just make people happy but instead my aura forces them to a certain level of happiness, and it's more than willing to pull up sad people to that same level...

"At the same time that should be much harder to do, so maybe that isn't how it works at all? Not like you can really test it. I don't know anyone else with a happy aura. My sister actually has a sad one though? Did you know that? It's really weird with mine though, cause mine is MUCH stronger. Or maybe it isn't. I dunno, she can make people a lot sadder than I can make someone happy but...

"Whenever we try to match auras it like, isn't even close. Just a few drops of my own practically overpowers her best. Not... not exactly sure I like that fact considering you can do the same to me... huh I wonder if it's a trio thing. Like, can she shatter yours easily? Or maybe there is another emotion that would?

"That sounds fun to look into. What do you think Kat? Should we try? I mean that main problem is how rare nonstandard auras are... so we might not be able to test it... and... oh no what if they are all different ranks? Damn, this might not work then."

Kat smiled, content to listen to Kamiko ramble on about the various reasons her plan should work, and just as many explaining how it was doomed to failure.

### **Chapter 339: More Speaking... but by Someone Else**

A loud boom rang out, somehow filling Kat's ears completely and blocking out all other sound. Kamiko stopped speaking quickly as well, and they both turned to face the front. There was an extremely tall red demon standing there. He reminded Kat of Kraks the accountant slightly.

He was easily twelve feet tall, perhaps higher, but the perspective made it hard to really judge. He was also large in other ways, with thick bulging muscles in his arms and legs, making any individual limb thicker than Kat and Kamiko put together. He wore light leather armour that was just a slight shade off from his own dark red skin. Kat didn't want to think about it, but part of her was almost certain it was leather made from that same skin.

If his height seemed initially impressive, then the sword on his back had to be double so for it was even taller than him. Most was blocked by his body, but the handle easily extended a head past him. It did make Kat wonder how he even managed to draw the weapon, as his arms weren't needlessly long, but the weapon certainly was.

The other confusing thing about his outfit, was his shoes, or more specifically his lack of. Kat could see no reason for this fact. He had perfectly normal, if large, feet with five toes on either foot and everything. This compounded with the fact that he was wearing gloves, just confused Kat more. \*You know what. He's a twelve-foot-tall, at least, hulking demon. He can wear whatever he wants as footwear. I won't complain.\*

"WELCOME" said the big demon. "You are all gathered here for your punishments! Please place your hand on your chosen PARTNER! You will be responsible for each other during the punishment. Any additional punishment incurred during this will apply TO BOTH OF YOU so make sure you pick well.

"In a moment, you will be teleported away from this room into a second one to explain more specifically what you have been charged with. DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS!"

\*I mean, I really want to question what the point of gathering us all here just to say 'grab a partner and wait for more teleportation is' but I'm not going to say that.\* Kat did however, grab onto Kamiko's hand, which firmly grabbed her back. Kat was actually forced to send a bit of demonic energy through her hand, with how hard Kamiko was digging her nails into Kat's palm.

Before she could think on it too much, the demon decided that nobody was going to ask questions. Kat suspected that might be because of his threatening presence when he spoke, but who was she to assume. She felt the world tip sideways, which was weird because her visions stayed centred. Then in a short burst of colour, Kat found herself, hand in hand with Kamiko, in a tiny room with just them.

And a hologram of the big demon from the stage. "Ok listen UP! You two have been given the basic punishment for not fulfilling your Rank 1 debt. HOWEVER you are also both Rank 2 now. As such you will be sent around to each of the Seven Sin factions to do one task of their choosing.

"These tasks can be rejected, but that will require you to then perform two additional tasks at another one of the Big Seven. No task shall take longer than three days. If you spend three days attempting to complete a task, you may request D.E.M.O.N.S overview, or speak to your supervisor to remind them of this fact.

"You will perform all tasks with your partner. If your task would separate you from your partner, you are to inform them that this is a breach of article 123123123 section xxzf paragraph 3, involving first time offenders of sufficiently high Rank. Good luck. Your first stop will be randomised"

\*Wait what?\* Before Kat had time to properly absorb the information, she was sent flying through space once again. Flashing flames surrounded her for just enough time for her to realise what was happening before it stopped once again. This time though, she was dropped in front of a massive iron gate. It was a series of iron poles all bound together by strips of iron that ran across, roughly, every two metres. [novelnext.com](http://novelnext.com)

There wasn't anything special about it beside the fact that Kat couldn't actually see the end of it. Even when she pushed demonic energy into her eyes, she didn't get a hint of where the top could be. \*This... is weird. It also makes me wonder what this is made out of. It looks like normal iron, all... grey and steely, but... I don't think iron this thin could stay standing when they are so tall.\*

"Woah!" said Kamiko "The Wrath compound!"

Kat tilted her head. "You know where we are?"

Kamiko nodded "Yup yup, this has to be the Wrath compound. They... well, they like to spread out for some reason. A lot of the other compounds try to more efficiently use their space but Wrath basically just... grabbed a chunk of land and put a massive wall around it. Honestly, I kind of admire the courage

that sort of thing must take, but I suppose when you enjoy battle like they do, it's more like a challenge to everyone else to come cause trouble if they dare.

