

DEMONS 361

Chapter 361: Winning the Chance for a Loss

While Kat scanned the other demons looking for weakness, Kamiko adjusted her grip on her weapon and dismissed the top blade of her naginata, deciding to use it as a traditional naginata with one blade rather than her strange double sided contraption. *It just isn't long enough to use both. I don't have much practice in this form but that's better than not being able to hit anything at all.*

Kamiko made sure that she was holding the weapon carefully, with demonic energy constantly flowing between her and it so that she wasn't at risk of hitting Kat by mistake when they suddenly moved.

Seralina let out a long hiss, that was supposed to be intimidating as she started to position herself so that her head sat above the three brothers, but it wasn't working on anyone other than maybe Meron, who could feel the vibrations running through his body and was getting the idea that he was perhaps more outclassed than he'd thought.

Kamiko and Kat thought it was a little cute, not that they'd admit it to anyone, not even each other. It felt more like Seralina was trying to say 'don't laugh at me' after slamming her head into the ground. Still, the brothers all readied their weapons, as Percy moved to the front with his large shield.

Kat saw they were all well and truly settled and decided to start circling slowly. *Oooh, good idea, we can force them out of position. Seralina can change her orientation really well, but circling around behind them will be hard if she wants to hold her head above them at the same time.*

Seralina, had evidently realised the same thing and dropped her higher position to situate herself on the right side while circling around with Kat. The brothers moved with her, and so the slow walking continued as both parties started to make their way around the arena again and again.

Kamiko was looking for a good opening but she wasn't really seeing one. Seralina's bulk on one side with Percy's tower shield on the other provided for a nice set of defence. Seralina could take the attacks for a bit and counter, and with Meron helping her out, they might be the more dangerous of the groupings the enemy team had come up with.

Still, the succubi weren't confident they could get through the brothers either. Kat thought she could maybe trade a good hit on herself for a chance to take out Percy again, but it wasn't a sure thing and Kamiko might be seriously injured if she was the target instead so that angle wasn't looking great.

By some unspoken agreement though, both Succubi started to consider the idea of going after Meron. *I mean, it's actually a good idea. Seralina is scary, but if we can cut Meron free maybe we can start to work on the others? Or at least use that chance to attack him properly? Maybe we can do a few things to keep him from climbing back up? If I use my lasers just a little bit to stop him from climbing that could work...*

"Kat I have a plan" whispered Kamiko as quietly as she could.

"Yeah?" returned Kat.

"Go for Seralina's head I'm going to try and cut Meron's beard" said Kamiko

Kat nodded very slightly while she continued to circle. The pair kept circling and made sure to complete another full rotation just in case the others realised they had something planned. As soon as Seralina started moving herself to adjust her position slightly, Kat knew it was time.

Kat kicked off the ground as hard as she could, and Kamiko was ready. The duo sprinted at Seralina as quickly as they could. The enemies reacted as best they could to the situation. Seralina was trying to raise up her head so that the brothers could help her out. They moved to try and get in the way of Kat, but this situation was fine for the succubi pair.

Kat leapt over the brothers with ease. Sekron tried to catch her foot with his shield, teleporting it in front of Kat but it wasn't quite high enough to catch them and only provided a foothold for Kat to get even more speed and further refine her flight. Just before she kicked off though, Sekron withdrew the shield, causing Kat to click her tongue slightly but was clearly still grinning.

Kamiko brandished her naginata and, as soon as she was in range, swung at what looked like Seralina's eye, making it look like she was trying to cripple the Lamia somewhat. Seralina instinctively jerked her head to the side to try and force Kamiko to attack her scales. Sadly for Seralina, this was exactly what she wanted.

Letting the naginata slip slightly further down her grip, she let the blade swirl straight towards Seralina's side. Now that her face was directed away, it gave Kamiko a clean line of sight to Meron's beard. She felt the blade digging in, and there was some slight resistance before she flared her energy causing the glow to intensify around her for a moment. Just long enough for the cut to be made and for Meron's beard to come loose.

This also meant, that Meron found himself falling from his perch. Seralina's jerky movement had forced him to hold tightly to his beard to prevent his falling, but now that it was no longer tied, he was doomed to fall. Realising this he tried to force enough extra beard hair to grow back around but realised quickly it wouldn't be fast enough.

Accepting his fate, Meron pulled his beard back to him, forcing it to spin around his body multiple times as he fell. While this was going on, Kat landed hard. She hadn't quite prepared herself to land with the additional body weight Kamiko provided. It only cost her a second of recovery but that was enough for the other parties to get themselves together.

Seralina was coming down for a strike, Meron was regaining his footing as well, and the brothers were trying to launch an attack on Kat's exposed back. Kat dodged straight into Meron, rolling as she did so. Kamiko cursed as she dismissed her weapon, not wanting to lose control of it during the manoeuvre as she put her hands down to assist with the roll's trajectory.

Come on Kamiko, your arms can take this. It's just a bit of strain. Kat's been carrying you around this whole time, don't worry about it. Of course, the weight of the pair was never the issue, it was the speeds at which they were moving that would cause problems and Kamiko knew it, but she felt she had no choice in the matter, and Kat was already regretting her instinctual actions, which had forgotten the fact that she had a passenger, when they forced her to move.

Kamiko's arms creaked under the pressure as they met the floor, but she knew how to roll well enough. Forcing the pressure to disperse into the ground as she let herself get carried along. Even still, it wasn't

a pleasant experience and as Kamiko was brought away from the ground and Kat continued her run Kamiko was wincing.

Not sure if I can summon my weapon back. I can feel my muscles still screaming at me for that trick. I might not have ridiculous regen like Kat, but a bit of muscle tearing is something even I can heal given a bit of time... I just hope I actually have that. I'll have to rely on my eyes.

Meron, seeing the pair coming for him sighed and let his eyes roll back into his head. As this happened his beard exploded with movement, coating the ground and building itself up into a big blob of beard hair. Kamiko blasted it, just to judge the reaction, but found her lasers barely scorched the hair.

Holy shit, that's really tough! What the heck did Meron do? Kat seeing this, bit her lip and worried slightly but was already committed to the attack, her legs already stepping on some of Meron's beard. If she wanted to retreat, it would be on his terms and she'd have given up an attack.

Kat had to fight herself, as her instincts screamed to use her wings, at least for some stabilisation. Using her wings at all, while probably allowed for balancing and not flying, would be too hard, as it was likely she'd take off her glide at least a bit. Her tail was doing the best it could, but Meron's beard was becoming increasingly difficult to stand on with every step she took as the friction on her shoes lowered. Kat was gritting her teeth, and was hoping that the next few steps wouldn't be impossible.

What the succubi pair didn't see was Seralina and the brothers stopping their own charge as soon as Kat did that. Seralina started to encircle the area while the brothers stood together behind Seralina's head just in case.

Chapter 362: Crunch Time

Kat was two steps away from the central beard structure and she was debating making a leap for it. The only thing that stopped her was Kamiko's grunt of what had clearly been pain when they'd performed that roll. Of course, Kamiko would have told Kat to go for it.

In the end, nobody really got what they want. Kat made it one more step before, as she tried to take the final one, she slipped slightly and kicked off the ground. The pair didn't exactly get much height, and had more or less only launched themselves towards their foe.

Kamiko grimaced and shot as much power out of her eyes as she could, watching as the beard hair started to smoke lightly and nothing else. Kat, seeing the area Kamiko was targeting, pulled her legs in close before super charging them with energy and kicking out with as much power as she could at the place Kamiko was firing.

Kat felt her feet burning for a second, before the hair gave away crumbling around her shoes and letting her momentum carrying her further forward. The hair seemed to part and she was thinking they were ok.

For all of two seconds before the hair that had parted for them suddenly closed in around the pair. *Oh shit.* Was all Kamiko could think before Kat had pulled the shorter succubus off her shoulders and stood tall. Kat braced her legs against the edges and pushed back on the hair feeling it try to crush down on them.

Kamiko got up to help but Kat said. "No stay. I can't move anymore while this thing is bearing down on me, and I'm not sure how much you can help without being injured. I can heal at least, so just rest up if you can"

Kat's point was well made, as she could feel her muscles burning as they were healed rapidly while she tried to keep up with the strain of holding it. Really, it was her ligaments giving the most trouble as her bones were strong enough to fight back, but she'd had to lock her joints essentially, and the damage between each bone was somewhat extensive, at least in her arms.

