

DEMONS 391

Chapter 391: Jumped up Pricing

"Thanks for that Kat" said Kamiko as she rubbed her eyes again.

"You know you aren't supposed to do that right?" responded Kat, well used to little kids rubbing their eyes after getting something in them.

"I do... I just... I can't stop I guess? If mum was here she'd tell me off for it. Not as much because they've been washed out, but I know I still shouldn't" replied Kamiko

"Well, I'll do the writeup for the bubbles, you just take a quick break" said Kat, not wanting Kamiko to attempt writing while her eyes were still watering and clearly somewhat irritating her despite the necklace.

As Kat did that, Kamiko took a seat against one of the crate stacks and pressed her face into her knees hoping to relieve some of the irritation in her eyes. Even though the amulet was blocking the pain, she could still ALMOST feel it, and found the sensation much more annoying than just the pain.

The pair sat like this for a few minutes as Kat went over the details, including a quick check to confirm the bubble would cover the length of the warehouse if she was going slowly, and its constant rising properties, along with everything else she noticed including the pain of the mixture.

Once that was done Kat went over and rubbed circles on Kamiko's back to help her calm down, which only took another minute before she was handing the amulet back to Kat and standing on her own feet again. She did wince as the amulet left her neck, but didn't say a word of complaint and moved to the next box as Kat stacked the one, they'd finished with next to the other three.

This one was filled with slime, to keep the contents safe, which were easily recognisable to Kat. This apparently, was the not the case for Kamiko. She picked up the long metal stick and examined it. From what she could see, it had two cross guards for some reason, one right at the top, and the other much further down, perhaps a sixth of the length from the bottom.

The cross guards were slightly different, the 'top' one had some form of padding on it, that was slightly grippy, while the second cross guard was completely flat on top with grooves in it. The rest of the pole was completely smooth. Running her hand along it, Kamiko could feel the cool metal across its length.

"What the heck is this?" asked Kamiko, hoisting it onto her shoulder, using the top cross guard as something of a balancer and aimed it as if she had a shoulder mounted cannon. There was of course no button though so she dismissed that. Kat was trying desperately not to laugh in the background and was making sure to keep herself out of eye contact while she did this.

Kamiko then tried to hold it like she would her staff but found it to be terribly balanced, always trying to slip out of her hand, as the base of it was much heavier than the top, so holding it in the middle was unacceptable. Finally, she tried holding it like a sword, and was using the bottom cross guard as a way to brace the thing so it wouldn't slide out of her hands. Unfortunately, it didn't really work, because it was sliding down anyway, and she ended up holding the bottom cross guard.

Kamiko turned to see Kat, who was now leaning against the crates to try and stop herself from laughing or falling over. "What's so funny?" asked Kamiko.

"That-" Kat's explanation was quickly cut off by a burst of laughter which was no longer contained by her mouth. Once it started, she found it somewhat hard to stop. In between breaths, Kat reassured Kamiko she wasn't laughing AT her, just that the situation was actually rather funny.

See, what was contained in the box, was a number of pogo sticks. Once Kat recovered, she explained as much to Kamiko, who replied. "Yes, but what IS it? I don't need the name."

Kat then proceeded to explain what they are, children's toys mostly that allow you to bounce around. When Kat grabbed one from the box for herself and demonstrated Kamiko's jaw dropped. "But... what's the point? You can jump higher than it easily." Was asked.

Kat continued bouncing as she replied "It's just for fun really. I mean... not to pry but you guys do have fun here in the Hub right?"

Kamiko giggled. "Yeah, but I've never heard of anything like this..."

Kat shrugged. "That's fine, just have a bit of a go I suppose then we can write up a report. These are all clearly the same."

Kamiko did just that. Her superior sense of balance made it an easy task to get the hang off. However, she found it to be a thoroughly unenjoyable experience, as it was really rather jarring on her wings, and not too great on her chest either. She quickly determined, that while Kat might think it fun, she was half convinced it was a minor torture device disguised as something fun to punish children.

Still, Kat had written up the report while Kamiko was trying the contraption out, so she didn't get a choice about how it was written, and she found herself not caring enough to try and force Kat to include it, already imagining the polite smile Kat would have on her face if she said anything.

I do wonder why something like that was in the warehouse here. At least the bubble stuff let you make them as long as you wanted. Those were just normal pogo-sticks. Or at least, I'm pretty sure they were normal. Maybe they are rated for high weight class things like Pit Fiends or something? Then again, they are clearly normal sized.

The next box Kat and Kamiko opened was a bunch of completely normal swords, as far as they could tell. They both managed to bend them easily when they tried, and it cut well enough through the dummies but that was mostly due to their increased strength. It took them some time to actually get through all the swords, but decided they were 'likely plain steel swords' and nothing more.

This pattern continued for a while, as box after box of mundane items came about, occasionally with some on-Kat, testing to make sure that the weapons didn't have any extra effects when used on living targets. The most interesting thing they found for a while, was a bow and quiver set that generated arrows for a small bit of demonic energy.

Neither Kat or Kamiko were any good at archery though, so they couldn't determine if the bow was special in any other way like increased accuracy, or better power for the amount of draw the bow had. Still, the infinite quiver part of the set up was at least interesting. However, something they did find in

testing, is that throwing the arrow wouldn't allow it to regenerate for some reason. You HAD to use it with the bow.

This led to a round of testing involving just what 'with the bow' actually meant, with Kat freezing an arrow to the bow and then flicking it to send it flying without the use of the string and finding that actually counted. A few more tests determined that, as long as the arrow touched the bow before it was thrown, it would actually count.

So, when Kamiko tapped the arrow to the bow, then threw it at a target, another one was placed in the quiver.? This led them to questioning what exactly the point of the whole thing was. "I just don't get it" said Kat "What's the point of the arrow NEEDING to touch the bow? Is it like some kind of safety mechanism I'm just not getting? A necessary part of the enchantment?"

Kamiko let out a long exhale. "Honestly Kat, I'm with you on this one. I have no idea why it's needed. I mean... the only thing I can think of is to prevent other people stealing it and having an infinite quiver? But if they can grab the quiver they can probably take the bow as well... or maybe...

"Maybe it's so that people don't notice? Like... if they all just fell out of the quiver that wouldn't regenerate them at all. Hmm, but I'm still not sure why you want that... actually if we take all the arrows out what happens?" said Kamiko

Kat did as suggested and upended the quiver. After waiting a few seconds no new arrows were forthcoming. "Surely this isn't it..." mumbled Kat.

Kamiko emptied her quiver by pulling the arrows out and dropping them on the floor as well before looking into the now empty quiver, and found a marking on the bottom. Reaching in she pressed it down and the quiver made a high 'ding' sound like the ringing of a bell.

Pulling her head away, Kamiko was only mildly surprised to find a quiver full of arrows. "So that's how you stop yourself from running out... I'm still really confused about why it's like this though" said the demon in question

"You and me both Kamiko. You and me both" responded Kat with a sigh.

Chapter 392: Nothing Like a Good Pair of Socks

The next noteworthy item that Kat and Kamiko managed to come across was a pair of woolly socks. It was most notable for the fact that the box they found them in only contained the single pair of socks, despite the ample amount of free space in the box. "Kamiko. I know I have True Sight but... you are seeing what I'm seeing right? This isn't an illusion?" asked Kat.

"Well... if you can see a single pair of wool socks, then... yes I think you are" replied Kamiko equally as stunned.

Kat nodded and reached in. The socks in question were exceptionally fluffy, with a garish red and green colour scheme with some poor embroidery work that gave the impression someone had intended for them to be a Christmas gift of some kind perhaps. As Kat grabbed the socks in her hand, she found nothing noteworthy about them by feel. They felt just like the old socks she'd acquired in the orphanage when she was younger and her feet always got cold.

Kat handed off the second sock to Kamiko before poking around with the one she had. "Any idea why this whole box is just socks?"

Kamiko shook her head. "I have no idea. I mean, they don't LOOK particularly noteworthy, and I can't really feel them trying to take any of my demonic energy. If not for the fact that I saw them in their own box I'd just assume they were normal socks."

"Is the fact that they DID important?" asked Kat. *Because I don't really see why that would be. Each box we've seen so far is just all the things of a certain type or a set of things like that rather nice dinner set we found in one of them. It could just mean there is only the one set of socks, or maybe woollen socks if they are that specific.*

"Yes actually" said Kamiko. Well I was wrong then. "The fact that they have their own box, sort of implies they are WORTHY of being in a box by themselves. It's not something that comes up often, but my dad works in retail as technically part of Lust faction, hired by Greed, and these boxes have a certain limit on them.

