

## DEMONS 371

### Chapter 371: Kamiko's first summoning

"Right sorry Kat" said Kamiko "I got a bit side tracked there. I didn't mean to spend so much time talking about ghosts... but I guess it is a little important to the story so it wasn't time wasted really. Um do you want a drink?"

"I'm fine, I don't really get a parched throat anymore, or at least, I haven't gone long enough without water that it's become a problem, and I can make ice if I really need. Also, I enjoyed the ghost talk it was informative."

Kamiko smiled and her eyes started to twirl. "That's great to hear. I guess I should start the summoning story then. So, I got called off to this temple you see. In the middle of a massive room filled with... Oh it must have been two hundred people or so? Maybe more, all praying to the circle that I was summoned in.

"The place itself was mostly wooden and stuff, pretty bare, but what was there was spectacular. The support beams, all four of them, were beautifully carved with all sorts of flowers lining it all the way to the top. Actually, wait, I think there was just polished wood until a bit past head height? To keep it away from hands maybe?

"Anyway, the walls on either side had big murals on it. One was of some dude fighting a dragon, I think? Sorry I didn't get to spend long looking at them, and unlike the pillars they didn't stand out that much to me. I think the second one was a mountain landscape, though rather stylised if I remember that much.

"They also had this massive bell behind me, supported by a couple of stacked wood blocks... I'm not sure why it was like that though, because it wasn't hung up by them, no that would make way too much sense. Instead, they had the bell balancing on them. No idea how they ever actually used the thing.

"Still, I'm getting side tracked again. So, this guy comes up to me once I've been summoned, and he has this large black hat and these really colourful robes, and a massive beard. He just sort of looks impressive you know the type?

"So, he walks up to me, claps his hands together and bows twice and says... complete nonsense. Now, at the time, I was freaking out. I thought that my translation ability wasn't working and I was dying inside trying to figure out what I'd done wrong or why I couldn't understand anything he was saying.

"And he was just sort of... looking at me after he'd finished like I was supposed to do something else. We both sort of just... stared at each other for a while until eventually I start looking around, and then he starts looking rather unimpressed and some more time passes, and eventually, he turns around and looks at some other guy in the front row.

"Don't remember him, I think he was hidden from view by the big hat guy, and he says, "I think something has gone wrong with the ritual" now, of course, I was even more confused. Why did they think something had gone wrong, why did my translation work now? Did it need a bit of time to get whatever language he was speaking in the database or something?

"Should I tell him I can understand him now? All sorts of questions are running through my head when the kneeling dude says, "As far as I know the words were correct sir" and the big hat guy says, "Well

clearly something has gone wrong hasn't it?" so at this point, I'm freaking out, they're freaking out, everyone in the background... is actually pretty chill if I'm being honest, but I was thinking they were also freaking out.

"So I just sort of blurt out something like "What the heck are you talking about?" and they look at me like I'd just... stabbed someone or something? Anyway, they complain a bit about how I didn't respond originally, and I explained that I didn't understand them which for some reason was very confusing.

"Anyway, so it turned out that, oh wait, did I mention everyone in the crowd was a man? That will be a little more relevant in a second. So anyway, apparently they were happy with what I was wearing because it was close enough to be mistaken for a shrine maiden outfit of their religion, and women are responsible for cleansing places of ghosts.

"Now, at the time, I had no idea what a shrine maiden was, what they wore, how they acted, or anything at all about ghosts so I sort of looked at them funny, and they asked what the problem was...

"Skipping over the back and forth a bit, it came out that for some reason no women had been born at that temple in nearly a hundred years at that point, and their previous head shrine maiden, had died about a year before they contacted me. Seemed really weird, but they also mentioned they were in the middle of nowhere and grew most of their own food and stuff, so it wasn't like they had travellers or guests that would add women to the population.

"Well, I did later find out there was two girls there, but they arrived six months after the last one died and were like... fourteen or so? So they didn't know anything about performing exorcisms.

"Which, that's what I was called for. Apparently they were certain that at least one ghost, maybe more had settled into their temple after the shrine maiden died and that they'd summoned me to take care of it.

"Now, you have to understand, at this point I was already confused, and at several points in time I'd thought that D.E.M.O.N.S had given me the wrong job, so instead of doing the sensible thing, of agreeing and trying my best or asking D.E.M.O.N.S if there was a problem or something, I started arguing about the fact that I couldn't do it..."

\*Wait... something has just occurred to me. Why do people default to calling it D.E.M.O.N.S in conversation? If what Kamiko has told me is true... they don't get access to the system until they are older... so how did they get into the habit of referring to it that way? Surely before they get the system and translation up and running there isn't a difference between D.E.M.O.N.S and demons when you say it... right?\*

Kamiko, happily retelling her story, didn't notice Kat's inner turmoil. "Which took a while, and the people still bowing down in the back were clearly getting uncomfortable. And that one guy I didn't see, he spoke up a few times as well... still bowing and hidden behind big hat guy.

"Well, eventually, I did actually ask D.E.M.O.N.S to go back, but it told me that I was capable of completing the mission, and wanted to know if I actually wanted to leave. Well, as you can imagine that threw me for a massive loop. So I was then in a bit of a bind. I'd spent like... twenty minutes? Maybe more explaining all the reasons I COULDN'T do this job, only to get told by the highest authority that I really can do it.

"So I'm freaking out. Despite knowing I can do it, I still don't really know how, and it was going to be super awkward to just go and do it. I wanted so badly to just run away and hide, or head back home...

"But I also knew I'd never live it down if I just left my first summoning without even trying. The triplets would hound me for years and Aslena would do that weird disappointing stare thing she can do that makes you feel like somehow you can never recover from the humiliation even when it really wasn't that bad." Kamiko gave off a cute huff, and a slight pout as she thought of her sisters' reactions. "I haven't... exactly mentioned that part to them, so if you could avoid it as well that would be great...

"Anyway, the guys that were arguing with me really quickly noticed that I wasn't arguing as strongly anymore, so the hat guy just stopped, looked a bit smug and asked if I was going to do it. So I said to him. "Ok, I will, but know this. I can't do anything about ghosts. I'll try, but I can't touch ghosts" annoyingly, he just scoffed at me and said "well of course you can, you're just shy" and... well honestly, I don't see why that was his go to assumption, but I sighed and asked him what was going on, and hoo boy did he look smug when he started to explain all the strange things happening around the temple. A few others joined in throughout his story to add events, or sometimes clarify things, but mostly it was hat guy and what he said was...

## **Chapter 372: Ooh Eeh Ooh Ah Aah Ting Tang... Walla Walla Bing Bang**

Kamiko paused for a second and seemed to think about what she was going to say, before speaking.

"Yeah, ok, I think I'll just summarise this part because a few people weighed in at various times, and they dressed it up in really flowery and excessive language. Like, the hat guy started with 'We have been experiencing a number of separate instances of what we suspect to be ghostly activities mainly centred around the old building that the last exorcist lived in and while we trust that she was skilled enough not to leave her own spirit behind, it is likely that something else was attracted to that place'

"And that was just the start. I mean, he could have just said the old lady's house was what they think was haunted" Kamiko shook her head. \*Um... Kamiko you are guilty of that sort of thing as well... I'll admit he might have been a bit long winded but still, not much worse than you if at all.\* "So, the summary is that they managed to work out that building was the centre of the disturbances.

"A few people chipped in and explained that they had problems in neighbouring buildings as well. The biggest was that various small objects were going missing. Mostly the people who had nice silverware, and there was also one ring missing I believe? Maybe two? Anyway, there was that, as well as food that would get torn apart and strewn around the area it was left in, normally the kitchen.

"Um... these incidents would always happen at night, except for one person who claimed it happened in the middle of the day, but nobody else was willing to give credit to that particular story. I'm still not sure if it was true, but he claimed that it happened during the day and that he was missing his whole silverware drawer. Personally, I think a thief stole his using the ghost as an excuse but I didn't investigate that.

"What else... there were weird distorted sounds that would emanate from the old building whenever people got close, and if they continued onwards anyway they'd start to hear scratching sounds, they described it as 'like someone trying to scratch their way through wood' but when I went there it sounded more like someone scuffing their boots on the floor, before I figured it out, so I think it was just the fear talking when they got to that part.