Kamiko grit her teeth and looked away, clearly unhappy with the arrangement. *Dammit. I wish I could help but Kat's right. Just that tumble was enough to do a good deal of damage to the muscles in my arms. They feel a bit better now but I doubt they're really healed. Kat can take it I suppose but I feel pretty shitty just standing here... wait what about my weapon?*

Kamiko quickly summoned her naginata back, carefully across her legs so as to put no pressure on her arms if she could help it. Dismissing the blade on the end, Kamiko placed the staff up as high as she could before the constricting walls tried to close in around it and she succeeded in lodging it in place.

Kat felt the walls lighten up slightly and noticed what Kamiko had done. "Thanks. Be ready to grab it though, just in case" said Kat

"Yes Kat!" said Kamiko happily. *Yes! I did it! I helped my friend. Ok, is there anything else I can do? I know I can burn the beard a bit... but that probably won't be enough. I could.... wait where is Meron? Shouldn't he be here? I mean, that is why we went to the centre isn't it?*

Kamiko looked around the admittedly small space, and found that the only things she could see was, herself, Kat, the beard walls, and the floor. *Hmm, does this count as a disable actually?*

Before she could really properly consider the thought, Kat shouted "Now!"

Acting without thinking Kamiko grabbed onto and dismissed her weapon before jumping towards Kat's back once again. As this happened, the walls came down around them to show they'd been surrounded by Seralina. The beard hair all retracted itself into Meron's body who was clearly not moving.

Kat bent down just enough so that Kamiko landed on her back, before standing and asking. "So... what just happened?"

Silence reigned, as nobody said anything. A couple seconds past, until some signal was given by the brothers and Uncle said, "Right, I've been given permission to tell you. That was Meron's... well Ultimate Move you could call it. It knocks him out and generates as much aggressive hair as he can.

"I wasn't willing to count the match as over because you were only partially confined, none of his teammates could assist him, and if you outlasted it Meron would be out of the fight completely. Plus while you were somewhat confined you could both move"

Kamiko thought the end of Uncle's speech would be a signal for the others to attack but nobody made any extra movements. Seralina was watching the pair with a half-lidded eye that was clearly ready to close should Kat and Kamiko charge it.

The brothers also didn't seem to be doing anything, so Kat took it into her own hands once again. She spun on her heel and ran for a few steps before trying to make a leap over Seralina's body as far away from her head as possible.

This of course, was something Seralina prepared for. Rather than moving too much though, she bunched that section of her body up, raising it directly into Kat's path. "Shit" cursed Kat, as she twisted in mid-air so that her feet would hit Seralina's scales.

Kamiko had tightened her legs around Kat's neck, and was possible choking her slightly as the shift in position tried to force her off of Kat's shoulders. She was hardly ready for the burst of speed that was Kat being launched. The only thing that kept Kamiko on Kat's shoulders was that Kat had been getting somewhat used to a passenger, and had brought her hands down on Kamiko's legs to hold her in place.

Kat had aimed for the space opened up by Seralina's movement which was now a somewhat sizeable gap between her head and tail. Sadly, they'd prepared for this. When Kat arrived in that space, she was beset on both sides. Sekron with a shield to the left, Percy with a shield in front, and Krekron with a hammer to the right. Kat and Kamiko glanced above them, checking their escape route only to see Seralina bearing down on them.

Kamiko actually reacted first, blasting of a short burst from her eyes straight into Seralina's mouth, which caused the large snake to flinch back. Sadly, it wasn't really enough to escape, only buy them a little time. Kat was willing to use that though. She charged straight at Percy; the weakest link she had available to her.

Sekron dashed forward behind her though, and placed a shield in the way of Kat's punch. Not willing to let Kamiko's chance to go waste though, had Kat moving her tail as soon as the shield appeared.

She lashed it backwards straight into Sekron's chest and he was sent flying. It wasn't a lot of damage, and he managed to stick his landing, albeit one shield shorter than he'd started with, and a dent in his armour, but Kat hadn't given herself the time to send extra energy to her tail resulting in the lacklustre damage.

Still, she took the opening for what it was, dashing for the break in the brothers' formation, as Kamiko sent a second blast at Seralina's face. Seeing her mouth was closed, Kamiko tried to get the edge of Seralina's eye and just barely missed. She still managed to hit a sensitive area though as Seralina hissed in pain, giving the succubi just enough time to escape from the trap.

Kat whipped around once she'd gotten out of their enclosure, trying to assess the situation. Sekron was already trying to sprint back towards the group, and Krekron had kicked Sekron's shield back towards him. Seralina, was hardly damaged and was gathering her body behind her head to launch herself at Kat if need be.

Percy had turned to face the succubi, shield at the ready. He was feeling a little useless this time around, but he was determined to block at least one large attack and provide an opportunity for Seralina or maybe even his brothers to deal some damage.

*Damn, that was close. I'm not even sure who to go for now. I really hope Kat hasn't used up too much energy... I mean, I think she's ok, but I heard some rather unsettling sounds while surrounded by the

beard and I'm not sure how much energy her regeneration uses. I'm still at about eighty percent power so I'm good...

I think we can consider that engagement a success, right? We are down to just Seralina and the three brothers. The only issue with that, is they are the main problems here. I'm really not sure who we can pick off next. Might be able to go for Seralina and use her large body to block the others... but she can just raise another part of her to let them through...*

Chapter 363: AND THE WINNER IS!

Kamiko's perspective

After that the battle fell into a sort of uneasy standoff. With Rock out of the picture and Meron unconscious, the remaining demons were struggling to find angles to attack from. Kat and Kamiko would spot what they hoped would be an opening, charge in, only to be rebuffed by some combination of Sekron, Percy and Seralina. Krekron did help some, but his hammer just wasn't as defensive as the others.

Kat was being extremely cautious to ensure that Kamiko didn't take any damage, knowing that she did not have regeneration to keep her going. This led to Kat backing away from engagement after engagement when they failed to land a hit. Her vastly superior speed did help a little in escaping, but Seralina's manoeuvrability made it impossible to use that speed to make any real openings.

Kamiko wasn't doing that well either. She was still trying to take it easy on her arms, though they were starting to feel better now. She'd been relying on her lasers to try and make some space, but quickly found that the Pit Fiend brothers had to be hit in sensitive areas for any effect, and Seralina only really took damage around the eyes or mouth. A few times, Kamiko noticed that her lasers actually rebounded off Seralina's scales and into the floor, but it was somewhat random and she wasn't finding any way to use that to her advantage.

Seralina was really abusing her extra size in this match. If Kat tried to go for the brothers, Seralina would surround them during the run in, so that even if Kat got to them before Seralina was completely in position, one attack was all she was getting. If the succubi pair went for Seralina though... well she and Percy would combine their abilities with Seralina slamming into his shield sending the brothers flying over to intercept Kat.

It was an innovative strategy. The first time, and if it had been better aimed that may have decided the match... but they overshot somewhat drastically the first time, and only managed to stop the succubi pair's attack because they both panicked when they saw three Pit Fiends flying towards them, even if 'towards them' was an overly generous description.

Now all that's left were rather repetitive attacks, and no ground was being gained on either side. Kat had actually regenerated all her energy, and Kamiko had been full for a while at this point too. Finally, though, Kamiko felt her arms were in good enough condition to pull out her naginata again. She'd perhaps been overly cautious, but they were in no rush.

*We do need to make something happen though. Uncle didn't exactly put a time limit on this match but I bet it'll be counted as our loss if it really gets taken too far. I should have a few good attacks in me. And as long as I'm careful and don't damage my arms I'll have a weapon for the rest of the fight.

Who should I use it on though? Between us both we have a lot of attacks... Sekron maybe? If we can overwhelm him this might be our chance?* Kamiko slowly tilted her weapon to align best she could with the brother in question and was happy when Kat did a slight shuffle, which had become their signal that the message had been received.

A few steps later Kat dashed in, ready for what they hoped would be the tipping point of the fight. Kamiko raised her arm back, and fired her lasers straight into Sekron's eyes as they approached. Percy was already trying to move in front of his brother but he wouldn't be in time.

The lasers were met by a floating shield, but that was exactly what they were looking for. Kamiko swung her weapon wide, letting it come in for a strike on Sekron's temple that should be visible from his peripheral vision even with the shield in the way.

The plan went perfectly. Sekron rapidly switched his shield just in time to block Kamiko's blade. Of course, a much deadlier strike was coming for him. Kat's fist was approaching his chest plate and her tail was going for his knee just to ensure that something hit. It was overkill.