"I don't remember what it is, but these standard boxes, are what's classed as Tier One boxes. I think I can see some later on..." Kamiko pointed down the stacks at a box that Kat could now see looked to be made of stone. "There, two rows down on the right. That's a Tier Two box. It has more expensive stuff in it.

"Anyway, as I was saying, these wooden boxes have a price limit on them. It's pretty high, you don't really need to worry about it most of the time, but the fact that these socks are by themselves implies they are worth at least half of a Tier One box. Assuming that the set counts as one item and these aren't two separate products"

"Wait that's a possibility?" said Kat with a surprised expression on her face.

Kamiko shrugged "Well, I know some people use old socks as teleportation markers sometimes. I've heard it's a running gag, but I'm not sure WHY it's a gag, or when it started. In fact, I've never seen one used as a marker at all, but whenever someone mentions it, then they say that it is... and I've done it as well. I can't believe I did that. I might have fallen for the trap.

"Anyway," said Kamiko as she took a breath before continuing, "the point is. These should be pretty impressive socks. Assuming they haven't been miscategorised."

"Right..." said Kat. "How do we go about testing socks?"

"Well firstly..." said Kamiko as she lit the hand without the sock on fire, before condensing it to a much smaller fire. She then held the sock over the fire and carefully lowered it down. She stopped about a centimetre away from the fire before looking at it intently, before finally lowering it down into the fire itself. Kat wasn't sure what she was trying to do though, because nothing seemed to be happening.

"Why'd you do that?" asked Kat.

Kamiko quirked an eyebrow at Kat and said. "If this was a perfectly normal sock, it would have frozen over when I tried this. The fact that it hasn't means at the bare minimum it is cold resistant, or perhaps resistant to demonic fire all together. Sadly, because we are both cold aligned it's not really something,

we can test properly by ourselves. It will have to be one of the things we bring up with Boss more than likely."

Wow, I feel kind of silly for not thinking of that. "Should I test this one as well?" said Kat indicating at her own half of the set.

Kamiko gave Kat a nod, and Kat turned her attention to the sock in her hand. Focusing as much as possible, Kat sent all her energy into her hand and a bright purple flame burned to life. It tried to expand past her hand using its extra fuel but Kat pulled it in instead, compressing the flame further.

Unlike Kamiko who wasn't trying to freeze it seriously, just checking for minor resistance, Kat poured more power into the flame as the floor around her started to freeze and the water in the air started to solidify. Her breath now turning into vapour as it froze when leaving her mouth, coating the sock in a soft white mist for a split second. Before the sock proved superior to such puny attempts to stain its majesty, by melting away any ice that thought to use it as a perch.

"Woah Kat, that's... that's a lot of power to be using on testing a pair of socks" said Kamiko.

And she was right, just these few seconds was enough to burn off nearly thirty percent of Kat's demonic energy. She was giving this sock no quarter, and testing it to the full extent of her power. Kat stopped the flow when she heard what Kamiko was saying. Allowing for the flame to gently wind down as she stopped feeding it power. The flame in question, seemed to want to stick around for a little longer, but with nothing to fuel it and no contact with anything other than her hand and the sock, it disappeared quickly.

"Eh, sorry about that. I just wanted to test it you know? We had a few boring things recently and this was a bit of a chance to let loose. Plus, I'm not sure I've ever tried too hard to freeze anything, let alone tried and failed so it was actually a pretty cool experience." Said Kat.

Kamiko giggled. "I could see that. Despite the smile on your face, you were glaring at that sock pretty intensely as if it had personally offended you or something. Not sure how you managed to do that while looking so happy at the same time."

I didn't realise I was smiling? Kat flexed her muscles loosening the non-existent tension. *I guess I don't really give myself the chance to go all out do I? It's not exactly safe for me to just go all out on Earth, and I spend a lot of my contracts sitting around. I've not just had the chance to burn energy, even against the Wrath guys because it was forbidden.*

"Right... honestly despite the rather... intense amount of staring going on, it felt really good to cut loose I think." Said Kat. "Where I live I can't exactly go around trying to set fire to things, and I don't really have a practice area or anything, so I guess... I'm not sure maybe my demonic energy itself felt... cooped up? For lack of a better word?"

Kat was expecting Kamiko to look at her somewhat suspiciously or perhaps confused, instead she looked at Kat somewhat sadly, like she was to be pitied. Of course, that look was only held for a split second before she smiled a somewhat strained smile and began to explain. "Yeah, that's probably what it is... and it isn't... well... ok I might need to explain it.

"See, your energy is just as much a muscle as it is... something else. It NEEDS to be used. Even if you have all of your energy, you are still generating it Kat. For the most part, when you are full on energy it just seeps out of you, but... I don't want to say compressed because that implies that you have... purer energy... umm... hmm, look.

"This is actually a fairly complex topic, a proper medical one. I think, we should make a note of it and talk about it with my mother. What I can, and really should tell you, is that it isn't healthy to just not use your energy. You don't have to do anything flashy, but doing something at the very least is better than nothing."

Chapter 393: Right... but the Socks?

"Thanks for that, but we probably should get to testing these socks. You can tell me more later" said Kat.

"Oh right. Of course... do you want to put them on then?" said Kamiko looking a little guilty. *Don't look like that Kamiko, it was my fault I even asked the questions, you aren't in the wrong here. Still, I really should be the one to put the socks on just in case... but hopefully she won't think this means I'm blaming her. I don't want to make it into a big deal though... we shouldn't be talking too much.*

"Sure thing. I'd rather you didn't get hurt so just in case" responded Kat, hoping that little bit of comfort would offset her previous comments. It had... mixed results. Kamiko handed over the sock without looking quite as guilty but she was certainly pouting now.

Kat sat down, and threw off her shoes, making sure to keep watch on Kamiko out of the corner of her eye as she was doing so. Putting the socks on, Kat instantly noticed the difference. Her feet certainly weren't cold before, but she was experiencing a pleasant warmth, as if she had a good pair of socks on during a cold winter day. Not too hot, not too cold, nice and fluffy in appearance, even if the colouring left something to be desired.

As Kat was relaxing though, something occurred to her. *Wait a minute... how hot must these socks be? No really. If I of all people can actually feel the heat then these things must be toasty.* Taking a quick glance at the amulet, Kat didn't see any of the gems lighting up. *Hmmm. I have a plan. I'm not sure if it's a good one, but it is something I think we want to test... just it might be a little deadly.*

"Kamiko" said Kat in a serious voice, which caused the demon in question to turn to face her sharply. "It seems these socks keep my feet at a comfortably warm temperature. I somewhat want to see if it's the same for you, but it might be dangerous to try"

"What do you mean?" asked Kamiko.

"Have you forgotten?" asked Kat with a raised eyebrow. "Remember unlike you, I'm immune to both heat and cold. It makes it very hard to find anything warm. A warm bath is really just a lukewarm one to me. So that means if these socks are comfortable for me, they must be a couple hundred degrees Celsius maybe more."

"Oh right" said Kamiko, face flush with embarrassment. "Sorry, I really should have remembered. It's just, not that normal. It's normally one or the other, and I remembered that bath I was actually able to have with you at a nice temperature for once... sorry. Um... do you think we need to test them though?"

Kat shrugged. "I'm not sure. I think it would be worthwhile information. See if they work for anyone even demons that don't like the heat, but if it's a specific temperature then maybe not. These could actually be a trap, and my resistance to fire is the only thing keeping it from being as much."

Kamiko looked at the garish woollen socks and tilted her head. "Honestly... I think they could make better looking socks if they wanted to trick someone with them. This is...well they certainly feel more like a bad family Christmas gift."

Wait these guys have Christmas? Kat examined the words again and found that to be incorrect. *It's actually more like... 'end of year gift giving holiday' when I think about what Kamiko said. I suppose it translated it to Christmas for me because really it does fit the description, and it's the one I celebrate.*

"Well, just be careful. I don't think I want to offer you the amulet for this one because I don't want you getting hurt without noticing. I can regen you cannot" said Kat.

"My mum's a healer. She could patch me up... Sure she'd probably break my legs at least once during treatment just to ensure I knew not to get myself injured stupidly in the future but... you know." Said Kamiko.

"Wait... are you... are you exaggerating? I know we can't lie but can we exaggerate?" asked Kat.

Kamiko shrugged. "Sort of? I mean it really depends on what you are saying. I could say that because there was one time my Dad got his legs melted together. She needed to break them both a few times to get the healing right. Magical lava you see, so it was a bit harder to deal with. It was not a fun time. Mum though... she was yelling at him during the whole thing, and even made everyone who was at home at the time watch.