"Um what else... apparently nobody has actually gone into the house, both for good reasons and bad ones. See, that house is special and only the current exorcist is allowed to enter it without permission. All the useful things that the old lady who owned it before didn't need were taken out of it, so that the new exorcist, whoever it may be, can decorate as they want, so it's mostly empty.

"Out of respect none of the older generation is willing to enter it and search for the ghost, but the kids who don't really know what they are doing still try to sneak in, but got scared away. Oh yeah that's a thing as well, apparently the temple takes in orphans so they have a couple of younger kids, but nobody younger than... I want to say five? I didn't really ask and I was told not to listen to them because nobody really knew what was going on and it felt rude to push the point at the time.

"Of course, as an older and wiser demon, I realise that I probably could have asked a few of the kids around the place and gotten the answer to the mystery in like an hour, but I didn't know what I was doing. So much so that I didn't notice that I was given a really vague contract. I just agreed to 'investigate the disturbance' in the temple. I could have just asked everyone a question and left without solving anything. Aw well, I've learned to be clearer with my contracts since.

"Is there anything you want me to go over before I move my story along and we leave the main building?" asked Kamiko.

Kat considered it for a moment. \*Well, I know she figured it out based on the fact she said as much earlier... and I would like to know what exactly this temple looked like, but I imagine we'll get to that point later on. Um... names? I'm curious about those.\* "Well... nothing major but did you actually learn anyone's names for that summoning?" asked Kat

Kamiko looked away embarrassed as red started to crawl up her cheeks. "Um... no not really. I mean, a few of them actually did give me their names, but a lot of people gave me dumb titles telling me what they did instead... so they got nicknames, like 'hat guy' and 'thief dude' which... now that I think of it was a bad name because he was robbed and not the thief but... anyway, I just gave everyone nicknames in my head."

Kat giggled slightly, finding this to be really easily believable.... She did have the same habit after all. It was so hard to stop referring to Nixilei as Glasses, in my head even after I knew her name. Green was easy because well... her name is Green, but yeah, I feel you Kamiko. "Don't worry I did that as well. I even found one person I was referring to as 'Green' in my head because of her hair and well... that's her real name" said Kat.

"Wow, you have to tell me that one later" said Kamiko.

Kat shrugged "I don't really mind, that was one of my more recent adventures... or maybe not now that I think about it. Depends how you count. Anyway, I'm sure we'll get to it"

Kamiko nodded. "Right... um, where was I... ah! Leaving, so I left the big temple, and as soon as I stepped out the front door, I realised I'd made a big mistake. See they kept talking about the exorcists house this, and exorcists house that and all the houses around it but... I realised as soon as I left the door, I had no idea where it was.

"I didn't want to go back and ask, until I looked down and realised, the temple was up maybe... five hundred or so steps? Something like that? Away from the town itself so if I did have to come back and

ask it would have been quite the trip. I also wasn't used to boosting myself with energy and hadn't even consider that so I knew my legs would kill me if I tried.

"Anyway, I awkwardly walked back inside and asked for directions, and see, good thing I did, because I would have gone completely the wrong way. See, the town down the steps is the main compound, and the secondary compound where the exorcists live was actually HIGHER up the mountain.

"Now though, I had a problem. Most people would be down in the main town area, but I probably needed to investigate the compound anyway, and I spent a rather excessive amount of time deciding which way I wanted to go. In the end, I went upwards, because I didn't really know how large the area up there was, and thought at least I could look at the house in question.

"So up the steps I went. The angle was pretty atrocious honestly, and makes me wonder how the old lady managed it. The steps were at an angle of... seventy degrees or higher I think. I found out later this was because her house was built early on in the settlement, and they used to have a long winding path, but they later needed that space for farming and so they built the new stairs to use the least amount of room...

"And that angle was pretty much all they could get if they wanted it to be one straight staircase to the compound. So, anyway, I struggle my way up, hardly able to see anything and when I finally make it to the top, I'm astounded, because it's honestly got quite a few houses around the place.

"It was closer to a little village in and of itself rather than a compound. All the houses were mostly the same. They were all long, and seemed to be made up of two sections with a central courtyard that had all the rooms in the houses open into it. Some had a pathway straight to that courtyard from the front, others made you go through a door, but all of them were made from wood, with decorative posts every few metres to hold the places up.

"Sadly, I didn't think things through properly. You see, everyone who happened to live in that area was down at the temple in case I needed to call on them to answer questions, and then after that they went and prayed. Two birds one stone type deal. This of course, meant that when I went up those stairs to find more people to talk to... I was forced to confront the fact that I'd left them all down the mountain.

"I was not impressed in the slightest I'll tell you that" said Kamiko, with a fake huff.

### **Chapter 373: Exploring the 'Haunted' House**

Kat brought the other girl into a hug. "I'm not that mad about it Kat. It was a while back anyway" said Kamiko, pouting for real this time.

"Did you want me to let go?" asked Kat with a smirk.

"Well I didn't say that" mumbled Kamiko, accepting the hug properly from Kat before sitting back down in her chair.

"Right, so, once I realised that, I decided I'd have to just check out the mansion... but I was pretty scared. I didn't exactly know what I was facing yet and I didn't really test out my abilities that I'd unlocked just yet so... I really had no point of comparison for anything. All I knew how to use was my flame... sort of, and that it took a bunch of energy to do it.

"Still, I was already not a big fan of the place, so I walked through all the houses to a large one at the back. It was still the same basic design. Bunch of sliding doors, really long, courtyard in the middle, except this one was about twice as long on the outside and included two separate courtyard areas and had, what I found out later, a big dining room that ran through the middle to separate the two.

"Oh, those two courtyards were also larger than normal because the house was wider too, but never mind it isn't actually that important. So, I was walking up to this place to check it all out and I could already hear what they were talking about. It's... it's such a weird sound, and I don't really know how to describe it other than by saying exactly what it was, so you'll find that out later.

"The most accurate depiction I can give you is that it sounds like someone yelling down a long tunnel that's made out of rippling metal. The sound easily distorts, never sounds the same twice when you hear it, and is very unsettling regardless of what part of it you're actually hearing. It just keeps going as well. On and off, like some sort of alarm.

"The whole thing starts... maybe when you get to the stairs? Not really sure? Oh, did I mention the whole house is on slight stilts? Not sure why but all of the houses are, so keep that in mind once we get further on in the story.

"So I start looking around. First door I open, I nearly choke. So much dust has built up in this place. You can't really tell from the outside because you get a good deal of wind through the house, but all the doors were shut completely with no wind getting through. So when I finally released a few years' worth of dust it was not a pleasant experience.

"As I start coughing, I also hear that odd scratching sound, so I stumble back out of the house, completely covered in dust. There was so much of it, that even with my skin it still clung to me. Makes me wonder if it was magical dust or something. Anyway, I dust myself off, and pull my collar up over my mouth to use as a bit of a filter. Sure it already has a bunch of dust in it but... well I wasn't going to resummon my clothes out in the open so I ignored it.

"Back in that room, it was almost completely empty. There was a rug on the ground that had clearly seen better days and that was about it. I gave the room a good once over before heading back out and repeating the process.

"Took a bit of time, but I just worked carefully around the house. Checking each room got a little samey, but I was still on edge the whole time because the sound didn't stop at all. It also didn't seem to increase in a consistent manner, always changing how loud it was between each shriek making it hard to pin down exactly where it was coming from.

"I started to catch on to something going on though, when I was taking a break in one of the two gardens. This one had a fish pond that was still going strong. Not sure how exactly the water was filtered, but it was clear enough, especially considering all the plants that were growing wildly around the edges now.

"So, I'd just sat down on the steps, the ones that led up to the dining room, to take a break before tackling that particularly large section of the house, when the sound practically screamed in my ear. I'm not afraid to admit, I panicked, and leapt straight up into the air and... well, I am a little embarrassed to admit I smashed right through the ceiling."

Kamiko took a big breath for a dramatic pause. "This however, was both a blessing and a curse. The sound started up again, even worse. Screeching and squawking reverberating all around me and pressing in on my ears, while a few birds tried to come at me.