"So that way, either... Wrath wins and gets a bunch of land because nobody challenges them for it, or they fight and well... win or lose they get a big fight out of it, sometimes against multiple factions if the land they grab is actually large enough. They love those fights actually. Apparently, they just grab more land every time and see how much they can hold onto. It's not complete madness, because they don't want it to be a stomp of course.

"That would just be boring. If all the others came down on them, Wrath would lose too quickly for them to have a good time. Though, I've heard, and this is just a rumour, but I've heard, that the factions fight harder for Wrath territory mostly because they know Wrath doesn't like to kill people.

"Strange, I know, but that's something they are VERY careful of. I guess they see it sort of like..." Kamiko switched to a deeper voice for the next part, "Why kill a perfectly good opponent, that means I can't ever fight them again"

"Of course, killing them in other dimensions is fair game" Kat and Kamiko froze. Neither of them had said that last line. Awkwardly turning their heads around to the voice, Kat found...? a beard.

Looker closer, Kat realised it wasn't just a beard... even that was indeed what most of the body seemed to be. The demon in question did of course, have a luxurious grey beard that seemed to hover in place if you ignored the small pieces of body that poked out in various places.

The beard had tiny legs that were just barely visible in the gap between the beard and the ground. The beard also had eyes, they were at the very tip of Kat's horns, and made her feel like she should be looking up to meet them, as one of the few identifying features on the beard's body. What made it stranger, was that the legs were clearly behind the beard. It wasn't that the creature wasn't a beard at all, but that it was something that hid behind the beard.

"Um... hi?" managed Kat after a few seconds of staring.

"Good day youngin. I take no offence to you and your friend's words. Clearly you aren't Wrath but then again, I'm mostly retired so... I ain't too far off your perspective I'd say" said the beard.

"Hi there!" said Kamiko happily. "Mine name is Kamiko, and this is my friend Kat! We are here for the Wrath task I suppose. I mean, I guess we could be here for some other reason, but they did teleport us here after saying we were to do a task. They didn't exactly give us an order for them though...

"Oh, and how come you're retired? My Great Great Great Great Uncle on my Father's side of the family is a bremarin, and your beard is much nicer kept than his is. I mean, even though it's grey, that seems like the natural colouring of it instead of fading with age like some beards tend to. Plus it moves despite the lack of wind implying that you do actually have the signature fighting style."

The beard? Bremarin? Chuckled, it was a deep throaty laugh that seemed to come from just below the eyes, where one would normally expect the nose to be. "I see the young lass has an eye for beards. That's most impressive youngin. But don't be worrying too much about me. I just volunteered these old bones to watch you on the task. You can call me Gramps"

## **Chapter 340: Wrath area**



"Sorry I... just can't really do that" said Kat. Kamiko was nodding along with the suggestion before Kat spoke up, and so she paused, looking at Kat out of the corner of eye.

"Do you mind if I ask why lass?" asked Not Gramps

"Well... I didn't really want to bring it up, but the person who raised me goes by Gramps. I've known him my whole life and while apparently it wasn't quite since I was a baby, I can't remember a time where I wasn't under his care. So no offence to you of course but... it would be like anyone else trying to call you like... 'Dad' or 'Father' or something. It's just... really weird for me" said Kat

Kamiko's eyes went wide when she heard Kat didn't know her parents. Then she practically vibrated in place as the words tried to force themselves out of her throat. However, Kamiko clamped her mouth shut tightly. No matter how much she wanted to ask those questions, Kat had proven to be a friend and she was not going to betray that by asking about something she clearly didn't want to talk about, especially not in public.

Not Gramps eyes opened wide. So wide in fact, you couldn't see the lids anymore. It was slightly uncomfortable for everyone, including Not Gramps. "Well, that's perfectly understandable lass. I certainly wouldn't be looking to replace someone like that. Call me Uncle, or Old Man then"

"Sure, thing Uncle" said Kat, tasting the words on her tongue. \*Hmm, if I'm honest... I don't exactly like that either. Might try to use old man when I can but... I can at least put up with it unlike 'Gramps' that would have been completely unacceptable. This is also a punishment so... a bit of strangeness should be fine.\*

"Um... I'll also call you Uncle" said Kamiko "It would be really weird to call your Gramps without Kat doing the same, and I mean, I have plenty of uncles, so I don't really mind adding more to that list, especially because none of them actually claimed the name uncle for themselves, always adding some other name after it so...

Uncle looked towards Kat with a slight twitch of the head and a raised eyebrow. Kat wanted to know how he managed to have eyebrows when his face was basically the start of a beard, but she answered with a soft smile and a shrug as if to say 'what can you do'.

After a minute of Kamiko's rambling, Uncle just decided to open the door. His beard curled up around the gate and pulled. It seemed to easily swing open, and there was no visible strain on what little face of Uncle's Kat could see.