What they'd forgotten was that they'd been circling the group at an accelerated pace and it was taking its toll mentally on the Rank 1 demons unused to the strain. Kat's double strike landing on Sekron blasting him backwards into the wall and knocking him out of the fight. Kat and Kamiko were so stunned their plan worked that they weren't properly prepared for Krekron's hammer strike.

Kat did see it coming, and realised it was coming for her chest, and Kamiko's legs. Turning herself as much as she could in the few seconds she had, Kat made sure to take the attack on her shoulder. Krekron though, had been hiding his abilities before this point. When the hammer made contact with Kat, not only was she blown back, but the second step of Krekron's attack was unleashed.

A BLIZZARD. Which of course, did nothing to our succubi, as they were both practically immune to the cold. As Kat slid backwards on her feet face screwed up in pain as her shoulder knitted itself back together, she was treated to a cooling breeze that helped calm her down for her next move.

This sadly, was where the teamwork of the others was shown to be only surface level. Seralina hissed angrily, and moved as far away from Krekron as she could, clearly unhappy with the blizzard raging across around half of the tent. Even as it rapidly wound down, the snow on the ground was glared at by Seralina who was trying to keep her gaze on the succubi pair but felt her attention drifting.

Seeing Seralina back off, the succubi knew it was their chance. They dashed back in, even before Kat's shoulder had healed, just to make the most of it. They went for Percy this time. Without Sekron to defend him, they planned to simply strike him as hard as they could all at once and take him out, and then simply accept another attack from Krekron if it came to that.

Krekron, noticed their charge, and swung his hammer pre-emptively to intercept, but Kat dashed around him and kicked Percy in the side with all the power she could muster alongside Kamiko slamming her staff, blade retracted, into the same spot, with a dash of laser to help things along.

It was too much for Percy. Even catching it on his shield and using his abilities he was overwhelmed. After that it was a short dash around behind Krekron to take him out of the running as well. Seralina was trying to match Kat's speed, but the cold had affected her more than she'd ever want to admit, and her reaction time was lacking.

This meant that Krekron too was out of the running before a mostly fresh team of succubi faced down a lone Seralina. Before Kat had the chance to charge, Seralina transformed into her humanoid form, to forfeit, through chattering teeth.

"AND THE MATCH IS OVER" shouted Uncle. "Kat, Kamiko, if you both are well enough would you be able to grab all the others. Seralina, you take it easy I know you're fighting to stay awake, and a few of those blows to your scales did a bit more damage than you might be thinking."

Seralina nodded as gracefully as she could and transformed back into her full snake form before slithering quickly towards the now lowering platform and curling herself up into a ball, which Uncle promptly covered in beard hair to heal. Kamiko saw that Rock was also situated nearby, but while she was covered in beard as well, it looked more like she'd been strapped down, and wasn't terribly happy about it.

Kamiko gathered up Meron while Kat gathered the three brothers. Abusing her ability to hold things without causing them pain, she simply grabbed them by a hand each and the third by her tail and pulling them off the ground before taking them over to Uncle who swiftly cocooned them as well.

"Are you both in need of healing? I won't be doing any speaking until they all break out so it's fine" said Uncle.

"I'm good" said Kat.

Hmm, should I? No, Kamiko don't be an idiot. You have someone who is clearly a high Rank healer that can remove scars. Or at least, it's likely he can remove most scars. Don't be afraid to just ask. "If you could heal me as well that would be great. My arms took a bit of damage from that tumble" said Kamiko.

"Oh, I'm so sorry" said Kat. "I wasn't exactly thinking"

"No, no it's fine Kat" said Kamiko making placating gestures in Kat's direction as the beard hair surrounded her. "Trust me, I wouldn't have done any better at all in your position and I managed it well enough. All demons have some regeneration and it was only a-" Kamiko was forced to stop speaking as the beard hair covered her mouth.

Chapter 364: Performance Review.

We are now back to Kat's perspective. She shall lead the charge. And by that I mean sit around waiting for the others to awaken.

Kat looked awkwardly at Uncle as she was the only person that wasn't covered in hair. Well, Rock was somewhat free but extra care was taken to ensure she couldn't speak so it hardly counted.

"So... how did we do?" asked Kat, hoping to make some conversation to pass the time. *I can't believe I just asked that. Uncle said we'd find out once everyone was out. I didn't mean to be impatient I'm just... still a little hyped from the fight I guess.*

Uncle gave a knowing smile. "I won't say much just yet. I don't want to be repeating myself. Though why don't you ask yourself. How do you think YOU did?"

Kat chewed her lip as she started to consider Uncle's world. *Well... overall we did win, and I guess that really counts for something. However, we are supposed to be Rank 2, and I wonder if we should have won by a much larger margin? I really don't know what the difference is supposed to be?

Still... I know I at least don't regret my choice. Especially if Kamiko was injured as she said, and her arms weren't doing well. I thought that was the case when she stopped using her weapon after that small scream when rolling, so good to know that was right.

Plus, I doubt I could have finished those guys off without her. Seralina really put in work to keep everyone as alive as possible, and honestly, the brothers were no slouches either. They kept me off their backs for such a long time until Kamiko was able to use her weapon again and we were able to attack Sekron at all angles.

If Percy had been a little faster we probably couldn't have gotten away with it, or if Krekron had some other type of elemental ability instead of ice we might have been in some real trouble. Seralina getting scared off by that same ice might have helped more than I know...

Huh, is that really how we won? By getting lucky? I mean sure there was some skill involved but... most of it was luck. A good chance at Sekron when the brothers weren't at quite the right angle to intercept us. A blizzard attack to scare away Seralina, and a hammer strike I managed to tank AFTER Sekron was taken out.

Hmm, well, another matter is that they sort of just let Meron do his thing. Then again... they were in just as much danger as we were from that attack. I should have left it right alone but I thought it was some sort of defensive technique so... points down for me there.*

Kat went over a few other points in the fight where she was wondering if it was possible to do better as everyone else slowly broke out of their healing cocoons. Kamiko was first of course, but she didn't want to distract Kat while she was deep in thought, so she also started going over the battle in her head.

Eventually, once everyone... except Rock, was free, Uncle spoke up again. "So, I won't ask you all this time, simply talk about some of the mistakes made because sadly I don't have a lot of time is that ok with everyone? I'll be focusing on the battle from the Rank 1's perspective mostly though, as this is a punishment for our two succubi, so I can't really give you two much advice."

Yeah that makes sense. Honestly it was a little weird we were getting so much good advice before this anyway, so I can see how things ended up like this. That's fine though, I'm sure I can find some good points in Uncle's speech anyway.

"Firstly, you all tried to turn this into an endurance match. This was a horrible idea. You should all KNOW that Rank 2's have better demonic energy regeneration and more of it than you do. Why did you try to

draw it out and whittle Kat down? Especially when you also consider that she has regeneration, that was the biggest mistake you made hands down.

"This is especially bad because, once again, you should all know this. Additionally, this was a spar, so you should have had no issues taking a more active approach and going for Kat and Kamiko with everything you had. Hell, in the real world, if your team is outclassed, only crazy shit is ever going to allow you to win so you need to embrace that to some extent.

"That might seem harsh, and perhaps it does sound that way to ask you to make riskier plays in the face of life and death but... if you don't make them here, you'll never make them when they need to be made... and when they need to be made, you won't have a choice. It will be either death and some damage to your opponent or just death, and I want to train you better than that. Understood?" said Uncle.

"Yes Sir!" shouted the other demons.

Uncle continued, "Right. Now, onto the other issues. Krekron, you should have known that Seralina was weak to ice. It's a common Lamia weakness and something you should have ASKED about. Seralina, don't think you get off either. You should have TOLD THEM anyway when they didn't ask.

"It wasn't a mistake to use it on Kat and Kamiko, it was simply bad luck they were immune, but you really should have known about the effect it would have had on your teammate. Hell, it isn't even that good for your brothers whom you do know. You are all in METAL ARMOUR and the cold would leach into your skin.

"And considering that even you don't have the same level of cold resistance of Kamiko and Kat, I'd say it was a poor choice overall, if you knew what you were doing. However, I will at least give credit where credit is due for the crazy idea. You had refrained, presumably because of the issues with your armour, and tried it anyone when you had no other choice. Sure I'd have liked you to do it earlier, but it was a good moment to try. Understand?"

"Yes Sir" said Krekron

"Meron?" asked Uncle.