"Luckily I dropped down soon after, as the wood gave way shortly after, because it was rather old, and the ceiling hadn't been maintained well at all unlike the floors which I never had a problem with. Still I think it might have just been that spot because of the birds weakening it, eh, could go either way.

"So, having fallen down to the floor, and also finding the source of the noise... I ran away like a scared little girl." Kat interrupted Kamiko.

"Those birds sounded somewhat vicious, plus you had no idea how strong they were or how to use your powers, AND they were right next to your eyes before you fell. I don't really think you were wrong to run" said Kat. Granted I might not have run away, I'd probably have panicked and punched the birds instead but I don't necessarily think that would be a better response. "Oh, and you are a girl, don't forget that part" Kat finished off with a grin.

Kamiko pulled herself up and straighten her back, gaining back a slight smile. "Right, well, I did run straight out the front door, and the birds stopped following me as soon as I left the house. After calming myself down, I realised that the strange sounds had all stopped, so I had to go back and investigate.

"I did also know that I was strong enough to jump onto the roof, so I used that newfound power to get up there and walk over to the area I'd smashed. It was really easily spotted, though that wasn't actually the hole I made, but a hole that might have been there a while.

"Anyway, when I got over there and looked inside, I saw four agitated crows? Ravens? Some other black bird? I'm not sure I ever asked what species they were. Anyway, they were all staring at the hole in the floor where I'd come from, until I put my big head in the way and blocked the sun.

"They turned as one to face me again, and this time I stood my ground. I also made sure my poison nails were on paralyse and got ready. As soon as they tried to leave, I jabbed them all with my nails, and they fell onto the roof pretty rapidly.

"Turns out... when something has no resistance to poison and is only small like a bird... it's really potent. So, they dropped quickly, landing a little hard but they could clearly still move a bit. The largest one even managed to jump over and tried to peck my legs but... it didn't even hurt.

"That's when I realised, I'd forgotten this was an easy mission given to me as a first. You practically CAN'T fail them. So, anyway. I've got three downed ravens and one that's poking me in the side, so I look in the hole in the roof again, and find two nests full of baby chicks which were cowering at the time, and things clicked... or well most of it did.

"The food scattered around was the birds trying to get food for the babies, the noises were the chirps of them echoing through the roof... still that didn't explain the shiny things or where they were.

"I did try to see them, but the only things up in the roof were the chicks, and some nesting material, wait... maybe some bread as well? Not relevant. Nothing shiny was visible so I sat down and tried to work out what was going on there.

"Not the best idea, because after ten minutes of brainstorming the other ravens woke up and started trying to peck me, and, I dunno if you've ever tried but having a bunch of ravens sitting on you and pecking isn't a good way to think about things, so I brushed them off and left the house, at least temporarily so that I could think a bit better."

### **Chapter 374: Thinking Stage**

"So Kat," said Kamiko "what do you think happened next? Trust me, it was stranger than I expected at the time as well. I wasn't even close when I made my guess so perhaps you'll do better"

\*Hmm,\* "When you say what happened next... do you mean what you did next or what actually happened to the missing things?" asked Kat.

"Oh right. Sorry about that, I did actually mean to ask that. Actually, I'll tell you what I thought. I was still thinking that the birds were hiding it somewhere else" said Kamiko.

\*Huh... that's weird, I was guessing that as well. What else could they be doing with it? I guess Kamiko never said they had anything to do with it at all... but the way she set this whole thing up they must have had SOMETHING to do with it right? Hmm.\* "You mentioned earlier that someone else stole a bunch of silverware. Did that guy actually steal it all after messing up the first time?" asked Kat.

Kamiko's eyes widened. "Woah. That makes a lot of sense. Still wrong, but at least it makes more sense than birds hiding away their treasure for no reason" said Kamiko.

Kat shrugged. "I'm not sure it does. I mean, what could they do with it? The temple seems like a fairly close-knit community. Whoever was stealing them wouldn't be able to sell it to anyone because it would have been immediately recognised" said Kat.

"Huh" said Kamiko, letting out a long breath. "Honestly I didn't think of that either. Not now, and not at the time... honestly, I wish it made that much sense with the thief being a bit smarter than average but not smart enough to figure out that part."

Kat smiled and gave another shrug. \*Honestly, I'm just curious to see what actually happened at this point. I don't really have any good ideas.\* "Is there anything else I'd need to know to figure it out?" asked Kat

Kamiko winced a bit. "I mean... maybe? But I'd call that cheating in some ways because I never found out about it till I told my parents this story and they explained how it all likely happened. I'll just say that sometimes, mana is a little different between dimensions."

\*What the heck could that mean? It's weird to point it out... I guess I had just assumed it was always the same though. Is qi also different? Maybe I should ask, that seems important.\* "Is qi sometimes different as well?" asked Kat.

Kamiko shook her head. "No, qi is funny like that. There are different types of qi but it is always the same. However, what does change is the world adapts to absorb it. The whole dimension sort of... picks a way and sticks with it. Every species gets the same most of the time, and it's kinda like a weird universal law even though it shouldn't be. I'm not sure why it happens, but yeah, qi is qi is qi, while mana is mostly mana most times."



\*Right... that... let's just say that makes sense and move on. I'm not sure it DOES exactly, but I'll believe it for now. Actually, quick check. System, can you say something if Kamiko is wrong?\*

\*Nothing? All good?\*

Kat waited a few more seconds and saw nothing. "That's rather strange Kamiko. Um, why didn't you ask the system to confirm something like that while you were there?" asked Kat, not quite able to help herself.

Kamiko scratched her cheek awkwardly as some more colour rose to her cheeks. "Well... I didn't know it was a thing I NEEDED to know. Trust me, it will make sense in context once I finish the story I swear" said Kamiko

Kat nodded, and gestured for Kamiko to continue, which she did. "So, I was panicking a little after that, however in my time spent trying to figure out what the heck was going on, somebody came up to me and hel... well, no they didn't help, the next person did. The first person, was an idiot.

"So... they were a young kid, maybe... eleven? At the oldest? And he comes up and tries to flirt with me. And not that adorable thing kids do, where they blush a bunch and call you pretty and hand you flowers you can tell were ripped out of the grass from slightly further down the road.

"Nah, this kid wanted to pretend he was this worldly ladies' man, which, trust me, I'm a succubus I've seen them around, so... this was just awkward. So the kid comes up, let's call him Slezzy, and leans on my shoulder. He can only do this of course, because I'm sitting down.

"He says to me, 'what's a beautiful girl like you doing sitting on the grass out here', and honestly I was gobsmacked. Before I could even figure out who this kid thinks he is, he continues 'I see, speechless to see me are you. I understand the feeling, all the ladies in the village are like that around me' and if I'm honest. I'm wondering if he means the town, or just the upper compound because... remember, there are like... two girls, and the old lady. So who he was trying this on before... I have no idea.

"So anyway, I pull away from the kid a bit, and the little shit just follows along with me, as if he isn't now leaning over like half my body. So I say to him, 'Do you mind? I'm currently in the middle of something?' as politely as I could. Now, I also know that my aura is raging. I found out that day, that I do not handle idiocy as well as I thought. Patience, I have, time for idiots, I do not.

"At this point, I can already feel my demonic energy building, and... well, I was going to say I was starting to glow pink but I don't think that happened till I was Rank 2... so probably not, ignore that part. Anyway, I was mad already, and instead of saying something sane, the kid says, 'Oh, I'm distracting you am I? I'm sure you can make some time for me.'

"Which... just... no. First off, you are still a kid. I know I'm was a bit of a late bloomer in the chest department and my outfit hides most of it, but I was still clearly years older than him."

\*Um... Kamiko, I'm sorry but I'm pretty sure you look a few years younger than you are. Not sure when this happened either, but if it was in the last twelve months, I'm not surprised they thought you were around their age if they were a little older than you thought.\*

"So... I pulled the classic demon trick, and grabbed a nearby rock and smashed it in my hands. Which, ow, that hurt, because crushing rocks is easy but crushing rocks and not getting impaled by all the little bits that get left over afterwards. I don't have regen like you so it cut up my hands pretty badly.