Once the door was open a crack... which for a door so large was actually more than enough to allow for small demons such as themselves. As Kat walked through the door, she was surprised at the sight that lay behind it. Whatever she was expecting from the Wrath area, a carnival was not it.

The 'buildings', if you could call them that, were all large carnival tents with variations in size from 'large' to 'MASSIVE'. They all had two colours, with no nearby buildings sharing a set, and some of the larger, and, Kat was guessing here, more important buildings having three colours. Kat didn't see any doors or gaps in the fabric that let people in, but she wasn't really looking for them either, and assumed they could be found if needed.

Other than the carnival tents, there were also open-air circles that looked like they might one day be carnival tents. They had the posts up and everything, with tent poles up across the area with strings of flags connecting them all. The thing was though, Kat saw several of them in use for duelling purposes, and one that seemed to have a meditation class. \*So are they going to be tents in the future? Or is that just how they are?

Also why is everything here circular? Kat looked over the tents again. Ok sure they aren't quite circular, with flat edges between the poles but they are close enough to count in my opinion. But... it just seems kind of like a waste of space? Wouldn't making them squarish make some more sense? This way you have a bunch of gaps that just... aren't filled because a circle doesn't fill space in all that well when there is a bunch of them.

Also, why circus tents? I guess these are Wrath tents or something... but surely these demons have better options than fabric tents, right? This is a permanent settlement I believe... and it's not like they can't do construction. The whole thing has a massive wall around it and a huge gate. So, it's not like these tents are the best they can do. Should I ask?\*

Kamiko was looking around with big eyes, while Uncle led the way calmly. \*So... judging by Kamiko's reaction this isn't normal... maybe I should just ask? Is that rude? Guess I might as well try.\* "Hey Uncle? Why tents?" asked Kat

"Well... I'm not ta sure what you mean?" replied Uncle.

"I just mean that... it seems somewhat... how do I put this politely..." mumbled Kat

"Like a bad choice of housing? Weak? Inefficient?" said Uncle

Kat scratched her cheek awkwardly and said "I... I wasn't going to say those words specifically but... yeah. I just thought that if this was your permanent settlement you would have chosen something more long lasting and sturdy"

"Well" said Uncle stopping by a tent with red and white stripes "Why not strike the wall here? Feel free ta use full power lass. You are only Rank 2" said Uncle

Kat raised an eyebrow and eyed the nearby tent sceptically. Tapping it very lightly with a knuckle, Kat found the fabric didn't so much as twitch. It seemed to sway in the wind just fine but when she tried to apply pressure to it, it wasn't affected. "What was that weak shit?" said Uncle "Surely you can hit harder than that lass."

\*Ahhhh... really? Is... is he serious?\*

Kat thought about it for a moment and decided it wasn't worth antagonising the Wrath demon no matter how old he might look. Instead, she took a stance and pulled her arm back for a proper punch, keeping her thumb securely under her fingers, because she actually knew how to punch properly. She did manage to have that minimal combat knowledge.

Pumping demonic energy into her arm, Kat waited until it contained the most, she could reasonably manage without resorting to forcing the movement, and slammed her fist into the tent as hard as possible.... This rapidly turned out to be a bad idea. Kat felt the force of the blow spread out from her arm, and heard a rather unpleasant squish as she felt the muscles in her fingers getting shredded.

The shockwave travelled her arm, doing minimal damage, mostly because it was small enough that the excesses energy in the arm was more than enough to kickstart the regeneration and heal a large part of it as it travelled.? Kat pulled her hand away and the skin and muscle reformed around her fingers. \*At least the bone was fine.\* Kat was also pleased to see that her blood was sliding off the side of the tent rather than clinging to the fabric. She did not want to be responsible for cleaning black blood out of white fabric.

"Huh, I wasn't sure your blood would be that colour" said Kamiko

Kat turned, shaking her hand out a bit. Mostly just because it was a conditioned reflex, and not that it did anything for her now, with regeneration being enough to keep her hand in peak condition. "Um... yes? Should it not be?"

Kamiko shook her head. "No, it's actually very normal to have black blood. Most demons do... or well, most demons that have blood bleed black. There are quite a few that just... don't have blood at all, or have something in place of it that technically isn't blood. Like did you know that technically speaking Beholders have tears instead of blood?"

"Not sure why they make the distinction really. It does basically the same job as blood, and in Beholders, it just IS their blood completely. Then again, maybe it's a classification thing? Like how I'm certain there is a species of Wrath demon with lava for blood..."

Uncle nodded. "Yup. There actually is. I was never told what their species is actually called because there is only a few of them, and they are a little... explosive in their responses, so nobody really asks."

"Right... can we get back to what the heck the tents are made of?" asked Kat

Uncle shrugged and said "Really no idea. Stuff is hard though. Not even I can smash it. I can do damage of course, but it'd take me some time. I think it spreads the impact out over the whole thing somehow with a central plate underground absorbing impacts... or maybe just the floor? Nevermind, it's not important"