"Yes Sir?" said Meron unsure.

"Do you think you made the right calls?" asked Uncle.

"Well... um, yes. I do think so. Perhaps I could have better secured myself to Seralina, but considering the events that unfolded after that I don't think anything I did was a mistake. I couldn't use my normal defensive options because I already knew it wouldn't work, and I don't have much proper in the way of attacks." Said Meron underneath Uncle's glare.

Uncle's expression then softened. "Yes good. I'm glad you stood by that decision. Honestly, I'm not sure I'd even say you were best off putting additional beard length to use securing you to Seralina. Sure it was a good defensive position, but if you'd looped around once more you'd have had hardly any hair for attacking.

"Still, the main area of congratulations is certainly using your berserk attack. I'd have called that a win for your team if you managed to subdue them. You were alone, with only enemies around you, that outclassed you in every way, and because this was an arena fight you had no escape route, not even considering both the succubi are faster than you.

"It's a shame the others couldn't capitalise on your attack but that sadly is just the nature of that particular ability. I'm a little surprised Kat managed to hold it off if I'm honest, but then again, she is at the upper end of Rank 2's power scale."

Uncle turned to face Seralina and let out a long breath. "Now, Seralina, I must say I'm a little disappointed in you this time. Oh don't get me wrong, you had a really strong showing, and perhaps contributed the most to your team depending on how you count it... but you just didn't attack.

"I think it was those few strikes by Kamiko to your eye right at the start of the fight that put you out of your game. Since those, you were almost completely on the defensive. None of the power and readiness that was present in your match against Kat. You need to work on that I think. Just because your scales can protect most of you doesn't mean you'll never get hurt you know. You also surrendered when Kat broke a few scales, and sure, I'll admit, at that point she'd have just needed to repeat it, but you have A LOT of scales. You could have afforded to trade a few for some hits on Kat. *novelNext.com*

"I wasn't harsh on you for it then, but it was much worse in this match." Finished Uncle with a sad smile and a shake of his head.

Chapter 365: Wrapping up Wrath

After that, Uncle's advice started to get increasingly specific as he focused on each demon individually, and Kat and Kamiko found themselves losing interest fast as the terms being used started to eclipse their admittedly meagre knowledge of combat. Even Rock was freed from her confinement and given a thorough, if scathing review.

This continued for a while, but the succubi pair had no intention to interrupt. They were content to sit down nearby and lean on each other as they meditated. They hadn't forgotten this was a punishment after all, and were determined to complete it to the best of their abilities even if that meant they had to refrain from doing anything for a while.

Eventually, after the pair had well and truly lost track of time, they felt the others leave and started to gather their minds back up. Kat opened her eyes to see Uncle sitting down across from them with a smile on his face. "Sorry about that. I had some better plans that needed to be scrapped for your punishment.

"I had planned to dismiss you, then have my talk with the others, before we met up tomorrow early and I'd give you both a small performance review and then set you up with another six challengers if I could manage it.

"Sadly though, I've been called to deal with some rather serious matters and I'll have to scrap both of those plans. Thanks for sticking around. I'll just take you guys to the gates and see you off. I'll have to provide you with a stamped note as well to explain why your punishment here ended early. Is that ok?" explained Uncle.

Well... I'm honestly not that disappointed. I had a good day, and can't really complain too much about it considering it's supposed to be a punishment, but I can agree that I don't think I could do this too often. Honestly, it was less nerve wracking when I'm in live combat during a summon. Here I need to both show my dominance as a Rank 2 without doing permanent damage. At least on a summoning I can run away or tank some hits properly.

"That's fine" said both succubi together and Uncle nodded, before leading them out of the tent.

The trip back was quick, Uncle was writing on a piece of paper as he walked and didn't seem as interested in the sights. For Kat and Kamiko, even after the meditation they'd just experienced, felt this was a good time to calm down more and spent the walk in silence.

Arriving at the gate Uncle easily pushed open, he promptly handed over the notes and saluted them before taking off. Wait... he's just going to leave us here? What the heck? Kat heard the door slam shut now that Uncle wasn't there to hold it and felt the air blowing past her face.

"What just happened?" spoke Kat, not realising she'd actually voiced her thoughts.

"Oh, Mum complains about this sort of thing all the time with Wrath. It's... well I wouldn't say it's common exactly but it happens enough that it isn't a rare occurrence. Wrath tends to be good at responding to things and not so good with additional planning. If I had to guess, something only a smidge rarer than a 'common occurrence' happened. Wrath doesn't exactly keep reserve forces on hand...

"Or maybe you could say everyone is a reserve force? I'm not sure. Basically, whatever it is they are doing, they assign exactly as many people as needed to it, and not a person more. They like the challenge, or so I've been told by my Mum during her rants about the subject. This means that when things get bad, they tend to be really really bad. It usually means a team of demons failed at something and need someone a rank or two higher to bail them out.

"Now, that might not sound impressive at Rank 2, but, if you're not aware, demonic power scales exponentially... sort of. It's not an exact science but say... and do keep in mind I can't actually remember what the correct number is, but a Rank 2 might be twice as strong as a Rank 1, while a Rank 3 would be eight times as strong, and then Rank 4 is sixteen." Said Kamiko jovially as she started heading down the pathway.

Kat followed her, not really knowing what else to do, and said. "That does seem to compound rather quickly."

"Yup" confirmed Kamiko. "It's why high Rank demons are given so much respect. A couple of Ranks make a big difference. Especially Rank 5. That's where the difference is most obvious. Like... we can fight on even ish footing with well-trained Rank 1 demons, or very bad Rank 3's, but a Rank 4 would be lucky to injure a Rank 5.

"Plus, that's where people tend to get one really really strong ability. Like... um... well arguably regeneration like you have might count, though the Rank 5 equivalent would see you regenerating whole limbs in fractions of a second.

"Or if they had laser eyes like me, they'd be able to slice through mountains with a glance. I mean, maybe not quite that strong, but it's closer than most people care to admit. Those abilities also tend to define a demon. Like... say you got dream walking at five, you'd probably get a really good version of it, maybe you can take people along, or you already had a bunch of strong abilities relating to dreams and that just topped it off, and now you're known as 'the dream demon' or something.

"It really is fascinating to see it happen to people. I mean, we learned a lot about it in school, but I've only seen the transformation once. It's... well it's something I'll tell you that. Oh, and Rank 5 is where people can start to hide their demonic features a bit easier. If they want to of course. An enemy trying it will find it just as hard as before."

Huh... how do demons learn exactly? I wonder if they have schools like on Earth? What would they even teach though? Translation seems to take care of a lot of things, and history would be kinda redundant because you can just ASK the older demons what happened.

"How does schooling work here?" asked Kat, having given up trying to puzzle it out. Kamiko's obvious joy when providing answers might have swayed her as well.

"So... schooling is, um, well first what is it to you? I think the translation is being a bit weird?" asked Kamiko.

Hmm, clarification... "Well, for us school is a place you go to learn various topics. Mathematics, how to speak and write the language, studying history and a few other things. We get tests for them and assignments that make sure we actually know what we are talking about and teachers to make sure we pass." said Kat.

"Ok, that makes sense. Well, here in the Hub, it's very different. The first, and most easily relatable thing is that everyone needs to read and write before you are allowed to accept your flame and become Rank 1. There are buildings for it, and you can send your children there... but normally your parents or older siblings teach you.

"The reason, or so we've all been told, is that if you gain your translation ability without knowing how to read and write, you'll never be able to learn and while you can understand spoken things fine, any form of text you look at will be completely scrambled." Said Kamiko, shivering at the end and the idea you would be unable to see writing.

Hmm, I wonder how that applies to me. I know for a fact I had translation magic before I became a Rank 1 demon... but I was also turning into a demon at the same time. Maybe it's connected to the system that gives it to you? That might be it, Hey D.E.M.O.N.S? Any comment.

D.E.M.O.N.S is unable to speak on Demonic Translation. All D.E.M.O.N.S can do is assure User Kat that no mistakes were made during the activation of the ability.

Hmm, maybe I'll treat those early weeks as an extended period of ranking up? That might be easiest to consider. Not sure if it's right exactly but... at least it would make sense.

"So, you've never known anyone to have that problem?" asked Kat

Kamiko shook her head said. "No of course not. Everyone is very particular about things like that. Not only would the demon get fined, so would their family, sometimes family friends, and, if it happens more than once, the Section Overseer might get involved as well if it was really bad."