"Still, the image was actually good enough to get Sleezy to just run away from me scared. I was more than a little annoyed at that. He comes up to me, tries all his fancy lines, and with a little intimidation he backs off! Luckily though, a much nicer person rocked up afterwards. The oldest man that I'd seen in the temple so far, and I explained to him what I saw and that the sounds were all ravens.

"He seemed to believe me, but told me 'It will be a very difficult task to convince the others of this though' and when I asked why, he explained, 'Nobody is willing to go explore the area, and even with your insistence, it is against our beliefs to step foot on those grounds. They likely won't believe that birds got in, and insist it must be ghosts' and... well I was kinda down about that.

"I was much more put off than I should have been. D.E.M.O.N.S would never give an impossible task, and I already said this was my first one so it should have been really safe and fairly easy to complete, but I wasn't thinking about that. No, it was the old man who told me the answer while I was trying not to cry.

"He said 'What's wrong you one? Why can't you go in and grab the items and use that as proof of what was going on?' now, I'll admit, thinking back, I also could have grabbed the ravens, but his idea was great, so I gave him a hug and set off back towards the raven nest to explore better and try to find the stash of jewels." Said Kamiko with a big smile.

\*Huh, that's nice. It doesn't seem anywhere near as easy as my mission was... but maybe that's because I wasn't a full demon? Or perhaps whatever my mission was supposed to be would have been around this difficult? Hard to say really. The Elf King was maybe around that difficulty if you consider the pressure. I don't think it hit me at the time he was actually much older than me and well...? a King.\*

### **Chapter 375: Arguing Stage**

"It didn't go the best honestly" said Kamiko "At first, I just looked through the rooms I hadn't covered yet, then I went and rechecked all the rooms I had... still nothing, and it was getting late in the day. The sun was going down, and while my night vision is pretty good, it's no better than standard and I needed a break as well. I was... more than a little bit excited for my first contract so I sorta maybe didn't sleep the day before...

"Anyway, I was tired, it was late, I didn't know if my eyes would be good enough to look overnight so I asked around a bit and found that old man that helped me and asked if I could stay with him for the night. He told me instead, that the big hat dude had a place for me, which... honestly I ignored. Told him it was fine, and then he offered me his bed, and I claimed his couch.

"I wasn't about to let an old man give up his bed for me. Sure we argued back and forth for a while but I won him over by pointing out that he was too tall and wouldn't actually fit on his small couch but I would. Granted, my wings made it a little awkward, but I wasn't going to tell him that or lay down before he left the room otherwise, he might catch on and use it as an excuse.

"So, next day, I chat with the old man a while. Explain how I looked everywhere, but when he asked me about which places I'd looked at, he had this to add. 'I know you said everywhere but you haven't checked under the house, right?' Now, I wasn't exactly happy to have that pointed out to me, and instead of doing the mature thing, I instead I argued with him about it.

"I'll spare you those details, because they accomplish nothing, and I've grown up a bit since then, and have made several promises not to repeat that particular mistake. Still, my main thought was that because I'd found the birds, the items had to be with them. Furthermore, I thought that they'd never hide anything under the house...

"Ok, another large thought was that it was really gross under the house and I didn't particularly want to crawl through the mud. Still I can say my main reason was because the birds would never go down there... and I was sort of right in that? Kinda? Anyway... I went back to the house, spent much longer than I care to admit finding the little hatch that let me into the area under the house and started looking...

"Only to see something rather eye catching. There was a hole that had been dug in the... I'm not really sure what it's called? The wood slats that cover the outer edge of the house to prevent things from just wondering around down there. Whatever they're called, something had dug a very noticeable hole underneath some.

"On my way over, it was also really easy to see that something had made tracks in the dirt. Even me, someone with no experience in tracking figured it out. Granted, I couldn't tell what kind of tracks they were, but the tracks were there at least. Also, I found out, the pole in the centre near where the ravens are, was actually hollow.

"It still had a few rings there. So naturally, I went and explained this all to big hat dude. He said some things, about how wrong I was and how it had to be ghosts because he'd seen the signs... which is really weird because from what I can tell ghosts are a real thing in that world, and I asked D.E.M.O.N.S to confirm and yes mana was a thing... so I'm not sure why he was so adamant it was ghosts.

"Anyway, eventually, the other people in the temple got sick of our arguing as it was interrupting the midday prayer, so we both agreed that once that was over they'd come and help me figure out what was going on after I showed them proof it was the birds."

Kamiko let out a long sigh. "Just remembering that argument gives me a headache. It was MUCH longer than it should have been. Honestly, I probably spent more effort arguing with the guy than I did finding the ravens and the shiny things... but it gets worse in just a second. At least looking for them on my own I could be left with my thoughts when that happened, but anyway.

"This great big mob of people and I all trudge up the pathway and we hear the 'ghostly sounds'. I spend another ten minutes convincing them it isn't ghosts, and as we get closer, and the sounds get worse, people start to really freak out. Like 'we can't be on sacred ground' and 'we are angering the spirits'

"So of course, I have to spend more time arguing with them. After thirty minutes, we move away from the house so that people stop freaking out, and then we keep arguing. Sometime through it comes out that we have to go under the house not just in it. I... don't remember how it came up?

"I think I was trying to convince them it was fine because they didn't actually have to go in the house just under it... but that freaked them out more. Not even sure why, I don't think it was a religious thing so I've no idea. Still, these guys were not having it. All the like... twenty? Thirty? People that I'd brought along were not having it.

"Eventually, instead of finally listening to me, they sent a runner down to the village proper to get those girls I mentioned, and have them be witnesses. Apparently, it was better for some reason? Also, I don't get why they could take their word and not mine? Like... if I'm really in question, couldn't I just threaten them to agree with me or something?

"So, more waiting. Things are already looking like they are heading towards darkness, and I'm not happy with that fact. I know I'm going to need to get them to track whatever it was that has been sneaking under the house, but I can't do it alone and they can't see at night but whatever.

"So... a FULL HOUR later. All passive aggressive silences and weird looks. A couple people left of course, but most didn't and a couple that left came back with friends so I hardly lost any of my audience. Finally, though, the girls have arrived. Clearly exhausted, I guess because they had to run or jog up the stairs, and... they'd not actually been told what they were here to do.

"Um... let's call the girls long hair and short hair I guess. Long hair, is not happy, and once it's explained what we want them to do, she just point-blank refuses. Short hair says she's ok to do it, but wants someone other than me to come with as... well she didn't say 'guard' but she heavily implied it during her requests. So... now we have a bunch of these villagers trying to peer pressure the girls to go with me and I'm torn.

"On the one hand, I know there is nothing down there. I know that I'm not going to hurt them, and I know that even if they had a guard it wouldn't really help them against me. On the other hand... forcing them to crawl on their hands and knees in a dark crawl space underneath a house just to confirm or deny what I'm saying is not something I would want for anyone.

"So, I tell the dudes, that if they are too scared to do it, why would the girls want to? They took acceptance to that. But, it was in the best way possible. The hot-headed younger people in the group, at least one of which I know was called over by a friend, said they'd go instead.

"Now, at this point, I didn't know how angry to be. Because, if you'll recall, we'd been wasting a rather large amount of time at this point, just having me try and convince them to come and check things out. Nobody was willing to, so we waited for these poor girls to climb all the way up a few thousand steps...

"Just to send them home again" Kamiko slammed her fist into the table. "Sorry Kat. I... I wasn't this angry about it at the time. I was annoyed sure, but not angry. I think I was more... 'Dam I'm so over this' if you get my drift. But every time I look back at it, it's just... such a petty move to do things the way they did."

Kat reached out and put a hand on Kamiko's clenched fist and rubbed her thumb over it. People said it was calming, but she'd always just gone for hugs, so this was... somewhat of a field test, she supposed.

### **Chapter 376: Culprits Found!**

Kamiko gave Kat a soft smile and let out a sigh before she continued with her story. "Right, thanks for that Kat. I... I don't think I was quite that angry last time I thought about it, but every time I do it gets more and more unreasonable. Thanks. Anyway, now that the team is finally assembled, I led them down into the depths of the house, and made a beeline to the section I was talking about.

"The guys confirmed that the items were in fact there, and I asked them if I should grab them all now or leave them. I was told by one I probably should, so I did. It wasn't many of them, and clearly not all, but it was enough to get the point across, especially with the testimony from the two boys.