"She said it was good for us. Firstly to see something horrific now so we could move and deal with it next time. Secondly because if we ever did something, and I'm quoting here 'as reckless and stupid as your ol' father here, I'll make sure to break your legs a couple extra time so that the message and the healing sinks in'

"So, I can sort of... use that as an example when I want? Even if it isn't quite as stupid as how Dad ended up like that, oh um please don't ask I was told not to say. Trust me it was silly though. Um, yeah even if it isn't quite as bad, I can say Mum will break my legs healing me for it because she's threatened it. That make sense?"

Well, it makes sense but I'm not sure I want to meet your mother now. She sounded so nice and now she sounds honestly terrifying. Then again... if that's what she does for a living maybe it gets routine? I've heard anything can become routine if you do it enough and while Kamiko seems to avoid talking about it... she could be a few hundred years old easily.

"It does make sense thank you, and here are the socks" said Kat, passing them over to Kamiko who had taken a seat next to her. Kamiko took off her own socks and shoes before putting on the testing socks, and let out a strange hum, starting high and then going low.

"Ohh? Interesting. I was somewhat concerned for a brief moment, but it seems to have fixed itself. So, what happened was my feet were on fire for like... half a second maybe? Less? Anyway, it was really hot, probably whatever temperature they were for your feet or maybe it had time to cool down...

"Anyway, after that happened my feet cooled right down past a comfortable temperature for me, probably making sure to leach the heat from my skin before it became red, and then settled into a nice cozy temperature for me. Now my feet feel nice and cool. Just about the right temperature to relax with" said Kamiko.

"So they do work for probably everyone." Said Kat.

"Well, normally I'd have said no. Working for high rank people is a big deal, especially with how hot they probably need to get. Another thing is that they clearly don't let that heat or cool escape. Put your hand on the outside of the sock" said Kamiko.

Kat did as she was told and found them to not really feel like anything, neither hot nor cold. Reaching a finger down past the sock and into it properly Kat felt the finger in question cool down slightly and pulled it out afterwards. "See?" said Kamiko "The outside is completely normal. That must be why they are so expensive. They work for everyone and are safe to have around."

"Why is the safety important?" asked Kat.

Kamiko scoffed and said. "Well, safety might be the wrong word... not complete wrong, but perhaps comfort of others is more correct. Think of it this way Kat, I can't take a bath properly with my family. Sure we have enough resistances just being demons that it's possible. It isn't going to kill anyone or injure them much, if at all, but it's not comfortable for the whole family.

"These socks ignore that. They are as warm or cold as the wearer needs them to be and makes sure that it doesn't affect the environment. I'll bet these work for people at least to Rank 5, and likely higher. They're certainly the most expensive thing we've tested so far, even if they aren't something too many people would pay for."

Well, I guess that's an interesting way of looking at it. "Are they expensive because they'd be hard to make, or because the only people who would buy them have plenty of money?" asked Kat.

Kamiko shrugged a bit and said. "A bit of one, bit of the other. They aren't easy to make, and while they probably wouldn't be as hard as whatever price tag they have suggests. The only people who'd buy them would make so much money compared to us that the cost is still quite low."

Chapter 394: End of Day 1

After that, Kat and Kamiko discovered a surprising number of items that didn't seem to work. There was a mirror that was supposedly called 'The Mirror of Erisid' but it had a huge crack running down the middle and a note saying 'Out of Order' on it. Kat and Kamiko tried looking at it, but instead of their reflections, only black space was in the frame.

The next item was an empty box with a sheet of paper that read. 'IOU one Transistor'. The only other thing in the box was a lock of red hair, similar to Kat's own. There was felt at the bottom of the box, and there seemed to be the imprint of a sword that should have been there. Kat wasn't sure why a sword would be called a transistor, but it didn't seem relevant.

Following that, was a box that once opened, revealed a pulsating mass of colours that looked like someone had vomited crystals into the box and then tried to squish them all together. Kat was about to

lean down to touch a piece when Kamiko grabbed her hand. On the bottom of the box read. 'Parasitical Pseudo Intelligence designation Shaper. Do Not Touch'

Not one to ignore warning sites about creepy alien intelligence, that particular box was slammed shut... and then placed under three other boxes... and then another extra box for safety... after the opening was frozen shut with two layers of ice from Kamiko and Kat working together with their flames.

Next after that was a box containing assorted varieties of mushrooms. None of them were recognisable to Kat, and the most prominent were the ones that looked like they had stars all over them. Biting into one produced a bunch of popping in the mouth. Other more deadly looking mushrooms, and the ones that kinda looked like little piglets, were left alone.

After closing that box down and writing their report, the next thing they found was an old battered lamp. Kat, joked that they needed to clean it up before it would work, rubbed the side, and was treated to a bunch of blue smoke spilling out of the end. Kat was nearly shocked into dropping the thing but... nothing else happened, though Kat could have sworn she heard someone singing about a friend for a few seconds afterwards, but Kamiko insisted she heard nothing.

The final box before they found something interesting was one that contained a shattered green stone. It still glowed slightly and seemed to have a spiral pattern when they put the pieces together, but even after thirty minutes of trying various random things with both pieces and the whole thing, nothing seemed to happen, so they gave up.

When Kat and Kamiko looked into the next box they weren't expecting much. Their fears seemed to be confused when it was filled with packing slime and a number of pebbles. Picking up one each Kat and Kamiko looked them over. They seemed like perfectly normal stones, until Kat noticed they were draining her demonic energy.

"Is your stone draining you as well?" asked Kat

Kamiko nodded, and at that moment Kat knew she had something interesting on her hands. All the other artifacts, even the more impressive ones, didn't seem to drain much energy, if they drained any energy at all. The fact that this seemingly ordinary stone was taking whatever she was regenerating alongside about a percent every ten seconds, showed that it had some impressive power behind it.

After about a minute of holding the stone, it changed colour. Kat's shifted to the same colour as her demonic fire, a deep purple, and saw that Kamiko's was the same except, matching her pink flame. "Now... what do these do?" mumbled Kat.

"Hmm, I'm not sure" said Kamiko. "Where should we start? Whatever they are they've been charged but I'm not sure I'm so keen to just... hit them on something. They're packing a lot of energy now and if they explode or something that could be the end of the whole warehouse"

Kat gulped. "Surely there wouldn't be something like that just lying around here right?"

Kamiko bit her lips and looked at the box. It was just a simple wooden looking one. "Well, to be honest I'm not sure. Explosions aren't all that deadly to demons. Something about our internal organs being protected by our demonic energy? I'm not sure. So... it's not like we need to regulate them when people can punch mountains away.

"I know some worlds do that, but yeah... when you have people so powerful stockpiling explosives is really pointless. The thing is, that also means they are cheap a lot of the time. Pretty much anything in a tier one box, would be destroyed if these are explosive..."

Well that's just peachy. How are we supposed to test them? Sure they aren't going to kill me, and based on what Kamiko said, her either but we'd probably be killed by Boss if we destroyed all his stock.

"Is there any way to know? Check if it's explosive before using it?" asked Kat

"Well..." Kamiko dragged the word out for a while as she searched for an answer. "Nope. Not that I can think of. I mean, they probably aren't explosives. We just don't make them that often, so it's not a major concern... but it is where my mind jumped to seeing how much energy it ate. Honestly I'm not sure what to do"

Kat and Kamiko's musing were interrupted by a voice over the speaker saying. "You both have spent enough time in there today. Finish up with that last item and then the teleporter will take you out to our recreation area where you can head home."

"Wait can you hear us?" asked Kat instantly

"Yes" responded Boss' voice

"Do you know if these stones are explosive? We don't want to risk destroying anything" said Kat.

Boss' voice came back quickly. "The area with the dummies actually has a ward up. If anything dangerous goes off there, it will be contained. So, feel free to test it if you want. They are there for a reason"

Kat heard Kamiko's hand impact her face. "I'm an idiot. I should have thought of that. Considering the amount of money these guys make, having a barrier like that is child's play. They take a good amount of energy to power, but I'm sure they are connected properly. So Kat, do you want to do the honours?"

"Sure Kamiko. Let's see if I get blown up" said Kat.

Kamiko made sure to be behind a few crates and, well, out of the blast area. Kat rolled her eyes slightly, feeling a little silly now and slapped the stone against one of the dummies. It rocked back slightly from her slap but other than that nothing. Kat bit her lip and scratched under her chin with her tail.

Hmm, so not that. What about... I dunno throwing it? Maybe it has some failsafe if a person is to close. Backing up, Kat moved to the edge of the dummy area and threw the rock towards one of the back dummies. She missed, and it bounced off the wall before glowing a bright white. Kat panicked for a second and shut her eyes.