Ok... that sounds pretty serious. A lot worse than just not getting a high school certificate. I mean sure it's just for the one subject but they make a huge deal out of it don't they? "So..." Kat drew out the words. "What exactly is a section overseer?"

Chapter 366: Politics... kinda.

"Oh? I'm surprised that wasn't covered when you first arrived in the Hub" said Kamiko. "It's pretty standard information and everyone just sort of knows it. That's why when you first come it's... I think I was told it's the second thing on the information packet? Something like that. It's also covered again in education, which, I know you said you didn't do, but I just... well I was under the impression it was somewhat clear" said Kamiko.

"I think I can get the idea of it just from the name, but no, the first time I was in the Hub was for a medical emergency" said Kat

Kamiko's eyes went wide. "What? That's not good at all. What could you have possibly come down with? You have such good regeneration, immunity to hot and cold attacks, a demon, so most diseases on worlds ranked low enough for young demons like us to be summoned to... seriously how?"

"Um... well, I was stabbed in the heart repeatedly while being low on demonic energy, and then that still wasn't enough, so I finished the job and got stabbed a bit more for my trouble" said Kat.

"Oh yes. I mean, Oh no. I mean... sorry. When I said Oh yes, I meant that would probably do it. I'm not happy at all something like that happened to you, but it's good to know that you can take extreme trauma like that anyway. I mean, no that isn't something you want to know... er um... I'm glad you're ok?" stammered Kamiko, who was now sweating somewhat and moving her arms around in a panic.

Kat just gave the poor girl a hug. "It's ok. I know what you mean, and I'm glad that you care" said Kat while pulling Kamiko in tightly.

"But you still didn't tell me about the Section Overseer" said Kat

Kamiko's blush was hidden by the fact her face was pressed into Kat's neck. She was certainly tempted to just keep it there and prevent her embarrassment showing, but quickly decided it couldn't have been worse than what she'd already said.

"Right, so um... I'm really not sure what to compare it to Kat. The Section Overseer just sort of... is? I mean they look after an area, and people take their serious problems to them, and they report to someone else, but I don't rightly remember what those guys are called. Um... sometimes the Section Overseer is elected by everyone in the section, other times it's some sort of contest?

"No, I'm pretty sure that's right. I believe I remember once that when an old district near where I live had their overseer step down, they had an art contest that decided who was replacing him. I... I think I went to it? I'm not sure it was over ten years ago now and I was very young.

"Um... I know Wrath pretty much always has a tournament for it, but I'm not sure when exactly it happens or how often because well... they just have those all the time. Also... I'm not sure if the Wrath compound has multiple Overseers or not... I think they should, the land is certainly large enough. But because it's a compound maybe not." Said Kamiko trailing off as she started to consider the exact boundaries of each section.

Kat mulled over that information in her head before asking. "So, you said they are around to settle disputes right? What is to stop people just... coming to them for every little thing?"

"Oh, well um... it actually costs... a large percentage? I'm pretty sure it is a percentage, of any currency you have if you lose the dispute. The more often you come in for disputes and the more serious the dispute is, the more it costs, except, the Overseer is the one who sets the fee, and they set it before the verdict, so sometimes if the claim is really frivolous they make the fine much larger to account for that and BOTH people have to pay.

"Now, of course, if the Overseer actually does that there is the option to appeal to D.E.M.O.N.S for it to get overruled if you feel they were excessively cruel, but it's not particularly often that gets overturned because most Overseers like the job, and they don't actually get the currency from their verdicts so... there isn't really much of a point to being cruel about it unless you enjoy that sort of thing I suppose" said Kamiko finishing off with a shrug.

"So do they get paid?" asked Kat

Kamiko nodded. "Yup. They get paid a fixed fee I think, as well as a bonus when they get reviewed at the end of the year if they do well on the section wide survey. Additionally, they don't have to ever accept a summoning no matter what Rank. novelnetext.com

"Now, most Overseers are higher ranked because that means they can enforce their verdicts when they need to if people are being unreasonable. Oh D.E.M.O.N.S can do it, but I know that costs the Overseer part of their salary, and damages their end of year score when the surveys come in so yeah, it's more of an older demon thing." Explained Kamiko.

*Well, I suppose that makes sense. It really does sound like a mayoral position or something similar. They also seem to be a bit of a counsellor as well though. Still it does seem like an interesting job. I just wonder how many people they have to look over. I can't quite decide what sized group it would be.

On the one hand, it seems like you'd want to be good at it, you'd need to make sure you had time for people to always come see you so you're always on the clock... but how many people have problems on the regular? Like... if it was entirely houses for example, there would probably be a number of families that make almost no problems so you'd need a few hundred, maybe even a thousand houses, before you were busy on any consistent basis.*

"Hey Kamiko, how many people are in a Section?" asked Kat

"Well, that sort of thing changes semi-regularly. I think it's once a decade? I'd have to check, but once a decade, if that is correct, all of sections get looked over, and if there are too many reports it gets separated into two or spread out into neighbouring sections if that's possible. The same is true for the other way around. Not enough complaints and they get more people to look after.

"Some places, like the compounds, don't really change size for obvious reasons but I believe they potentially get other jobs, like visiting high complaint areas during the next ten-year span and things like that." Said Kamiko.

Huh... that actually sounds like a well put together system. It does make me wonder who decides on housing and zone laws or roads and such... actually probably THE system. It seems like the type of thing that would be more easily automated.

"Does the system, er I mean, D.E.M.O.N.S manage the like zoning districts and stuff?" asked Kat.

Kamiko shrugged. "It really depends. So, from what I know, you can petition the system for it to zone land for you. You give it a list of people interested in living in a particular area and it sorts the whole thing out, mostly free of charge. It's a few embers per person, but that's basically nothing for the work D.E.M.O.N.S is doing. Then you all get a chance to buy plots in an auction after they have been assigned their type. D.E.M.O.N.S does outline all available property, so you know what you want to chase after.

"The other way you can do it, is personally buy a bunch of land yourself and rent it to people. Or, buy the land and sell it, but most people don't do that second one. It's... well it's not actually that popular of a decision unless you are building a new compound if I'm honest. My parents said it's really common when Hubs are founded because the people who discover and clear it all out get massive discounts on buying the land, but once things settle down it really just isn't worth it.

"Still, I know there are quite a few sections that started off that way, and they are part of some of the largest cities now, so, it's not like there are NO reasons at all to do it. Just that it isn't really something that comes up much now" said Kamiko happily chatting to Kat.

Well, that has been rather enlightening. But... what are we still doing on the road. "Hey Kamiko, exactly why are we walking along for? Do we... like finish for the day? Go home? Go to some holding facility?" asked Kat.

"I'm... actually I have no idea." Said Kamiko, finally out of words for Kat. *Hmm, well I guess I'll just have to ask.*

Chapter 367: A Cosy Cottage

So system, what is the word? Oh, and can you broadcast the answer to Kamiko as well.

User Kamiko and User Kat will find that during Punishments the relevant User is unable to leave the current Hub until completion of the Punishment or Punishments in question. If a User requires housing D.E.M.O.N.S will provide a temporary room.

Huh, that's a shame. It means I won't be able to see everyone for a bit. I should really send them a message explaining that I suppose- Kat's train of thought was cut off when Kamiko let out a high-pitched squeal. Kat was instantly on guard, looking around for danger, until she saw the large smile on her friend's face.

"What?" asked Kat.

"You can come over to my house for a sleepover! Oh, I'm so excited. I've never had anyone who'd actually want to stay the night. I mean, sure I thought I did a few times but... well I don't need to talk

about that, so don't worry. Oh, I'm so so, excited." Kamiko froze her celebration. "That is... um, of course if you want to come?"

Kamiko's eyes seemed larger than normal as she gazed up at Kat with a pleading sensation she could feel tugging her in. *Damn, she's pretty good. Sylvie training doesn't seem to have provided me a resistance. It's not quite as adorable but it clearly means so much to her that my reason is willing to go along with it. See this, this is how succubus powers should work.* "Of course I do Kamiko" said Kat with a smile on her own, which, even though she'd been fighting the urge to agree, was in no way forced.

"Great!" said Kamiko as she grabbed onto Kat's arm and then suddenly a blast of fire surrounded them. It was different then interdimensional travel. Instead of a soft floating sensation that stretched on over the course of a few minutes this was a quick snap, mostly of pink flame, before Kat's vision cleared.