"So we all crawled out, with more than a bit of dirt on us, and we confronted the group with the evidence. I'll be honest, I was expecting another fight to start and have to argue for a while but... big hat just nodded and accepted it before asking for the items. Before I could even ask he said. 'I plan to hold these in the temple and wait till we have gathered the rest before returning them' and honestly, I thought it was a good idea. Still do, but I left before seeing how that all played out so I've no idea if it actually worked out well.

"With all the evidence though, the whole group was more than happy to walk around to the area where the tracks were. It was pretty dark already, so they couldn't do much better than say, 'yup there are tracks here' but it was a good start. Big hat guy thanked me for figuring this much else and then asked if I was going to lead the expedition to follow the tracks"

Kamiko sighed. "So, apparently he thought that I was interested in tracking them myself, and possessed that ability. Not sure what gave him that idea, maybe it was because I found them in the first place? Also he wanted to take a bunch of people, but I was planning for like... me and a tracker or two, maybe a warrior? I thought I'd be able to handle any fights well enough myself and wanted stealth.

"Before that turned into a big argument, big hat dude said that they'd discuss it amongst themselves and assign roles. I was free to rest if I wished. I was famished at this point, so I asked them for food and a place to stay, and big hat dude, talked to some other guy I really don't remember and headed back to the temple.

"Down the steps I go... again. At least I managed to avoid an extra trip by staying with the old man the first time. The meal was fine. Nothing like mum's cooking but it certainly wasn't bad. Quite a few fruits, a lot of rice, and a bit of meat.

"That was probably the worst part actually. They had all this fresh food. Beautiful fresh rice, nice juicy fruit that likely was picked that same day and... at least a week-old cured meat. Not even sure what it was before the curing because there was enough salt in the damned stuff that I could have used the same salt to season a month's worth of meals back home.

"Still, I didn't complain. I was tired, and sort of over them at this point, so I just ate a little bit of the meat, even though there wasn't much to begin with, while focusing on the rice and fruit for most of the meal. Then I resummoned my clothes to clean them and headed to bed."

Kamiko took in an obvious breath as she paused her story just to give a sense of time passing. "Now once I woke up, I was met by another random guy. Pretty sure it was a different random guy, but I can't be sure. They asked if I wanted food, and I decided I'd have a light breakfast as well. I didn't know how long I'd be away for and I'd hate to fail the mission because I was out of food.

"So I had more rice, which I'm not complaining about, and then was shuffled off to meet big hat guy who had set up... a sort of camp? I guess at the entrance of the forest. Apparently, they rotated through a few people and watched the tracks to make sure that whatever they were going to be following didn't know they'd been discovered.

"The big hat guy then informed me. 'That we have reached a compromise. You will stay at the front with two sufficiently competent trackers. After you have departed, a second group here will wait for a half a turn of the clock before leaving to follow in your path. If you need backup, one of the trackers will shoot a flare arrow in the air. If they cannot do so, but you can, please take it as high as possible and light the fuse.'

"I thought it was reasonable enough. So, I was introduced to Tracker 1 and Tracker 2. Apparently they were a pair of husbands that were planning to retire soon. Or, that's what they said, but as far as I could tell they weren't exactly old. Only like 30? Maybe 35? So I have no idea why they said it. Maybe as a joke?

"Tracker 1, was a big guy and moved surprisingly softly for it. I nearly switched his nickname to twinkle toes. Easy six-foot five guy, with muscles as wide as my head. Tracker 2, was also big but it was more like he'd been stretched out instead of bulked up. Slightly taller than Tracker 1, but much thinner. He was actually louder when he walked.

"Now, the lot of us headed out. I'll skip over the boring parts of tracking through the forest. It took us hours of following the tracks, but they didn't make a lot of sense to the trackers. Or so they said. Apparently they were wolf tracks, but they were much too deep set into the ground to have been common wolves.

"Still it was no more than three wolves so Trackers 1 and 2 weren't worried and we marched on. Eventually we found the place in question. And... honestly I chuckle a little thinking back to it now. See, it was a group of wolves and monkeys that had been working together with the birds.

"The hideout was a small cave with a large tree that grew out of the back of it and broke through the dirt hill it was contained within. The monkeys had been collected shiny things and just... shoving them into the tree. Like, knives and forks and spoons were all stabbed into the trunk with the rings all pushed onto a few smaller branches.

"It was rather anticlimactic then that when I made the mistake of stepping on and snapping a twig, all the animals froze, stared directly at the three of us, and then bolted. They just... left all the stuff behind.

"Trackers 1 and 2 debated about sending up a flare. We, didn't need help exactly unless requiring extra hands to carry everything counted. In the end though, they decided not to because apparently those arrows are hard to make. So we just got to work pulling all the cutlery out of this poor tree.

"When the other group showed up, arrows notched and ready for action they were rather startled to find us digging silverware from a tree. It took me and the Trackers quite a while to explain what had happened. The other two couldn't stop laughing and I couldn't help but laugh along with them.

"Because really, what we found while we were taking the tree apart, was this huge bag of seeds. And we think that the wolves and the monkeys were paying the birds off with bird seed to steal shiny things so that they could add it to their tree. Still not sure why they impaled them into the tree, but I'm sure they thought there was a good reason at the time"

"All that was left was getting it all back. That was a bit tricky because nobody actually brought sacks to carry everything but the MONKEYS had some. All very small, and with some holes in them so we had to

be careful, but it wasn't so bad. Then I got back, and once the stuff was handed over, I left" finished Kamiko with a smile.

"Wow" said Kat. "Your first contract was a lot more involved than mine. I mean, I know it wasn't that long, just a few days but still, mine was only a few minutes!"

Kamiko shrugged "Yeah... that's probably not normal. But I was happy with mine. It was a nice easy mission that gave me a... well maybe not a good taste of what contracts are like but I think it helped."

### **Chapter 377: Some Casual Conversation**

The two demons sat in companionable silence as the seconds ticked by. Kat tried to relax properly into the chairs, but it was clear, while they were designed to accommodate wings, it was for the tiny wings Kamiko, and presumably the rest of her family, had instead of something for Kat.

Eventually, Kamiko decided to ask "What did you think of my first summon? Have you ever had one similar?"

"Not really" said Kat. "Most of mine have been a lot more straightforward. I mean sure, I've had some that haven't been exactly normal, but nothing that required me to go and investigate anything..."

"Unless you count an emergency summon I did for a friend of mine. I had to go adventuring through some dreams and find out what was keeping her asleep. Or well, we knew what it was, but we needed to get to it and sort it all out. Not sure that really counts though"

Kamiko seemed to sit up straighter with that. "I'm surprised you managed to do a summon like that already, even as an emergency one. Even though you have specialties, most things that require them are for higher Ranking demons than us simply because of the danger of things that require them.

"Like... um, say someone is put into a cursed sleep and a demon is needed to rescue them. If you actually NEED the demon, the curse should be much more powerful than anyone treating the person, and so you need a powerful demon to break it, even if you can cheat a little by making use of a specialty.

"Though... with your true sight maybe that wouldn't? No, I doubt it, because once again, if illusion or whatever else, is so strong that it actually requires someone with true sight to have any chance of getting through it then there should be other dangerous traps most of the time and you'd need a high Rank demon for those..."

"I guess you could travel with someone else though? Maybe if it was say... cheaper to hire you and a Rank 4 or 5 demon together. Have you handle the illusions and them handle else? Thoughts Kat?" said Kamiko.

"I've not really thought about it all that much if I'm honest Kamiko." Replied Kat. "I've been told I can do special things like that but it hasn't exactly come up frequently. Though... now that I think about it, how does True Sight decide what counts as an illusion?"

Kamiko bit her lip. "So, mum actually knows a bit about it, and I asked one day because apparently it's shown up in our family line before. I wasn't overly interested in it, just that it's somewhat traditional for parents to talk about the strongest abilities in their line you kn- actually I guess you wouldn't..."

"So, True Sight came up. The funny thing with it, is that... it sort of filters for intent? Like... if someone made an illusion using light magic and projected it in front of you. If they were using it to show you a map, you could actually see it.