Nothing happened. Cracking an eye open though. She found herself facing a wall. Taking a step back, she felt herself bumping into a dummy and looked around confused. She was still in the dummy area of the warehouse. Did I get turned around or something?

"Kamiko what happened?" asked Kat.

"Oh Kat it was so cool!" said Kamiko with a big smile on her face. "You swapped places with the stone. Look it's back where you were before!"

Kat looked over back towards the other end of the marked area, and surely enough, at the furthest dummy, where she must have been standing before, was a glowing purple stone on the floor, though it seemed to have dimmed somewhat. Kat couldn't help letting out a laugh.

"I can't believe that. I was so worried it was explosive" said Kat.

Kamiko laughed as well. "I can't believe it's an ability I already have. I mean sure, this takes more energy, and it has better distance but I DO have it." She managed between giggles.

Kat looked down at the amulet she was wearing and saw it had lit up with two lights. *Hmm, seems it's not completely painless. But it's also not bad at all. I doubt it hurts more than a twinge.*

"Do you want to see how your teleportation compares to it Kamiko?" asked Kat.

Kamiko shrugged. "Sure" was what she said before throwing her pebble over towards the writing desk. Kat watched as a flash of white light, that... wasn't blinding so much as it was like a thick fog, more like a physical presence blocking the light rather than proper light, expanding into her eyes.

"Oof" said Kamiko pressing her hand against her chest. "That's not exactly pleasant. Felt like I was being squeezed everywhere."

Chapter 395: Nira chair

Once the pair had suitably tested the stones, and finding they could be used three times before needing a recharge regardless of the distance, the girls wrote their final report for the day and headed through the teleporter and then back to Kamiko's home. They didn't really talk about it, but when Kat grabbed Kamiko's hand while using the teleporters they understood.

As Kamiko opened the door and lead Kat inside, she spied somebody sitting in the corner. The chair was leaning back against the wall, balanced on the demon in questions heel. She had seafoam green hair and a puffy coat on that you'd wear during the winter. It was bright pink like Kamiko's hair and matched well with the demon's long seafoam green hair.

Her horns stood out amongst the hair as it wasn't done up at all, flowing freely down to about her shoulder blades. What Kat had missed in the painting, was that she had tiny wings on her back just like Kamiko, and now Kat thought about it, likely the rest of the family as well, though she'd have to wait and confirm that.

The final notable detail, was her eyes. Whereas Kamiko had a cross that split only part of her eye, the women in front of her had it running across every visible section, and perhaps more that wasn't. It was a bright gold line that split the eye into four quadrants, but seeing her in real life, proved that it wasn't just a stationary cross. Her eyes seemed to spin slowly in their sockets.

"Oh? Who is this?" asked the demon Kat knew had to be Kamiko's mother. When she spoke, it was with almost the same strange effect Boss had. It was layered, as if there were multiple people speaking from the same mouth. Both were soothing voices that made you think of a duet in harmony. The higher voice was soft, and pleasant on the ears, while the lower was comforting like a warm blanket.

Overall, it was a strange experience. "This is my friend Kat!" said Kamiko happily. "I met her when we were waiting for our punishment."

Kamiko's mother smiled and let the chair fall forward before placing the teacup she had in her hands down on the table. "Well, it's nice to see you found a friend finally. I'm not sure if my daughter has introduced me properly or not, but if she hasn't please just call me Nira."

Nira held out what looked like a carefully manicured hand. The skin looked smooth, as was becoming standard for Kat, and she had nails that seemed just a touch longer than would be convenient for delicate work that were a matching green with her hair.

When Kat placed her hand in Nira's a wave of hostile aura rammed into her. It was strange, the aura seemed to be telling her it was fine to sleep, but her own aura of calm seemed to stop it in place like an impenetrable wall.

Nira's eyebrow raised just the slightest amount, so small that even Kat with her enhanced senses wasn't entirely sure she had seen it or not. The pressure on Kat doubled then, showing that Nira had been going more than just easy on Kat, she was now at least trying a little.

Kat felt her jaw clench and her aura shake under the assault. It wasn't buckling, but she could feel herself being worn down. Her mind was starting to drift slightly, and Kat found herself wondering if the effort needed to keep her aura focused was actually less than just fighting off whatever effects Nira was trying to impress on her.

"MUUUUUUUUUUUUM!" whined Kamiko, snapping Kat's concentration, and apparently Nira's as well.

Kat felt herself shaking her head just to clear her mind a little as she glanced at her friend, in doing so, she missed the quick pout that appeared on Nira's face. "What?" replied the demon in question innocently.

"Mu~um I've seen you introduce yourself to the triplets' friends more than enough times to know what you were doing. Do you remember that poor girl Aslena brought home once? She ran away crying Mum" said Kamiko

Nira shrugged an unrepentant look on her face. "I have no regrets. If that little wimp couldn't handle a little aura then she doesn't get to hang around with Aslena. Besides I was only so hard on her because she looked down her nose at me."

Kamiko's eyes narrowed. "Mum, the first time you met that girl you were doing the gardening. Naked. She thought you were crazy!"

Nira stuck her tongue out before saying. "I didn't want to get my clothes dirty, it all slides off my skin so it's better that way!"

"Don't try that on me Mum. Not only do I know that your clothes do that too, even if they didn't you could resummon them. That's not even considering the fact you have an apron specifically for gardening. You were just trying to scare the girl off" huffed Kamiko in response.

Nira shrugged again, still not finding Kamiko's arguments compelling. "That girl was no good I tell you. Did you hear she went on to steal Aslena's girlfriend at the time?"

Kamiko groaned. "Mum that isn't what happened. Aslena wasn't dating Share at the time. Just because she couldn't work up the courage to ask her out but acted like she had to everyone else doesn't mean that Emekrakak swooping and grabbing her first is stealing."

Nira reached over and grabbed a small sip of tea. "It does when she goes on to dump Share like a week later. See. No good. I told you that. Besides Aslena's dating that lovely boy now... what's his name again?"

Kamiko rolled her eyes at her mother. Nira smirked back in response. Kamiko sighed and admitted. "I don't actually know. She won't tell anybody after what happened last time she actually got a date."

"I stand by the triplets' decision to throw that one out. They tried hitting on me three times when Aslena wasn't around. Pretty sure they visited often hoping to catch me alone. Sure I do look like her, I am well aware of whose genes came out on top, but if you're dating her that's just rude. Personally, I think Aslena's horns put them off." Said Nira in response.

Kamiko bit her lip. "Ok, fine I'll give you that one. Still why don't you ever give the triplets' friends shit?"

"Oh, don't worry my little starlight. I gave them plenty of shit for it when they were younger. Now though, they give each other's friends shit before I get to them. I'm so proud." Said Nira wiping away a fake tear from her eye.

Kamiko groaned. "Oh, by the way" said Nira paying no attention to Kamiko's displeasure. "Did Kat stay here yesterday the other day?"

"Yup!" said Kamiko happily. "I was going to introduce her but nobody was around, and I didn't think you'd mind."

Nira grinned and said. "Well, I don't really mind, but I did notice that the guest bedroom hasn't been made up... do I need to get out the sharpened shovel for your father? Oh wait can I do it instead?"

Kamiko blushed scarlet, and Kat just tilted her head in confusion. "MUM! You know me better than that! I would never... I mean... I'm also not into girls... you know this. Eugh, why would you even..."

Nira giggled into her teacup, clearly enjoying her daughter's embarrassment, perhaps a touch more than is healthy. "Well, I need to have some fun don't I? What about you my dear Kat, you seem rather unflustered"

Well yeah? I mean, your daughter is adorable but I'm not attracted to her. I'll give her some pats on the head, all the hugs she could want, and I'll probably be next in line with the shovel when she does find someone but I'm not sexually attracted to her.

"I feel it's more likely I'll be next in line with the shovel when the time comes rather than on the receiving end. I grew up in an orphanage and I'm just sort of used to taking care of people." Said Kat with a slight smile.

Nira nodded and finished off the rest of her tea. "Yes, I can see you weren't born a demon, so that's not terribly surprising." Kat's eyes widened in shock. "Oh, did you not mention that to Kamiko? My apologies." Said a grinning Nira, knowing exactly what she'd done.

Kat however just stared back. "I had in fact told her, but how do you know?"

Nira stuck her tongue out and shrugged. "That's for me to know, and for you to wonder for all time. I shall take my secrets to my grave. Never shall they make it past my lips!"

"Yeah for like, two-hour max, and then you'll tell three of the other nurses and then onto the rest of the hospital" grumbled Kamiko.