Kat's jaw dropped when it did. *Whatever I was expecting for a house. It wasn't this.* In front of Kat was the quintessential cottage in most ways. Kamiko's house seemed to be a small stone building, that was surrounded by a small but lovingly cared for garden. First, the house.

It looked to be made of carved stone that had been stacked together. It was a nice mix of colours, mostly varying shades of soft grey with the occasional splash of light red or darker black that kept things interesting. It was shaped somewhat like a child's drawing of a house, though the front door was on the side of the house instead of the front, with a small extra pointed window up and to the left of the door, that must lead to the attic.

The roofing was all made out of the same black stone, even darker than the darkest supporting stone, and while you'd think that might make the cottage take on a darker feel, the interlining of the tiles helped alleviate that alongside the garden.

Which was perhaps the true centrepiece of the cottage. There was no fence that surrounded the property, instead it was a carefully trimmed rose hedge that reached Kat's waist. The strange thing about it was that the roses changed colour slowly as they made their way around the perimeter. Starting with bright white, over to pink, and then a red, before the rose bushes were hidden from view.

Beyond that, was a small path to the door that had short bushes of red and white Starlias Dahlia's that had a bright yellow centre surrounded by two layers of six leaves each that had red on the outside and base that bled into a white centre. Off to the right side was a large tree that stood taller than Kamiko's cottage house. Kat didn't know this, but it was a large Magnolia Grandiflora that had soft pink petals and a number of branches ranging from thin and spindly to twice the thickness of Kat's leg.

"Wow. This place is beautiful" said Kat.

"Naw, you really think so?" said Kamiko looking away embarrassed. "A lot of people call it over done, or not worth the effort, or a disgrace of a front yard"

Kat frowned. "Ok, I was maybe following you with the force two points, but I really don't understand the third" said Kat.

"Oh well, um, see" Kamiko gestured to her neighbours as she talked. In the yards next to Kamiko's house were yards field with intricately carved stonework. "The style shifted over a long..." Kamiko coughed and looked frantically around for a second. "they changed style over the course of my mother's life after she

bought the cottage. She... well there was a bit of a... obviously it wasn't a lie, but some... misleading things said about the area when the sale was made.

"See, the area had gotten together and agreed to switch away from gardens you see. They were all having to spend too much time tending them, as the massive amount of greenery was reacting with each other and the demonic energy in this place and causing some problems.

"And the people who lived here weren't exactly high rank at the time. Now, in comes the couple who used to own this cottage. I don't know anything about them, but the story I was told by Mum is that they said they couldn't take care of their garden anymore so they were selling it and the house.

"Now, the implication was that Mum could take over the gardening like she'd always dreamed. A lovely little cottage house, away from her own family, and an old, and, well it was somewhat unmaintained at the time, but nothing a little work couldn't fix, garden. So she bought the house with dad soon after.

"The problem was, the section had already agreed to either remove their gardens or move and let the next person do it. They'd all agreed to this so... when Mum started fixing the garden it raised some eyebrows...

"And then when she started to really spruce it up while everyone else was tearing their own down it started a massive dispute. In the end though, Mum hadn't agreed to anything, and they couldn't force her into it because, well I said this was a low Rank area, mostly for older Rank 2 demons, and she was Rank 4 at the time.

"So she basically told them they had no choice but to let her continue with the garden, because they couldn't stop her even if they all attacked. I'm not sure that was strictly true, but it worked.

"Nowadays... the area has a lot of stonework, and all new residents have to agree to no gardens but... Mum still got away with it, and she tends to it in her free time... personally, I suspect, and don't tell Mum I said this but... I think she knew the whole time. Even though the family was trying pull one over on her, I think she knew anyway and agreed to the whole thing for the extra challenge.

"This is further supported by the fact that every now and again people try to burn down our garden, or trash it in some other way. It never works, and everything is always fixed in a day, or two days max. Mum grumbles a tiny bit the morning it happens, then she has this massive smile like the cat that ate the canary shortly afterwards."

"Huh, your mum seems like a really interesting person. Will I be likely to meet her while I'm here?" asked Kat.

Kamiko tapped her tail against her side. "Well... that really depends. I'm not sure she expected me home because of the punishments, and most of the others are out doing their own things, so she's probably at the hospital."

Kat nodded. "Hey, how many siblings DO you have anyway?"

"Well... it depends how you want to count things. I'm the youngest of my sisters though, I'm actually not the lowest Rank. Oh, and I have no brothers. The reason I said it depends on how you want to count it is twofold.

"One is that my oldest sister turned out to be my great great aunt who had a really bad reaction with a strange artifact that turned her into a child. The process was reversed... but she'd lost all her memories so instead they turned her back into a child once more and my parents raised her as their adopted daughter.

"We weren't told about this for quite a while until one of mum's other family let it slip, and let me tell you, Mum was not happy. The reason being, is that, to simulate childhood a really really high-Ranking demon stripped Elmony, that's her name, back down to Rank 1. It's practically impossible to do, or so I've been told, so I'm not sure how they managed it, but they did.

"Anyway, everyone had supposedly agreed that they'd never bring it up and treat her like her own person because... well she pretty much is. From what I've heard, Elemony, and Great Great Aunt Elmony aren't anything alike at all. So... yeah not sure what she counts as" said Kamiko.

"Wow. Your family is weird" said Kat.

Kamiko sighed. "The others aren't quite that bad..."

Chapter 368: Sibling Details

"See, there is the next oldest, after Elmony, her name is Meradithna. I... don't really want to talk about her too much. Part of that is because I don't really know her and I've only really HEARD things... but apparently, she disowned Mum and Dad and claimed that she had no parents.

"I've never met her because of it though all of them except, Aslena, the second youngest have met her at one point or another. The Triplets, Erra, Merra, and Kerra, all think she's good, but everyone else kind of... says REALLY bad things about them, and the triplets actually don't contradict most of it so... I'm not sure what to think.

"Anyway, I'm skipping around a bit. Merdithna, second oldest sister and firstborn. She does actually still have a room here but it has been sealed. I'm not sure by who, nobody is willing to tell me. We do have a few pictures around the place and... one thing I'm not terribly comfortable with is the fact that she actually looks similar to me. It means so much to me that Mum and Dad have never treated me as if I was her but... the resemblance is rather uncanny.

"Sure, we have a few of them. Like her horns are angled differently to mine, and she has no tail, but... sometimes... never mind forget I ever said anything" trailed off Kamiko.

"So, the Triplets! Other than the fact that they look the same, they couldn't be more different. Er well, they also have similar abilities, but they ACT differently. So, the three of them look like little copies of Mum but with Dad's eyes. That's actually one thing they agree on, that missing out on Mum's eyes was a disappointment.

"Anyway, Merra is very sporty. She likes to pick up new physical hobbies like she's shopping for candy at the shops. She picks up a new one whenever it strikes her fancy and trains really hard, then challenges everyone with even a modicum of skill in the sport to match until she gets bored and picks something else.

"Sometimes that takes a while, especially if the people she plays against are competent, but she has a penchant for picking strange obscure sports without too many people that train in it and abusing her

amazing reflexes and talent to beat people who have been playing whichever sport she happens to be on for years.

"Erra is a bookworm through and through. Her room, though that's another thing, the triplets hate sleeping apart, and Merra's room sort of belongs to all of them, anyway, Erra. Her room is filled with stacks and stacks of books. All of them have been read at least once, and she visits the library so often you'd think she was a librarian.

"One quirk of her though, is that she's not a fan of rereading books. This actually annoys Mum a lot because she KEEPS them all, even though she refuses to read them again. Still whenever this comes up, Erra compares it to keeping a garden of books and Mum just rolls her eyes and lets her have her way.

"Kerra... she's a little different in that she likes to paint, but her favourite subject is the other two triplets. She shadows them around for a while till she finds a worthwhile scene and then runs off back home to start drawing it up.

"She's really good at stealth, and even though Merra and Erra, know she follows them around they hardly ever find her. Kerra likes to get action shots of Merra primarily, and likes to read over Erra's shoulder and draw her in the scene of whatever book she's reading if it takes Kerra's interest.

"She also stores a bunch of paintings in her sort of room like Erra, but... she regularly sells her paintings. She does keep her favourites and family is always able to claim one if they want. I actually have a great picture of Erra in a ballgown dancing with, well I know in the story it was supposed to be a prince, but it's just Merra in a wig. I find it somewhat funny. Oh, and Kerra is ALL of the background dancers.