"If instead they were using it to give you misleading information then you'd be able to see through it. It's really strange, and can apparently understand the true intent of the illusion even if the one setting it doesn't know. Like say... say someone was asked to make an illusion of a water fountain.

"And they do, they make a lovely fountain because that was their job, and move on. You'd normally be able to see that, but if the person who paid for it, was using the fountain illusion to hide the fact they hadn't repaired the fountain in the square, you could see that it wasn't actually there. Even though the caster didn't realise it was hiding anything...

"Does that make sense? I mean, you're the one with the skill so I obviously only know what I've been told but I hope it helps somewhat." Said Kamiko happily.

Kat bit her lip. "You know, I wasn't exactly thinking about it, but now that you've mentioned it, that does make sense. If I think back, I was watching a projected light screen that showed what other people in a tournament I was in were doing.

"At the time I didn't think about it, but that would have been an illusion. It was all made with magic, not recorded, and probably counts as an illusion doesn't it?"

Kamiko nodded. "Probably. I mean, it might also count as divination magic? Depends how the person in question did it."

Kat shrugged. \*Knowing Thyme, they did it however the heck they wanted to. I wonder if categories of magic even mean anything to that crazy bastard. Though speaking of him... I wonder when I'll be summoned for the next tournament leg? I don't think I asked when the next one was. Aw well.\*

"I'd believe anything about that guy." Said Kat. "He managed to hide my horns actually. Took so much mana the area started to shake"

Kamiko's eyes started spinning as they went wide. "WHAT! Why the name of the great demons would you meet someone that powerful already?"

Kat shrugged "He was running a tournament. Well, actually, I think he was just a judge?"

Kamiko shook her head and looked away, eyes still spinning and showing just how surprised she still was. "You... Kat you don't just meet people like that. He's at least equivalent to a Rank 5... maybe 6 demon, considering I think you have a bloodline on the stronger end. For someone other than you to hide them... even for a moment that sort of power is not something to mess with."

Kat couldn't help but laugh, while Kamiko glared at her with a look that seemed to say 'this is no laughing matter' so Kat tried to explain. "It's just... sorry but, you haven't actually met this person so maybe you can't understand but that's their whole shtick. Messing around with things. Half of what they do is purely for the fun of it at least. They built a maze an instant, created a weird set of challenges, and hosted a quiz show all in one afternoon"



Kamiko pursed her lips, eyes starting to calm down slightly. "I suppose I see why you laughed... and I guess if that's how they are there isn't much you can do." Kamiko continued to mumble under her breath, but knew Kat could probably hear her anyway. "You never can know how to act around someone like that"

Kat shrugged. "Polite fondness without being overly stuffy seemed to work for me. I'll admit, I don't really have a good reference for how strong he has to be, so while everyone else was freaking out completely I only freaked out a little bit and I think he liked me for that"

Kamiko nodded. "I suppose I can see that. My mother talks about how hard it is to find someone who wants to just be your friend once you reach her Rank. Even within a Rank it's can be hard to tell, because having even one more person on your side makes a huge difference.

"She always says how happy she is to have met dad when they were younger. Granted they were friends for nearly a hund- I mean, for a lot of their life together before they started to consider pairing up on a more permanent basis" said Kamiko.

I'm not sure if I'm happy or not to see that demon women still don't like people talking about their age... which if I'm honest... doesn't make a lot of sense to me. Who cares if you're a hundred when you can live practically forever?

A few more moments passed between them. Kat looked outside and saw the sky starting to dim. Hmm, I'm not really tired. "Kamiko would you like to hear about my second summoning?"

"Sure thing" said Kamiko

"Well... I'm not sure if it was stranger than the first or not but here is what happened...

"And I was teleported home right as I fell into the room with all of his advisors plotting to kill him" finished Kat.

Kamiko's mouth dropped open. "Wow. I can't say that anything like that has ever happened to me or the rest of my family. You would be shocked at the amount of, go here kill x, or go there and defeat y without permanently maiming y.

"I wonder why you seem to get so many cool missions" sighed Kamiko.

Kat raised an eyebrow. "If your first mission is anything to go by, yours are pretty good as well"

Kamiko nodded and went to speak but let out a long yawn instead. Finally after a few seconds to get herself under control Kamiko said. "Sorry about that. I guess I'm more tired than I thought. Do you mind if we pack up for the day? I mean, of course, we can chat in bed for a bit longer, but um... I'm going to go shower, want me to show you where it is?"

Kat nodded and stood up before patting Kamiko on the head. She was rather adorable as she tried to rub her eyes to keep herself awake properly.

## **Chapter 378: The Other 2 Floors.**

Kamiko got up and lead Kat to what she had thought was a cupboard. It was on the opposite end of the house to the kitchen and stuck out of the wall slightly. It was a bit large for a normal cupboard, with the

double doors being about the width of Kat's outstretched wings. The answer to this mystery was revealed when Kamiko pulled open the doors for Kat to see a fireman's pole running down.

"Now, I'm guessing because of the fact you can fly you aren't afraid of height right? I mean... maybe I shouldn't be asking but I swear I have a good reason, um, you don't have to tell me if you don't want to just... it IS important." said Kamiko

Kat shrugged and said, "No that's fine, I'm not afraid of them at all"

Kamiko nodded rapidly like a bobble head while speaking the words, "That's great. Yup, perfect. Um... so this is how we get to the second floor... it's actually a bit of a way down. Mum designed it that way so that the plants all have enough room to reach out with their roots. That means there is a bit of a drop. The pole isn't necessary actually, and the floor is special...

"Um, I'll talk about that when we get down there? Maybe? Yes I'll talk about it when we are down there, but just know the pole is more to make sure you don't hit any of the walls then to slow you down. Some of the triplets' friends have made that mistake and I'd hate for you to burn your hand on the metal... though of course with your regeneration I'm sure you'd be fine.

"I'll just go first? If that's ok? Um see this?" Kamiko stopped to point at the ceiling of the cupboard. Kat hadn't noticed it, but it was actually glowing a faint green. Kat nodded allowing Kamiko to continue "Right so this light tells you if somebody is using or standing in the drop zone. Just come down once it turns back ok? It'll be red if someone else is standing at the bottom and bright red if someone is sliding down"

Seeing Kat nod again, Kamiko strode confidently off the edge and dropped out of sight. Kat watched the light for a few moments until it changed back to green. \*Guess it's my turn then.\* Kat stepped forward, placing one hand lightly around the pole. Just before Kat stepped off she had a thought.

\*Wait... my skin repels dirt and water right? It's also unnaturally smooth... will I still burn it if I hang onto it? I don't actually know if those types of things are proper burns either. If the heat from the friction is what causes it I'll certainly be fine...\*

Kat decided to hold onto it just a bit harder than she thought would be comfortable. Neither of her predicted outcomes happened though, as it was clear she was more than strong enough to hold her body weight on her hand. She would either fall freely, or stop in place depending on the pressure, there was no in-between. Letting go, Kat fell the rest of the way to the first floor of the basement, or as Kamiko referred to it 'the second floor'.

When Kat landed, she felt the padding stretch underneath her, then, once all of her momentum had bled off, it slowly raised her back up to level with the rest of the floor that Kamiko was currently standing on. Kat looked at it oddly for a second before stepping off.

"I'm glad to see you made it out fine" said Kamiko "I've never had any problems with it, and other than the issues with grabbing the pole nobody has had any problems at all... still I always was suspicious about how safe it was. The triplets thought it was a good joke to throw me down it once when I was younger... and while I've mostly gotten over it... I can't help but feel it will fail one day and I'll break my legs...

"Sorry, I didn't mean to bring the mood down." Kamiko turned around and gestured to the hallway which stretched quite far backwards. "This is the second floor. It has everyone's rooms on it except my parents, and adding one guest room. Apparently we didn't used to have the third floor and the guest room was my parents but... I was never alive to see that so..." Kamiko shrugged.

"Oh wait right, the flooring" Kamiko said as she pointed to the square Kat had been standing on. "So it's special material. I don't know what it's called but it absorbs impacts really well without hurting the floor or the person. It actually isn't very thick, only about deep enough to get to the third floor in fact, but it's more than enough for, allegedly any amount of weight.