Chapter 396: I've Been Awake Too Long to Name this

"Wait a second." Said Kat as her mind caught up. "How did you manage to say that if Kamiko can respond with saying you'll tell the nurses?"

Nira grinned widely and explained. "Well, when you stick around for a while, you start to pick up on the little things that let you... stretch the truth. The first, is that I can do a fun bit of mental gymnastics. Second, is that I consider my lips as belonging to my husband. Not really, but also somewhat?

"I won't spoil the why, but anyway, because of that, they aren't 'my lips' in the strictest definition, so I can say that things aren't leaving MY lips because it's true, they aren't mine. As to the grave question, well I made a fake grave somewhere, and I can just visit it. Bam, I've taken my secrets to my grave.

"It isn't what you are lead you believe, even with the translation activated. Have to be a trickier with it sometimes, but part of the translation is what I want you to hear, not just what is completely true, so you can use that as well. I can say something, in a language you don't understand and then impress an... adjacent meaning. I suppose.

"It's actually a skill that took me a while to learn. It's really difficult to learn another language once the translation kicks in. Mostly pointless too but, as I just showed has some uses."

Kamiko, showing the height of maturity, returned her mother's explanation by sticking her tongue out of her mouth. Nira just shrugged and continued. "Kamiko here was never a fan of playing the social crowd and always means almost exactly what she says. Doesn't have a deceptive bone in her body this one. I blame my husband obviously."

Kat smiled, starting to get used to Nira's flow. It was a little strange, but you could see she adored Kamiko and was mostly enjoying the variety of reactions she could produce from her youngest daughter more than anything else. "Well, seeing as I have true sight, perhaps that's why I find myself liking her" said Kat.

Nira's eyebrows did properly raise at that. "Impressive. Anything else odd about you? I ask as a medical professional obviously"

Kat mentally rolled her eyes. *Thanks for making that one obvious Nira. You don't want to know because you're a medical professional, but you do ask AS one because you're... what certified? I'm not really sure how that works in the Hub... maybe something to look into. Still, I don't exactly mind telling her, and Kamiko probably will anyway.*

"I'm not weak to heat or cold, in fact I have really good resistance to both. I have cold flames, and I have Succubus Regeneration, up to regrowing limbs. Reattaching is fine." Said Kat.

"Yup that'd do it" said Nira. "Never known a nondem, that's someone who wasn't born a demon in case you're wondering and they never do things halfway. It's always some strong bloodline with unique abilities all packed in there tightly that comes back. Personally, I think it has to be that way.

"Anything weaker would die out, but the strong ones can stay dormant for generations. You will probably find Kat, that it isn't your parents that had the bloodline. Or well, they both almost certainly had it, but they weren't demons and neither were their parents in all likelihood. It probably goes back... at least five I'd guess." Said Nira.

"Um, that's something I was wondering" said Kat. "How exactly does a bloodline die out or whatever. I mean, everyone here is a demon... but you said my parents probably weren't? But someone earlier on in the tree was? Like... how does that work exactly?"

Nira took in a big breath. "Right, so... that gets into some more in-depth healer knowledge. It's not really relevant to you, especially not with the power you likely have. Still interested?"

Kat nodded and Nira continued. Wrapping her coat tighter around herself as she spoke. "Right, so demons, most specifically Succubi, a few others, but Succubi mostly, can have children with just about anyone.

"There are the more... standard ways" as Nira spoke she made a loop with one hand and poked a finger through it. "Then there are a bunch of magical ones that use some rare resource or another. Those are normally for people that aren't anatomically compatible for whatever reason, or the real prudes that can't stomach the act. Personally, I'm not a fan of those pompous idiots.

"A lot of the good shit for that is RARE and I'm always annoyed when two people can't even..." Nira shook her head to clear the growing scowl off her face. "Sorry, that's just one of my pet peeves. I know they might not enjoy it, heck I understand that but... if you want a kid surely doing the dirty is easier than paying for expensive and rare magical artifacts.

"Anyway, we are way off track. The main thing you need to know, is that demonic blood is very adaptable. It likes to grab whatever traits it feels like from either parent and see how things turn out. It does stabilize occasionally when it finds a setup it likes and a group of people who like being that way and with each other.

"Like the Gorgons. You know them?" Kat nodded. "Oh, you do? That's a surprise. Anyway, that's a great example. They weren't always around, but well... one clan of Succubi had a... thing for snakes. That's how you got Lamia, and then later Gorgons. Or so I'm told.

"That's another thing to note. Most demons, actually find similar demons attractive most of the time. Not always, and it's not exactly rare to... be adventurous but people tend to settle down with physically similar demons. That's how you get new stable races.

"The blood treats it as a foundation, instead of just a new trait to grab. Does that make sense? Like, take my daughter hear." Nira gestured at Kamiko. "Her basic form, the horns, the wings, being a succubus, that's from both me and my husband.

"However, the pink hair, that's a trait grabbed from him, the attitude is his as well, but at least she has my eyes. And her sister's somehow. I blame my great grandmother for that I think, but ANYWAY.

"Enough about how cute she is. See, the problem is, when a demon has kids with someone who isn't a demon. Then it's just as likely to grab traits from them as it is any other. Repeat that for a few generations...

"And just about all the demon blood bleeds out of them. It gets worse in that they start becoming allergic to demonic energy. It's not a good time. It won't drive them mad like it would if they weren't a demon, but their body doesn't produce any, and it tries to compensate for what it feels like it's missing.

"So it tries to draw in demonic energy from nearby, either from demons or just an environment like the Hub. Sure it's not likely to happen in the Hub, too much demonic energy in the air, but it can happen.

"That's the main way that bloodlines die out. Someone that's allergic to demonic energy has practically no way of being romantically involved with a demon. Sure, they might find them sexually attractive but it would be painful, and then eventually fatal to pursue that interest if it was there."

"Shit" said Kat. "I think I understand how it must have happened then. My world doesn't have any higher energy. It suppresses all of it, even demonic. A couple generations and the demonic energy probably leaves the family, and because it's suppressed they don't notice being allergic and then... nothing."

Nira nodded. "Yup. That'd do it. Probably pretty quick too. I might revise my estimate to three generations if it actually suppresses demonic energy like you said. Our bloodlines like to grab traits and see what works, but they do try to optimise for environment if it's serious enough. I'd say demonic energy suppression is pretty serious. It would also explain why the line went dormant for a bit.

"Honestly it's not too surprising. Demonic families that try to live off of hub worlds inevitably end up losing the ability for some reason. It's a bit odd, because nondems like yourself pop up sometimes, but sooner or later the inbreeding has to start OR you go for someone local to that world.

"Once you do that, then sometimes you get people attuned to mana or qi instead of demonic energy and well... they're the allergic ones. Sadly they can never actually use mana or qi. Those guys inevitably end up weak, because they are in a sort of... transitional state.

"Their kids however, or sometimes their grandkids are MONSTERS. All the best leftovers from demon ancestry now with some other higher energy to use. Oh sure, they're not as strong as a comparable demon but to most blood tests they'd read as fully... whatever the natives were, let's just go with human like you were Kat.

"I'd bet nobody could tell you were anything but till you started changing." Finished Nira.

Chapter 397: All the Ways to Keep Yourself Fit

"Yup. I never had any idea either" said Kat "I thought I was dreaming until I ended up with my tail... then I still didn't really know what to make of things for a while"

Nira nodded and said. "Yes, it's always that way. I was actually on the auxiliary research department for one of the past nondems. I did it a few years ago..."

"Before I was born" interjected Kamiko with a cough.

"A few years ago" repeated Nira while glaring at Kamiko. "I didn't meet them personally, nor did I record the data but I did get access to the data and could find out some extra behind the scenes thing. Did you

know that nobody has ever met a nondem before at least one demonic feature appears? Or rather no other demons.

"Some researchers before me actually tried to look into that. If nondems don't actually pop up unless there are no other demons around. The problem with proving something like that, is if you're around demons you probably have demonic parents and can't be a nondem, and the rest of time just the fact that they are rare prevents them being identified early.

"I honestly wonder why anyone devoted so much time to testing it. It's not like we have nondems lining up at the doors. An example perhaps, is that you Kat, are likely the only nondem in the entire hub. There might, and heavy emphasis on might here, be one more from the older crowd, especially the settlers if they stuck around, but they really are just that rare.

"Oh, and another thing..." said Nira suddenly, turning slightly more serious with her eyes narrowing. "The worst part about studying them, is that you basically can't touch them before they become a full demon otherwise bad things happen. This can range from them draining the life from you as they try desperately to get enough demonic energy for the transformation,

"To people trying to give that energy freely and ending up with an insane nightmare monster powered by demonic energy and ill intent. Neither of them are fun but we get told about them both in very graphic detail before you're allowed in the nondem department. I guess so that you know not to do those things."