"They grumble a bit about the fact that I picked it out, but I'm almost certain those three worked on it together, and the fact they've never properly complained means I'm probably right." Kamiko finished letting out a long breath of air.

Huh, Kamiko's siblings seem rather interesting. Though, she didn't really say what Elmony was actually LIKE aw well, we still have one more to go.

"Sorry about that Kat" said Kamiko. "I sort of lose myself a bit when talking about things that interesting, and I really do love my family. Would you like to hear about Aslena?" asked Kamiko.

Kat nodded and said, "Well, that does sound good, but maybe we should actually go into your house instead of standing on the sidewalk?"

Kamiko blushed and nodded before saying. "Woops sorry. Yeah. Um... right this way"

Kamiko led Kat down the pathway up to her door and pushed it open to reveal a large kitchen and dining area. The table seemed designed to seat twelve, with five chairs on either side and one at either end of the table. This took up around half the area, while the rest was the kitchen.

To Kat, it looked rather similar to the kitchen back at the orphanage more so than Vivian, or really Callisto's kitchen. It had two large ovens side by side set into a central bench. The ovens took up the centre, with bench space on either side of the ovens. The back wall was filled with a number of cupboards across the top and a large window into the garden in the middle with more cupboards along the bottom.

It was as she was admiring the area that she realised. *This takes up a tonne of space. Actually it probably takes up eighty or ninety percent of the house... where does everyone sleep?* "Hey Kamiko?" asked Kat as she was led over to the table. Kamiko pulled out two chairs and faced them towards each other so they could keep speaking.

"Yeah?"

"I was just wondering... where does everyone sleep?" asked Kat, "I mean... and I hope this isn't some kind of major offence but... you just don't have the space for bedrooms if the kitchen is this large"

Kamiko nodded. "We do, but of course, it doesn't fit up here. See, Mum had the house for a lo... well, she had the house some time before she had any children, or even adopted Elmony. Originally, her and Dad just lived in the attic. It's not actually as small as it looks, but that is where they stayed and... when it came time to upgrade... instead of moving they renovated.

"It was actually really expensive apparently. This is because the rooms all needed to be a lot deeper than the house because of the garden. They did however, excavate basically the whole yard once they did get down there, and it's three levels of basement all together. So we have plenty of space." Said Kamiko

Huh that's actually pretty cool. Natural lighting might be a problem, but I imagine demons have figured something out for that otherwise Kamiko's mother would have done something else. She doesn't seem like the kind of person to enjoy living underground if it's drab and dark unless lit by artificial lights.

"That's really cool. I don't think I've ever been to a basement before. An underground temple once, but not a basement." Said Kat. "Would you like to finish up your siblings by talking about Aslena?"

Kamiko nodded. "Yeah, she's... well, I'm a lot of ways closest with her, and a lot of ways the furthest apart. See, the triplets are all A LOT older than I am, or well, comparatively anyway. So are the rest I guess, but Aslena actually grew up with me.

"However... she's always been obsessed with her looks. She's... she's kinda the succubus stereotype. She fits it all to a T. She doesn't even spend any time getting ready to Rank up. She could easily make Rank 2 now with like... maybe a week's worth of effort tops, but she just doesn't care.

"She spends most of her time outside of summoning picking clothes... and most of her time DURING them picking clothes as well. She surprisingly found a bit of a niche, in that her eyes allow her to see someone's exact measurements and she uses that talent to pick out outfits for them. She really loves her job and... I love her as well but..."

Kamiko gestured down at herself. "I was never 'cool' nor did I ever really like any of the outfits she suggested I wear and that... well, it weighed on her end of the relationship I'm sure. I still take every opportunity to spend time with her, but... she's never quite as happy about it as me I don't think."

Chapter 369: Reminiscing

"Well, I guess I can sort of relate" said Kat slowly as she considered what Kamiko likely thought about the situation. "See, because I was one of the people that didn't get adopted out early, I actually spent the most time out of anyone I know in the orphanage I grew up in. This meant that, despite not always being older than some of the kids, I was still everyone's older sister somehow and I was the person you'd go to for help a lot of the time.

"Sure, some kids would still go to Gramps, the man who ran the orphanage, but for the little stuff it was almost always me, and, not to brag, but most of the kids really enjoyed spending time with me when they could. Except for a rare few who always seemed to have something against me and liked to cause trouble.

"The ones I have in mind were actually perfectly civil in school, or when Gramps was in charge, and a large part of me feels like they only made trouble specifically for me, but I'm not sure why. Some people said it was because they wanted more attention from me, but they probably got even less attention because of their actions so I don't really know"

Kamiko's eyes seemed to shine as she smiled. "That sounds so cool. I like having a big family, but I can't quite imagine having one that big. How do people normally feel when someone gets adopted? On both sides of things, the people leaving and the people staying behind."

Kat bit her lip as she thought about it for a few seconds. *Hmm, leaving is always a complicated fair, but for Gramps' orphanage it wasn't so bad...* "Well, I've heard this isn't terribly typical but we had a really high turnover rate, as in, kids that would come to the orphanage rarely stayed long. Most didn't even spend a year in the orphanage before being adopted, and almost all were gone before two years was up.

"It truly was odd that nobody tried to adopt me, but anyway. For most of us we were quite happy with the event. They were getting a home again with people that would care for them. Gramps did try, and I helped him when I was older but... for the kids who didn't stay long they'd always want to be adopted.

"The orphanage... I'm not sure it was ever really 'home' for them the same way it was for me, if that makes sense? Like... most of them had to deal with losing their family, and then by the time they got over that and started settling in, learning the ropes, they got adopted and suddenly they had a family again and a home to go to."

"Huh" said Kamiko. "Sorry Kat but I just... I can't really picture it. This" Kamiko gestured around the room, "is home, and it always has been. Apparently it's been remodelled a few times but I wasn't alive for any of them. So... I can kind of get an idea of what it might feel like not being at home from the few times we went and visited relatives but it's not really the same is it"

Kat shook her head. "Well, I'm not sure? I imagine not from what I've heard but obviously I don't have any relatives so I can't really compare."

"Oh, I'm sorry" said Kamiko, visibly wilting in place.

"No, it's fine really." Said Kat as she made placating gestures towards Kamiko "Unlike some kids I don't remember a time I wasn't in the orphanage. Gramps was my family, and so were a few of the kids that lived there. It never bothered me at all, don't worry."

Kamiko seemed to visibly brighten back up as she heard this but it didn't completely recover her shine, her smile just a slight bit smaller, but was more than noticeable when you had demonic eyesight. "That's good. Um... though it does sort of remind me. Did you want anything to eat? Do you need anything? I really only eat once a day at breakfast but the triplets have to eat two meals a day and Aslena only needs to eat once a week.

"Mum does grumble at her for that, and I personally think she sneaks a few extra bites of food in while she's out doing things with her friends or on a summoning trip, but nobody has ever caught her so we have to take her word for it" said Kamiko.

Hmm... how long did I go without food? Eh, it's not that important. "Don't worry too much about me, I can go a few days without it and feel no worse for wear. I'm not exactly sure how often, I'd need to think about it, and it's not really important so I won't bother." Said Kat.

"That's a little strange considering you have regeneration. Though I suppose yours is powered by your demonic energy which is less common than you'd think so maybe that is normal for people like you?" pondered Kamiko.

"No idea" said Kat "I've not really met other demons with a similar ability"

"Huh. That's fair enough I suppose. It is rather rare and you've not been exposed to too many demons just yet. Oh, that does remind me, would you like to talk about your summoning adventures? Not all of them are interesting from what I've heard but I bet you have some cool stories and I'd love to hear them." Said Kamiko.

Oh shit. System, can I tell those? You didn't want me spreading around that I was human at the start right? And it's kind of hard to explain some of them without that particular bit of knowledge.

User Kat may freely spread that knowledge amongst other Users. There is no problem. They will be asked not to spread the information with others if necessary.

Oh, neat.

"Ok, well I would like to talk about it, but before that I need to explain something so that my first summoning makes more sense. Then I'd like to hear some of your adventures if you don't mind" said Kat.

Kamiko nodded, practically bouncing in the chair. Kat grinned and wished for a brief moment her wings were smaller so she fit properly in chairs before realising that being able to fly was so worth the trade-off. "Right, so... this might sound weird, but I started out as a human. Or well, I'm not sure if that's totally true, but I didn't THINK I was a demon for a long time."