"That makes it really handy for cushioning, though it's not really right for couches and stuff because once it bleeds of that extra energy it becomes rigid solid flooring once again. Even if you kicked at it, it would stay solid. I'm not sure how that part works honestly, or why it's always solid no matter who is standing on it...

"Anyway" said Kamiko leading Kat over to another 'cupboard' next to the first. "This one is a much shorter jump. No pole this time, though there is a hidden ladder in the back. I doubt you'll need it. I mean, I don't anymore and you're at least as strong as me... um... just follow along I guess?"

Kamiko opened the door awkward smile on her face as she revealed a roughly five metre drop, which she took without hesitation. Kat watched the light for the all-clear sign and jumped after her... to face a wall. Though turning around revealed the third floor in all its 'glory'.

It was a simple affair. The corridor was once again very plain, and an almost exact match for the previous floor. The only difference was that the doors were no longer evenly spaced. Whereas before they were almost exactly fifty metres apart, not that Kat knew the figure, now they were a seemingly random assortment of distances between each other, and they didn't necessarily line up on either side.

"So... this is more like the utility floor? Or... no maybe like the spare space? No that's still wrong. Um... so the ground floor that you saw is mostly just the kitchen and another little sitting area separate from that, we sometimes use it for get togethers if it's only part of the family involved...

"Like say, Mum was having some friends over. She'd take over that room to leave the rest of us in peace... oh and the attic, but we mostly just store things up there. It was actually the first bedroom for our parents, but I can't imagine it knowing what it looks like now.

"And I mean... I guess you didn't really see much of the second floor. I doubt my sisters would approve of me just showing you all their rooms even if I want to... um, but I can tell you a bit about this one ok?"

Kat nodded, and Kamiko practically sprinted off with glee, the tiredness from before washed away by the excitement. When Kamiko reached the first door, she didn't open it. "This is Merra's sport closet. She keeps spare sporting equipment or the old stuff she doesn't use anymore. I won't open it more because I can't be certain I'd be able to close it again with everything in it. She doesn't mind people using her old stuff at all... but you'd never find what you want.

"Um..." Kamiko pointed to a door on the other side, that actually did match this one's position and the only matching set on the floor. "That door is Erra's old book storage. She actually makes it really nice and tidy but it's all stacked closely together. She has a list somewhere that tells her where all the books are but that door is locked...

"Um this door" Kamiko walked over and patted the next door. "Is one of the largest rooms down here. It's Kerra's art storage. She does keep a lot of stuff in her room but it's not anywhere near enough space to fit. Unlike the other two where old and forgotten stuff ends up, Kerra puts things in here she doesn't want to sell on display.

"Huh... sorry Kat, I kinda realised I can't show you much. Kerra made me promise that any friends I have need to be shown this when she's around so that she can see their, or I guess your face when you see it... so I guess that's out to. Um... maybe I should just show you..."

Kamiko walked past another two doors before pushing the third open. "So this is the main bathroom. Mum and Dad have their own, but this one is like the family's. I'll show you why I guess..."

### **Chapter 379: Bubbl- er Mist Bath**

When Kamiko opened the bathroom, Kat wasn't sure what she was expecting. Hearing it was for the whole family, she thought of multiple shower stalls, or one wall filled with shower heads. Now, as someone who grew up in an orphanage, these are both understandable mistakes. Having seen the communal showers at the local pool area, and heard Gramps say it would be a good idea if it wasn't so expensive a few times, that was her idea going in.

Instead, Kat found a large 'bathtub' that was the size of a small swimming pool and a room consisting of a white marble like substance that seemed to grip onto her feet when she walked in. It was strange, and not something she knew how to react to properly so she just gazed at the rest of it with her mouth opened wide.

If it wasn't for the inordinately white colour that everything in the room was, Kat was sure she could be convinced that she was outside in the garden. In fact, she wasn't entirely sure she couldn't be convinced of that fact anyway. The slight touches of colour on the various details that littered the walls floor and bath helped give it a strange sort of natural calm.

The walls looked to be made up of rosebushes, with the leaves tinted a slight green and the roses a soft pink. They almost seemed to surround the room as if they were preventing someone from peeking in from outside. The rosebushes made their way up slightly more than two thirds of the wall, and changed into a soft blue that covered the upper parts of the walls as well as the ceiling.

The blue had dots of pure white fluffy clouds. Unlike the bushes that seemed to come out of the wall, the clouds were all carved down which gave them a strange three-dimensional effect that even the slightly raised sections of the rosebushes didn't actually manage. The sky, and by extension the room, was lit predominantly by a bright light that sat in the far upper right hand corner, acting as a sun for the mural and a light source for the room.

Kat thought it was a little weird, as there wasn't actually any shadows in the room despite the clear positioning of a light source. Sure the details of the room all APPEARED to have shadows originating from that light source, but when Kat looked closely at a particularly nicely carved rosebush, Kat noticed that the shadow was part of the design and not natural lighting.

The centrepiece of the room, was of course the tub. At the moment it was empty but that didn't change the sheer size of the thing. The walls were lined with various flowers, most of which Kat didn't recognise,

with six particularly noticeable ones that were spaced evenly but swapped between each of the two sides of the bath.

These flowers were much larger than the rest, about the size of Kat's head, and looked like nothing she'd ever seen. They were a strange mix of a roses intricate petal designs while also coming in a rainbow of colours and with a large opening in the centre that she guessed the water would come from.

Kamiko interrupted Kat before she got completely lost in the details of the room and said, "Hey Kat... um, I didn't really think of this but do you mind if I keep the water chilled? I can't really do that with the rest of my family. I mean, they keep it only a little warm for me when we are together but, well, it's not exactly the most comfortable for me... actually never mind we can just-"

Kat cut Kamiko off. "No, it's fine, make it as cold as you like. That's one bad thing about my particular resistance is... I just sort of don't feel the heat or cold of things. Lukewarm water feels much the same as freezing or boiling water to me. The temperature difference isn't enough for it to matter at all, so I'm perfectly happy to go with whatever temperature you like."

Kamiko's eyes started spinning and her smile grew. Kat was starting to actually notice that Kamiko's eyes would betray her happiness like that and smiled a bit herself in return. "Oh that's great! I hardly ever get a chance to use the coldest settings. It's really comfortable for me. I think it's... um I'm not sure if you did this but you keep the temperature just on the edge of being too hot when showering for the best effect right?

"Well, for me it's kind of the same in the other direction. I like it cold, so cold it's almost a problem, but that's way too much for the rest of my family. Mum and Dad can deal with it because of their high rank. 'Normal' cold water isn't exactly an issue, er well, not that we actually use water once it gets that cold but... anyway, it's not comfortable for them the same way it is for me. So I'm actually quite glad to hear that you're ok with whatever. Maybe it will be good for you as well! It should still be calming... but that's for other reasons. If it works I'll tell you."

Kat nodded, and Kamiko walked to the side of the room Kat hadn't inspected. The one closest to the door that she currently had her back to. Turning to look at it, Kat saw four large red valves. Unlike the rest of the room which was mostly slight shifts from white these were all very solid colours. The valves themselves were shaped slightly like flowers, with the spokes being petals with thin vines that connected the spokes together.

The left two were bright red, with the one on the edge a slightly darker red with stripes of orange that ran throughout it. The middle two valves, were just one solid colour, with the one of the right side being a dark blue instead of red. The final valve on the edge was blue with white stripes.

Kamiko walked straight over to the valve with white stripes and gave it a hard spin so that it spun around completely twice before she took a step back. Kat, jumped in place when she heard the sudden rush of 'water'. Turning around after she landed surprisingly gracefully, and chalking it up to the special flooring, Kat saw water pouring out of the six largest flowers in the pool. It was filling up much faster than Kat thought it should have, as the water level rose quickly and visibly despite the size of the tub.

It only took two minutes for the whole thing to be filled, and at that point Kat was sure something strange was going on. Even a normal bathtub didn't fill up that fast and those were much smaller than

the one beside her. When full, it started to give off a cloudy mist that seeped into the edges of the room, giving the room a whole new look.

The 'sun' caught the mist in interesting ways, giving off the impression of a garden in the light of the dawning sun just before the light misting of the night can fully escape. Kamiko instantly dismissed her clothes and hopped into the bath, not thinking anything of Kat's presence.