Kat just nodded as she gained a realisation. *Nira may talk slowly and carefully, but Kamiko IS her daughter. Clearly I can see where she gets her penchant for overexplaining things. I don't think I really wanted to know about the horrible things that could have happened to me before I became a full demon.*

"Let's move onto... lighter topics I suppose" said Kat. "Kamiko mentioned that you have to exercise your demonic energy or something?"

"Ah, yes" said Nira as she gave a quick glance at Kamiko. "What exactly did she say?"

"Not much, mostly that I should talk to you about it" replied Kat.

Nira nodded, straightening herself up a bit more, and gaining a hardness to her eyes. "Good. It's actually rather serious business if you don't know what you're doing. The general advice, and when I say general, I mean what you will most commonly hear but NOT what is necessarily best for you to exercise your energy well.

"The reason for this, is that most demons' demonic flame is fire aligned. If you don't ensure that you use it sufficiently it starts to get... agitated? I suppose. It's really hard to explain without the appropriate medical jargon which wouldn't be translated well anyway. It's one of the downsides to things that DO translate but are still hard to understand simply because it's complex.

"Anyway, if you have fire affinity and just sat on your ass for a while, somehow skiving off your contracts or taking easy ones, eventually you'll start to cook from the inside out. That is NOT pretty, and because it starts with the energy channels, a lot of people can do semi-permanent damage to themselves without really meaning to."

Kat licked her lips. "Am I likely to be fine?"

Nara gave Kat a wry smile. "I doubt it. You don't have regeneration for your energy pathways, do you? That would truly be a rarity."

Kat used the most deadpan voice possible to say. "I have Succubus Regeneration that works on my energy channels"

"I stand corrected apparently" said Nira looking sceptical. "How do you know that?"

"I was repeatedly stabbed through the heart while regenerating and on low energy," replied Kat.

Nira winced. "Yup that'd do it. I mean, you'd also normally get pulled out before things got that bad, but I suppose your regeneration being what it is, it can't exactly get as bad as it can for anyone else. I can see how it happened though.

"Your energy channels got screwed up because you were stabbed through the heart, but you couldn't take the time or energy to fix those so your body fixed everything else first, because while low on energy, you don't need fully functioning energy channels.

"Then, you got stabbed AGAIN likely sending a shockwave through your system. Even if it didn't fix much, your regeneration was probably carefully making sure your channels didn't get worse and then someone took a sledge hammer to it. It's... it's hard to get people to visual this but...

"This is a bit crude of an example, but imagine if you were holding fine china for a friend. Then all of a sudden someone take a sledgehammer to your kneecaps. By some miracle, you remain standing, but you can't move or do anything else because your kneecaps are broken.

"Then, some idiot walked up with a sledgehammer, and tries to repeat the process but... there is no kneecap this time, so the shock travels through your body, shattering your arms and forcing you to drop the plates."

That is not where I thought that analogy was going. I'm... I'm not really sure I see where it was going anyway even with the thing finished. Then again, it is still a good lesson. Don't get stabbed in the heart even if you have insane regeneration, get stabbed somewhere else.

"Right. But the other energy types?" asked Kat

"Oh yes. Sorry. Permanent damage, yada yada, burn from the inside out. Right, good? Ok. After that, we have what you and Kamiko have, and that is a frost attuned demonic flame. Rare, but more in the 'you only know one person with it' rather than 'I have never seen this is it even real' like say... I think the rarest one I know about is pure life demonic flame. I don't exactly have that memory on call despite my perfect memory" said Nira

"What do you mean about the memory thing?" asked Kat jumping in.

"I'll get to that later dear" said Nira with a dismissing gesture.

"So, anyway, with you and Kamiko, my advice is still to use it, but try not to just... unleash everything all the time. Does that make sense? I've told Kamiko this, people with Ice demonic fire shouldn't be going for bursts of power as much as your demonic flame may try to go that way.

"It's actually very unnatural for you both. Sure, doing it once or twice a contract with plenty of rest between means there will be no damage, but certainly don't make a habit of it. I know plenty of firey types that love to start a fight by jumping in the middle and using like half their energy in one go.

"No, you have to treat it almost identically to water aligned demonic fire." Said Nira.

Kat had to jump in. "There is Water... fire?"

Nira nodded and said. "Yes, of course. There is a demonic fire for pretty much every element, though things get really rare after the first two. If say... 99 out of 100 demons have demonic fire, that last person has something else.

"Of that ONE, if we split it into a hundred again, ice makes up like... seventy? Maybe eighty? Of those slots, with earth taking up most of the others, and then going onto the rarer and rarer stuff.

"Things get order of magnitudes rare as you go in that direction, and as I said weirdness. Anyway, back to what you should do, and what your symptoms are. Oh and Kat, you need to be especially careful about this. Because you can heal yourself, you might not notice how bad it's gotten, until it gets really bad. You should notice a drop in demonic energy regen if it's starting to get to that stage so pay attention to that as a very obvious but last resort.

"The actual first signs, are you slowing down. Your demonic energy will decide that... not moving is the best thing for you. Slowly decreasing your speed and sometimes reaction time. That isn't consistent between demons"

Well, that's certainly something I'll keep in mind then. I felt much better when I used a bit of energy today, so I should try summoning some flames just... when I can.

Chapter 398: All the Things a Young Succubus Should Know

"So... Nira, is there anything else you think I should know? As a succubus or perhaps just a demon in general? I mean the system was pretty good, but it really wouldn't tell me much without more specific questions," said Kat

"Oh there are plenty of things" said Nira, and Kamiko paled slightly in the corner of Kat's eye. "The first and most important one is to be very careful about sleeping around."

"Um... ok?" said Kat confused "It's not really on my to-do list so I'm fine avoiding that"

"Second thing, is be very careful sleeping with friends. In fact that's more important than the first rule" said Nira cheerfully, clearly aware of her ordering.

Kat frowned. "I don't understand. I don't really feel the need to sleep with anyone, but why do I need to both not sleep around and also not sleep with friends. Do I just not sleep with anyone? Are we talking sleep sleep, or sex? I'd think I'd like this to be clear"

Kamiko was desperately trying to find something to hide behind, desperately not wanting to listen to her mother and friend talk about said friend's potential sex life. Nira was taking great enjoyment from that pain, but was a little annoyed at how unflustered Kat was. "Well, the biggest reason is that Succubi very regularly pick up abilities relating to sex.

"You don't exactly get a list of everything you pick up, and for a young lady like yourself it's very easy to lose control of your powers especially ones related to sex. Why I remember breaking my poor husband's back the first time. Of course, he also nearly killed me draining my demonic energy to heal the injury. But I never got this talk with my mother so I blame her for it all."

Kamiko groaned and tried to sneakily leave the room only for Nira to blur slightly, and all of a sudden, a gust of air blew through the room, and Kamiko was back on the chairs with Kat. "I'm very lucky my husband didn't have one of the more dangerous abilities. My Great Grandmother is able to steal years of people's lives and then add them to others. Not in the best way, but by aging them up. So, really, both people lose time living. Not really an issue for a demon of course but for some species it is.

"The most common power is just to drain energy from their partner. However, this becomes an issue because when a succubus first gets the ability, it's not very efficient, a bunch of power is lost in the transfer and it's really easy to accidentally kill someone. Happens all the time, so you should make sure to be careful if you actually like the person in question.

"The next most common is mind control. Mostly temporary, but sometimes permanent. You basically get a slave out of it because it locks up their soul and they become a puppet with a brain that follows your commands. Not a fun time turning your friends into an intellectual zombie."

"MUM" shouted Kamiko, now bright red. "Do we really need to talk about this?"

I'm sorry Kamiko I didn't think she'd go on this long. She really is your mother after all. Still... this isn't exactly relevant to me. I don't think I have these powers and I've never even wanted to sleep with anyone. Unless that other version of me from when I was transforming into a full demon... does she count? I don't think she counts.

"Well, you might need a refresher as well Kamiko. You are getting older," replied Nira with a serious look in her face but undisguised mirth in her eyes.

"It's embarrassing to talk about" said Kamiko

Nira shrugged. "I really don't know why you ended up such a prude Kamiko. It's just sex. You're a succubus, it comes up. It's not like I've ever hidden that fact from you. None of your sisters care when it comes up. The triplets hardly even date, but they care about as much as Kat here.

"It really is nothing to be ashamed off. Plenty of Succubi make a good living from it both contract wise and working in the Lust faction in the pleasure department. It's important to talk about so that there are no misconceptions. Really, imagine what would happen if any of the things I brought up before happened. You'd be heartbroken."