"How does that work?" asked Kamiko "I'm sure your tail or wings would be a big giveaway and it's not like you can hide them"

"Ah, see, that's the thing..." said Kat "They only started to pop up after my first summoning. I got a tail shortly afterwards. It was... well honestly most of the stages were not pleasant, but I got a tail, then my skin smoothed out... and... I think my eyes were done that time as well, oh and my hair to. That was a big week now that I think about it.

"Later on I got my wings, then finally my horns, a massive fever and I was Rank 1" said Kat.

"Weird. I didn't think we were allowed to go on any summonings before we became Rank 1 demons." said Kamiko.

Kat shrugged. "I know my situation is pretty rare so I'm not sure how possible it is for others. Anyway, you might enjoy what happened and appreciate the comedy. So, I was summoned by this apprentice

and obviously, I showed up without any demonic features because I didn't have any, I was also half asleep at the time..."

"Oh. Oh they didn't!" said Kamiko eyes wide and already trying to stifle giggles.

Kat wiggled her eyebrows. "I think so. The old guy, the master, told the apprentice to send me back straight away, they were arguing about it though. The apprentice was so proud of finally summoning a demon.

"All the while..." Kat let herself trail off so Kamiko could fill it in.

"The Master guy was freaking out thinking you were a high rank demon" managed Kamiko between fits of giggles.

"Yup, got it in one" said Kat.

Kamiko continued to laugh for a little while longer before saying. "That is great. Oh, I can just imagine you, all stoic and cool, while actually being half asleep and just as confused as they are about what's going on. They misinterpret everything and send you straight back. Oh it's glorious."

Kat nodded, and Kamiko continued. "You know, it's funny you mention that, because my first summoning was also a bit of a mix up. Sure, I got the job done but... well it was a bit weird. Or, perhaps not weird, I'm not sure how common this kind of thing is, but there was also a rather large misunderstanding when I was summoned."

"Huh. Well I'd love to hear it" said Kat.

Chapter 370: Ghost Stories

Kamiko got straight into her story, "So, I actually had a few hugs with my family... well more than a few before leaving. Everyone was there, er, I mean, everyone except Meradithna was there. I was so happy they were all there to see me off. I gave everyone a hug or two... or three, and it was pretty good.

"I was... more than a little over eager so I had a backpack with me full of things I might need. I know now that there is no reason to do that unless you really want to, but I was panicking a little inside despite how happy I was to finally have my first summoning. Some people really dread it but I couldn't wait. I wanted to show people I could actually do things without tripping over myself.

"Granted, I had mostly grown out of that habit in the year before that once Mum started teaching me weapons but that didn't stop them from making fun of me for it afterwards. Anyway, in case you don't know. Despite my outfit, I'm no more effective against ghosts than the next demon. Actually, because my demonic fire is ice attuned I'm probably LESS effective than your average demon."

Kat felt the need to jump in here. "Um, why would you be good at fighting ghosts? Also, ghosts are real?"

Kamiko's eyes widened. "Oh. Um... sort of? Some ghosts are more real than others, and it depends on the world. It's hard to explain but um... would you rather hear about them or why people thought I'd be good at fighting ghosts?"

"Um... ghosts first outfit second, because I feel like that will better lead into the story again" said Kat.

"Yeah... yeah I guess it does" mused Kamiko. "Right so ghosts. There are quite a few different types of ghostly spirits and it really is a pain to categorise all of them. So, first off are the ghosts that have actually been people. Depending on how they are made, and how powerful they are, it's sometimes true that they are the same person.

"See, if they were never that strong, and it was more of a coincidence than anything else, or ghosts are suppressed in that realm for whatever reason, they aren't actually the soul of the person who died, more of...? a complicated mana of qi construct that LOOKS like a person. These are the weakest sentient ghosts. They don't do much, most of them are impossible to hold a conversation with if it goes longer than a few sentences... and generally they don't actually do much.

"Now, the next similar type of ghost are ones that... are only in the strictest sense 'once a person'. These are your wraiths or spirits of vengeance. They... are more like a bundle of mana and anger. They can very rarely be made out of qi, apparently, but I've never met one. Then again, I've never met the other types of ghosts either so, I'm just going off what I've heard. Merra has actually dealt with them a few times and so has Dad.

"Anyway, anger, or sometimes another emotion like hatred or disgust or a few others, but it's normally anger, even the ones that seem like hatred are normally. These ghosts only look superficially like the person they were once supposed to be, and are just angry all the time. They don't always count as ghosts coming from people, but because they are still created when a person dies, they count.

"Um... after that it's true ghosts. These are the souls of people that are still bound to the world somehow. Normally it's a ritual of some kind, because other circumstances create the other kinds of ghosts instead. These aren't very common because the rituals are never easy to perform, and people don't actually last all that long as just a soul.

"Nothing is really meant to be just a soul. Even the other kinds of spirits aren't truly just a soul, they have other bits and pieces to them that keep them alive. Some people have tried to copy that but... it never works, you soul gets pushed out of reality if you try and you end up as another kind of ghost.

"See, for most of the nontrue ghosts, the higher energy creates a sort of shell... around isn't quite the right word because a soul isn't a three-dimensional construct, so what happens instead is that the soul gets tied into a three-dimensional construct that forms the 'body' of the ghost and shelters the soul from any direct damage.

"True ghosts have a similar shell, but they don't have a way to refresh it naturally. That's the main limitation on them and why they normally require an outside ritual to power them and keep them functioning. Liches can also come under that category if their body has been recently destroyed and they are being pulled back to their phylactery, but that only takes a few seconds anyway so it hardly counts."

Kamiko stopped to take in a long breath, before looking over at Kat who was still listening intently and gave her a small nod of acknowledgement. "Right so... the other kinds aren't actually ghosts, or not proper ghosts. Banshees for example, were never human and are things that pop up occasionally when a lot of mana is in the air and it has nothing else to go into.

"Another thing is sometimes people think elementals are spirits... on account of the whole... not having a solid body thing. Especially the humanoid looking ones that are more powerful, though because they can speak the issue gets cleared up pretty quickly... normally. I've been told by Aslena that sometimes they keep it going as a joke.

"Oh, and living shadow sloth demons. They also cause some confusion but they aren't actually made up of nothing they are... it's this really weird feeling substance... it's kind of like... tar and water and then nothing all at the same time. Trust me, you don't want to shake one of their hands, it's super disturbing. But yeah, despite looking like a shadow, and acting like a ghost... they do have a proper body so they don't count. Oh and they have demonic energy so they really don't count"

"Then there are a few other kinds of beings that... are just called spirits? They are fully solid beings that have some strange property or another and just somehow ended up with the label for one reason or another.

"Like fairies. In some places they are known as a kind of nature spirit even though they are part of the fae, and nobody in the know would say otherwise. Of course, that is exactly why they believe incorrectly, is that they aren't in the know... um..." Kamiko started to trail off.

"Honestly I don't know that much about other kinds of ghosts." Admitted Kamiko. "Wait, no, there is also holograms. But those are either horribly misinformed or liars because well... they are holograms."

"That's fine." Said Kat with a slight giggle "Can there be ghosts of demons? You said it took mana or qi, but you never mentioned demonic energy"

"Oh right. So, no, we just can't. I've heard a few conflicting reasons as to why and I'm personally not sure which one is true. The first one, is that we signed a thing with the angels to enforce the fact that we can't become ghosts. However,... the fact that demons can actually talk about this supposed contract freely leads me to believe it's just not true.

"Most angel stuff, other than just stating their existence, is really hush hush before you get to certain Ranks. Not sure what Ranks, but it does seem like the stronger demons are able to mention things offhandedly. Not much of course, and my memory is particularly hazy around the times it was mentioned near me, but yeah, that's what some people say.

"Other people say that D.E.M.O.N.S eats our souls after we die but, I don't really believe that one. If the system can stop as spreading information about angels, I don't see why it would let us spread rumours about it trying to eat our souls after we die if it was actually something it could do.

"Anyway, another thought is that it's something to do with demonic energy. It sort of has a mind of its own. We can see this because it corrupts other living things that try to absorb and assimilate it. To my knowledge, no ghost has ever been formed from a being that absorbed demonic energy like that so some people think that's why we don't become ghosts.

"Personally. I'm just not sure. None of those answers feel quite right to me, and some are rather... well not easily, but common sense lets you disprove them for the most part rather easily. Then again, demons don't exactly die often so it's rather a moot point I guess" finished Kamiko who seemed to decide it was finally time to take another breath.