Kat of course, did the same. She may have been in the habit of getting up early to avoid fighting over showers, but more than once she'd had to shower with the younger kids to make sure they cleaned themselves, or with other older ones when they were all pressed for time. Kat got in easily, and was shocked to feel her muscles loosening and tension draining from her whole body.

\*I didn't even realise I was still tense at all? I had a perfectly pleasant conversation with Kamiko and I don't think I was that tense after the fighting? Shouldn't my regen take care of things like this?\*

Kat was further confused because like she'd told Kamiko, the 'water' wasn't exactly cold. It was slightly chilled and comfortable certainly, but it was only just noticeable for her, like putting your hand in a glass that's been left outside in the sun for a bit during Autumn. Hardly worth mentioning the temperature difference even if it was noticeable.

\*Still. I think I needed this.\* Kat let herself spread out, and another surprise was inbound as she started to float in place, her wings stretching out to cover... a small corner of the bathtub as she stretched all her limbs out completely, with her tail swishing happily in an uncontrolled manner.

"Whatever you were talking about," said Kat with slurred words from relaxation, "definitely works on me. The water isn't that cold but it's so nice"

Kat could hear the cheer in her friend's voice as she replied with. "I'm so glad to hear that. Mum said it's something special in the stone. I didn't want to get your hopes up because it doesn't seem to work on everyone. I personally think it only works on Succubi, but Mum won't tell me. Apparently, it's special stuff they use at the hospital so they aren't allowed."

Kat didn't think that made too much sense. If it was so special who would make a bathtub out of it. Then Kat gave it two extra seconds of thought, or well, maybe it was a few more than that, the calm was pervasive, even releasing a pressure on her mind she'd been unaware. \*This is probably worth all the candles.\*

### **Chapter 380: Story of My Life**

After taking a few minutes to really relax and let the 'water' soak into her body, Kat started thinking up questions for Kamiko. Most of them revolving around why the girl didn't have friends. \*It just doesn't make sense? She seems so nice and sweet, and I really can't believe nobody wanted to be friendly with her. Should I just ask? Maybe I should share first?\*

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"So, would you like to hear about my own schooling? I didn't mention it before but I didn't really have friends for a long time either" said Kat.

"Oh? That's a surprise" said Kamiko as her relaxation turned to confusion, and a slight sadness. "I'd have thought someone as cool as you would have easily managed to have a whole group of friends. And you were able to so easily ask for my friendship"

Kat sighed. "Yeah... it was a combination of a couple things really. The first and biggest one was that when I was younger I had a few friends for a short amount of time before they got adopted and left the area completely. I... I wasn't really as sad as I thought I'd be when I saw them leave, and now I hardly even remember their faces. I was very young.

"I'm also sure that they wouldn't have actually been the first. I'm sure I had some at the orphanage before that but... I only remember the first few very vaguely that went to school with me as well for a time. Seeing them leave, I started to think, 'that's just what friends do' 'they leave before chances to grow close happen if you weren't meant to be friends'. Not sure how I rationalised that as a child but that's what I thought for a while.

"Eventually, I started to gather acquaintances, mostly at the orphanage. I'd simply do my work in class and relax afterwards. I'd do all my homework at lunchtimes so that at the end of the day, when I went home, I could help the other kids. I make the distinction, with helping them and not playing with them because really that isn't what I did.

"I'd just... go around interacting with people you know?" asked Kat as she ran her hands through the water leaving slight ripples in their wake. "I'd never stick around with any group for long, always moving on to help the next lot. Didn't matter who I helped. Younger, older, same age? I helped as many of them as I could.

"It was because I think I still wanted friends, but didn't believe that I could make any that would stick around. Now sure, I could have befriended people at school, ones who wouldn't leave but... there was this group of three girls, they actually followed me all through schooling, and they made it clear they never understood me, and liked to make fun of the fact that I lived in the orphanage.

"I was a little more stubborn as a child... ok maybe a lot more, so I was more than willing to defend my home against them... and all the other kids. See in my young mind, like... I was maybe six? Seven? Or something at the time, so I didn't really know, but I thought it was us orphanage kids on one side and everyone else on the other.

"Eventually, I got really used to that. I'd help people at the orphanage but never get friendly, I'd just sort of exist at school, mostly keeping to myself. And this was fine. I settled into a routine, and got used to it. Some of the people from the orphanage would be in my year and I'd talk to them a bit at school but not much.

"That was... until I met a girl called Lily. It was in High school, which is near the end of our education in my dimension. Remember those girls from earlier? Well, it seemed they found another target. I'm not sure if they tried to bully anyone else over the years, they always picked on me but...

"I never really cared. They called me mean names, but I knew they weren't true and they just... didn't hurt me the way I'd heard words were supposed to so I kept ignoring them. Then they tried to do physical stuff but... with all the work I did helping around the orphanage, and walking back and forth from school every day, I was much fitter and stronger than them, so if they tried to push me I could dodge or push back twice as hard.

"So then they tried to do other things. Like wetting my clothes or getting dirt on them, or one time I ended up with glue in my hair... but honestly it was too little too late. I mentioned I helped around the

orphanage, right? Well, these were regular occurrences from various accidents I had overtime you know?

"A kid spills juice on you during breakfast so you clean it up quickly. Cleaning out a particularly nasty cupboard and the shelf falls on you covering you on dirt? Happens when you clean if you aren't careful, nobody's fault really. Helping the much younger kids with art projects? Honestly if nothing was stuck in my hair at the end it was would have been counted as a small miracle."

Kat let out a long-relaxed sigh, appreciating the chance to talk to someone who wasn't Lily. Not that she didn't love the girl, Lily was a great best friend, but Kat knew, intellectually if not in practice, that she couldn't talk about LILY with herself. That would be weird, and going over the rest of it again was actually quite nice.

"So, when they ran out of ideas and a new student transferred in, whose name was Lily Furos, a shy little bookworm with... MASSIVE glasses. Honestly, that first year, I do wonder why her parents even let her buy them. The lenses on them were huge, easily the size of the balls you do your hair up in." Kamiko let out a gasp at that.

"Yeah I know! She's such an adorable shy thing even though we were in high school. Anyway, the trio of girls decided she was the new target. Well, I wasn't standing for that. I... took a more... let's call it proactive role in defending people from their bullying. Now that 'people' included more than just me."

Kat spread her wings and did a full body shrug. "Not that it really ever evolved past the two of us anyway, but we settled into a bit of a stalemate that way. Lily always asked me not to get in trouble for her. The trio never picked on Lily in class or while I was around, and they would make a few attempts at me I'd never thwart.

"If I found them picking on Lily and it was over the line... which I'll admit I wasn't the most consistent with, I'd beat them up. Nothing serious, but major bruising surely. I... honestly looking back on it I may have been a bit rough on them, but they never complained to anyone if we weren't caught fighting and I never went for the face or anything.

"I like to think... we got to a weird source of truce with those three. We all roughly understood where we all stood and established the rules of the... game? Perhaps? And we all came out happy. Lily and I both got a real friendship, they got a target for bullying that was... perhaps unsatisfying but didn't fight back, and one that was satisfying but would lead to physical consequences."

Kat let out a long breath of air, head dipping slightly further into the water because of it. "That's how I met my first friend. I guess... I didn't really tell you much of what she's like but I guess that's enough from me for now. I just thought I'd share before asking about your own troubles I guess."

Kamiko bit back tears. She could empathise with Kat, and did wish to share her own childhood with Kat, but for now, she was fighting off the desire to cry... mostly successfully. Of course, the fact that she still cried tears of proper water did help as any water that left her froze once it left her eyes leaving nary a trace with the thick mists that shrouded the room.

"Thanks Kat" said Kamiko. "It... I don't know how much it means to you but... thanks. I've never really heard a story like that. I... I've only really had my family and... a lot of their stories feel... so disconnected



from me, taking place such a long time ago or... or I LIVED the event from my own perspective so... it just isn't the same if that makes sense?

"Like... I can properly see myself in your place, and... I'm a little shocked at how much I can relate" said Kamiko.

Kat sent a wry smiling directed at the ceiling. "Well, I do appreciate it. And it feels nice to talk about. Did... you want to share your own story?"