"I don't even like anyone" mumbled Kamiko into her hands.

"Those stains on your sheets say otherwise" said Nira with a smirk.

"MUM. I do NOT have any stains on my sheets" Kamiko shot back, scandalised.

Nira grinned with full teeth before saying. "Not all of them are darling. Got to keep track of all my various daughter's developments. Of course, my nose is also much better than yours, so even if I wasn't looking I'd know"

"Kat. End me now please" said Kamiko

"Is there anything else you can tell me?" asked Kat hoping to change the topic.

Nira gave Kat a look saying 'I know what you're doing but I can't have any more fun with this topic anyway so I'll allow you to move us on'. Honestly, Kat was surprised that the translation ability of a demon worked on pointed looks.

"Well Kat, related to the previous topic is pheromones. You don't have any, I can tell, and neither does Kamiko, but my husband does, so does the triplets and Aslena. You have to be a little careful with them. Demon law isn't entirely consistent when it comes to them, plus out on contracts they can be annoying.

"Some people can't turn them off, though most can. They aren't the same as mind control, but they can be just as bad, or perhaps worse because of their ability to affect many people at once. I know my mother had a rather infamous story when she warned me about pheromones I never actually got.

"She took a contract, and walked into a town before she was mobbed by EVERYONE. Not exactly happy with that fact, she burnt them all, including the person she was supposed to be protecting, failing the contract for the week. She went into a bit more detail, but I don't think that's necessary. I wouldn't want to offend Kamiko's delicate sensibilities" said Nira.

"Is there any way to know?" asked Kat "It seems like an awful thing to just have sprung on you"

Nira shrugged. "If you really think that you're probably fine. Nobody gets an ability they'll hate forever. I know of a cousin with pheromones that only work on men. He was very surprised, or at least pretended to be. His parents worked out pretty quickly what it meant, still took the guy another five years to admit it to himself, and then another twenty to tell his parents.

"They of course, found the whole thing hilarious and were taking bets with people about how long it would take for him to bring it up and how many hints he needed. By the time he finally told them, they were making double entendre basically every sentence. Anyway, the point is...

"Abilities are always something you want, at least on some level, and while you might not be as happy with them, as you would be with others, you have to at least want them a bit. For example, just using myself, I am almost certain I'll never get any Gluttony related abilities centred around consuming food.

"I HATE eating. I had major problems when I was younger with just not wanting to eat. It's not as though I didn't like the taste of things, but the act of chewing on things I supremely disliked for some reason. I get by now mostly because I have regeneration like you Kat, and I suspect, though have no way to test, another ability that lets me get by on practically no food ever."

That... that is a strange hangup I'm not sure I ever imagined hearing about. "If you don't mind me asking..." said Kat watching Nira's reaction closely. "How exactly did you get by when you were younger"

Nira shrugged and said. "Not all that well if I'm honest. My parents could overpower me easily enough to force me to eat, but it wasn't a fun experience when they bothered. I think even back then I might have awakened a weak talent for it because I'm certain I didn't eat enough to keep myself healthy when I was younger.

"It does make me wonder if that's why I ended up with healing powers. So that I could help myself and help others with obvious medical issues."

"Mum, I'm not sure refusing to eat counts as a medical issue" replied Kamiko with some bite, clearly still annoyed at her mother's attempts to embarrass her and somewhat red still.

Nira sighed. "See, that's the thing. It's a hard line to draw when you think about it. Golems for example, eat rocks. They need to eat rocks, and a golem that doesn't is one with a problem. With how easily demons mix and match traits I wonder if my aversion to eating was because of some Living Shadow in my family tree. Those guys eat practically nothing."

Huh... I didn't think about that. Medicine for demons must be a lot more complicated. Or... maybe not. Some things must be easier with healing magic but I guess other strange issues crop up. Do they have psychologists I wonder?

Chapter 399: Summoning Details

"Well, that all makes a lot of sense really" said Kat. "I think I'll be spared most of those problems because I don't want mind control of any kind. Seems kind of... not sure what I'd call it, but unpleasant is at least one description"

Nira shrugged and said. "Well, I can't be certain you'll always feel like that, but it is a common attitude. Mostly from Succubi with parents that have those abilities and they wonder if their parents only got together because of it. Gives them all sorts of insecurities. Honestly, I don't really have a lot of answers for those. Demons are more resistant to those kinds of things a lot of the time, but not always.

"And it's not like I can just ask the parents that sort of thing. Terribly unprofessional to even suggest that I know about it at all." *Huh. That means they DO have psychologists and that Nira is one. Why does it matter if she has healing then? Kamiko said she was a healer after all... unless healing the mind counts as well? Maybe?*

"I still don't think I'll have to worry about it. I just don't really want that sort of power over people. It seems like a lot of effort really. I mean, having absolute control over them basically means they are entirely your responsibility. I don't mind responsibility, and I do like helping people but that's just a step too far." Said Kat

Nira's eyes widened and she replied with. "I've not really heard that idea bandied around. It makes a surprising amount of sense. Do you mind if I share that with my patients some time? Being able to tell them that one of their parents clearly had to really want them to make the choice twice could go a long way to settling them down."

"Sure I guess" said Kat. "Though what is it you do? Kamiko said you were a healer but you seem to be implying you're a psychologist"

Nira gave a 'somewhat like that' gesture with her hand. "Depends how you look at it. I've worn a number of hats over my time in the hospitals. You have to understand that when you start out, you basically just heal a person or two when they come in and then you have no energy for anything else.

"And you can't just sit around doing nothing, so when you are younger and in the lower Ranks they test you on a bunch of things and see what you're good at. Maybe that's patient care, keeping people calm

while they are recovering and can't be healed any more, or helping them while they wait for their healing without injuring themselves further.

"Alternatively, they could get people to study the mind, like myself. We help with more deep-seated issues. I got into it to find out why I hate eating and still never got an answer. Anyway, now that I'm higher up in the pecking order, I do a lot of medical research on fringe cases, heal the occasional high Rank person and just do work that interests me.

"I'm not sure if Kamiko has made it clear just how rare healing is, or a Rank 5 healer. I'm one of only five in this Hub, and the most senior of those. There is only one Rank 6 healer above me that runs the department on paper, but is rarely ever seen.

"I actually work across the hubs semi-regularly. There just isn't that many people at my level. Well, in the more local multiverse anyway. It's a bit hard to go too far afield and my family is here so I research with the people I can contact.

"Anyway, because of that I can mostly just do whatever I want. I do enjoy helping people, so I just find where I'm most needed and work there. I could show up to work and sleep all day and nobody really has the authority to stop me."

Kat bit her lip as she waited for that knowledge to sink in, but it just wasn't hitting her. *I guess I just don't know how big the hub is. The way she's saying it, certainly sounds very impressive. Like... like saying that you are the best scientist in the world almost. Something like saying 'I'm the next Steven Hawking' and it being true. I just can't picture it though. My brain must still be a bit human, because she just looks so young, and doesn't feel very powerful.*

"Wait I don't think you've ever told me that Mum" said Kamiko, now mostly recovered from her mother's antics.

Reminding Nira of her presence though, may have been a mistake as she turned to Kamiko with a big grin. "Finally showing an interest in your dear old mother? Sometimes I feel like you kids hardly care about me. Never spending time at home, always running off and having adventures..."

Kamiko was ready for the teasing this time and gave Nira a flat look in return as she said. "Mum, I have to fulfill contracts. We all do, even Aslena who can get out of a lot of them has to. You can't blame us for that one, and you know we love you."

Nira still smiled though, before disappearing from Kat's vision and reappearing with Kamiko now on her lap. "Naw, my daughter does care."

Kamiko rolled her eyes and snuggled into the embrace. "I'm not my sister's Mum. That line of embarrassment never works against me."

Nira gave Kat a look over Kamiko's shoulder saying 'she may not be embarrassed but I get hugs out of it so it's fine' and Kat was left thinking. *Do you even need mind reading when you can say so much with just a look? Unless... it's probably a Rank 5 thing now that I think about it. Kara did say that you can get better at it.*

"Speaking of Contracts" asked Kat, now wondering if she'd missed anything considered 'common knowledge' about them as well. "Is there anything I should know? Or just would be good to know?"

"Well..." said Nira with an overly thoughtful look Kat could tell was faked. "The biggest one is that while yes, you can complete any Contract by killing the person who offered you the Contract, we don't really do that in this Hub."

Kat raised a questioning eyebrow and Nira continued. "Right, I suppose I should explain. That was the favoured method by quite a lot of demons a LONG time ago. This is the sort of thing that makes it into OUR history books, and I'm sure you know how long we live. This is truly ancient history.

"It was basically the first loophole we found in this particular life we've had to live. Back then, demons were still trying to figure out what they were doing in the world, and we were more than a little bitter about the whole thing at the time.

"So finding out that we could just kill the guy who summoned us and then be done with it was a big plus. The way it works, basically, is that a Contract is based on the approval of both souls. If you kill the second soul needed for the approval process you can force a 'Contract Complete' state.

"Now, the reason we don't do that anymore is because we get much better jobs and terms if people know we can work with them. When you go around killing anyone, you only get Contracts to kill people, or do the work of insane cults or something. Generally just nasty business.

"So, as a Hub, we have agreed to not do that for the most part. If you do start killing people for Contract completions, and by people I mean Summoners, then you go on a list, and you eventually get stuck with a few worlds where the Summoners are extra cautious and bind you in more complete chains that prevent you from attacking them, or at least make it very hard.

"Now, that isn't to say you can't kill ANY of your Summoners. Sometimes, you just get summoned by a horrible person you can't agree with in any way and think the world would be better off without them. Personally, I've never been in that position, but my husband has. He thinks that he was sent specifically to kill the Summoner in question instead of completing the job but I'm not sure why he thinks that."

Well, considering I once got a Contract basically from D.E.M.O.N.S itself to lie to a Summoner and threaten him instead of doing what I was asked and answering his proper questions, I think we can be reasonably sure that your husband was right in his guesses. I probably shouldn't confirm it though.

Kat nodded though, trying to keep the understanding and surprise out of her eyes. "Yes I can see how that could happen. In a recent Summoning I was tasked with destroying this Sect with a guy I did NOT like. Not sure he was evil enough to kill instead, but it would have been nice to know it was an option."

Chapter 400: Captured for Hugs

Nira hugged her daughter tightly so she could shift position slightly to better see Kat. "Yeah you get people like that sometimes. It's not too often though. Normally when they mess up the ritual. You can actually decline a lot of those and still get paid half the time. It's a bit of a gamble, though."

"Why is that?" asked Kat

"Well, mostly because the circle didn't actually get asked to do what the circle said you would. Most of the time that sort of thing happens when an old Summoning Circle gets activated by someone with no idea what they are doing.

"The problem, and where the risk comes in, is that sometimes they are just close enough to what the circle was intending for that you get penalised for skipping out on the contract. Then you either have to do more contracts or a punishment run like you and Kamiko are doing right now."

"Huh, actually, why are you doing this Kamiko? Not sure I asked?" asked Kat.

Kamiko groaned and mumbled something quietly into her mother's neck. "I'm sorry what was that?" asked Kat. Kamiko repeated what she said, making no effort to actually be heard.

"If you don't want to tell her I will" said Nira without shame.

Kamiko groaned again and faced Kat. "I... I don't really want to say? It's very embarrassing..."

"Dear" said Nira as she ran her hands through Kamiko's short hair. "It really wasn't that bad. They didn't exactly call the best demon for the job, and it wasn't your fault..."

"It's still embarrassing" said Kamiko, blush creeping up her face.

Nira shrugged as if to say 'welp I gave her a chance' before actually saying. "She got lost."

"What?" asked Kat confused

Kamiko groaned and turned herself around to speak. "Fiiine. If Mum is going to go that far. I... I was tasked with delivering a letter. I'm not sure why I had to, or why they couldn't have gotten a courier to do it, but they summoned a demon and I was that demon.

"I maybe sort of... got lost along the way? I gave up in the end... after like, two weeks travelling when I found out that I'd headed the wrong way at some point and was like a month of heavy travel away from where I wanted to go at least.

"I was informed that I wasn't getting paid and I was going to be punished for doing so badly. Apparently because not only did I not do the mission, but it was a somewhat time sensitive delivery. I think I was chosen because technically I have a teleportation ability, but I've already mentioned how that's all it is. A technicality."

*That... that does make some sense I suppose. I have True Sight, and D.E.M.O.N.S said I might get missions just because of that fact. I wonder if the system likes pushing us? I wasn't exactly a fan of my most recent Summoning... but I did complete it in the end, even if that completion was questionable.

Well ok, maybe I didn't complete it by the strictest definition but I DID help. He's the one that started screwing things up at the end, and I feel like I did the right thing there. Maybe that's the point though? Hmm. I'm not sure how good D.E.M.O.N.S is about basically telling the future.

It's clearly not impossible. The Angel I met proved that you can in fact, tell the future, or at least make scarily accurate guesses about it. Then again, that was an Angel making a prediction about just me. D.E.M.O.N.S has a much bigger job. I wonder what the limit might be?*

"What do you think Nira?" asked Kat

"Hmm hard to say really" said Nira "It's one thing to think that D.E.M.O.N.S set you up to kill the person to complete the contract and an entirely different thing to think they wanted you to fail, especially going on to punish you for it.

"You start thinking in circles, and wondering if you're entire life has be planned out already by some cosmic force, but that's just silly. Maybe D.E.M.O.N.S does play with the odds, but ultimately, it's always our choice, and D.E.M.O.N.S does stick by its rules, even if you feel like it is trying to get you to do something else.

"It will also never give you something impossible. I know my daughter doesn't have any experience with that sort of job, but it's not like she's known for being bad at them are you? You found your classes fine and you can get around the neighbourhood"

Kamiko shrugged and said. "I guess? I never really thought about it too much... but yeah I guess my sense of direction is passable. I'm not sure how much attention I paid to it during that mission, or where exactly I got turned around. I think it was somewhere in the forest but I can't be sure. I didn't exactly leave the road, but maybe I should have seen a turnoff or something"

Nira leaned into Kamiko and said. "Nothing you can do about it now dear. I will say this punishment is a little extreme in my eyes, but I bet it counts as an extra week of Contracts anyway."

"Oh?" asked Kat "Why is that?"

"It's just the way it is" said Nira "They treat the punishment like a contract in and of itself and it sounds like the one you guys have will run for at least a week, so it'll probably count as two. It's not exactly a harsh punishment but it is a time consuming one. Though it's probably worse for you Kat because you can't see your family during it unlike we can. So you are more than welcome to stay for the whole lot. If someone else tries to tell you off and I'm not here just let them know they can fight me over the decision if they don't like it"

Kamiko jumped in with "Don't say that Mum, Elmony with ask for a fight just because you've given her the chance"

"It's been a while since I fought her though. If she really wants a fight with me I'm happy to give it to her. It's been what... a month since our last one? She's getting better." Said Nira

"How close are you both in combat prowess?" asked Kat

"Closer than you'd think" said Nira "Or perhaps not? I guess I don't know you well enough to say that. Elmony is one of the best Rank 4 fighters if you ask me. She works with me through the Lust faction as an enforcer."

"Wait how does that work?" asked Kat "I thought that was Wrath's job?"

"It is... but Elmony still has Succubus abilities for the most part. She just uses them offensively for combat. It's not like the other factions have no combat capabilities. Personally I think the only reason she joined Lust is to be around family, but she gets her fill of combat from the occasional Contract and fight with me, so maybe it's where she wants to be. Hard to say really, and I know she'd never answer me either way. Still embarrassed after all these years. Makes me very happy though, that she thinks of herself as my daughter still." said Nira with a goofy smile on her face.

"Do you mind elaborating on that?" asked Kat

"Sure" said Nira picking up on what Kat meant. "I'm sure Kamiko already mentioned she was adopted under... strange circumstances to say the least. Well, we never really wanted to keep that hidden from her. It would be hard to keep as a secret and I like being honest with my children unless it's for embarrassment purposes.

"And I guess, in the back of my mind... I sort of felt like once she'd gained enough power she'd just... stop being my kid you know? It's different with the other girls. Not that I'd treat them any different but they don't get a choice. Even Meradithna doesn't. She might be angry still, but she's my daughter and she can't tell me otherwise.

"Elmony kind of... could though? If she'd done half the shit Meradithna had, then I think I'd be forced to give up. Mostly because... she'd be right? If that makes sense. Meradithna I can be annoyed with her, but ultimately, know she's wrong."

Kat gulped and decided to change the topic, not really having experience with the intricacies of family. "Why are your fights so close?"

Nira looked like a shark who smelled blood in the water, until Kamiko gave her a light squeeze on the arm. "Oh fine" said Nira rolling her eyes. "The reason is because a lot of my abilities are tied up in healing. Sure some work well enough on me, but it's mostly for other people. That combined with her love for combat and more practiced technique means I have to rely on the extra power and speed from being Rank 5 to come out on top. I think she wants to beat me before Ranking up, but I suspect that beating me will be achievement enough to Rank up."