

DEMONS 411

Chapter 411: Monster in the Doorway

Kat and Kamiko were sitting down at the dining table and having some water while relaxing. Boss had been more than a little scary at the end there. Kat had glanced over at Kamiko a few times but she'd just shook her head. Kat got the implied message, that it was something they really shouldn't talk about.

I just wish I knew at least a little more. Boss seemed very surprised to see it, and the look on Kamiko's face, while scared, was one of at least some understanding. She clearly doesn't want to talk about it either though so I guess I can leave it. Maybe it's something like the Angels where you can't talk about them if the others don't know.

Suddenly the door slammed open, and Kat went into combat mode before she even registered what was going on. Kat's mind slowed to a crawl as she pushed against her chair. It would fall down eventually, but time was on Kat's side. When Kat looked to the door, she saw a large figure that took up the entire entryway.

It was covered in blood with two large ram horns attached to the head. What little she could make out of the person's face was mostly ignored in favour of the bone white teeth that looked like they belonged on a shark that were currently grinning at her. Long hair that was matted with blood hid the rest of the details that weren't obscured by even MORE blood.

The figure might have been wearing an outfit at some point, but now it looked more like they'd been painted with a blackish red blood that wasn't dark enough to be a demon's. Kat watched as the figures red eyes widened and mouth opened sucking in a deep breath as Kat moved.

On Kat's end she was now in front of Kamiko wings flared and tail coiled but ready to strike out at the target. Kat stared whatever was coming into the doorway and set her hands alight for the intimidation factor, whatever that was worth against the shark toothed monster.

While time was slowed, a deep rumbling like crashing boulders was emanating from the thing's throat as it started to shake. Kat bared her teeth and let the world return to normal speed so that she wasn't wasting energy only for the sound to transform into... laughter?

"Ahahahaha" laughed the figure with a voice that would give a more feminine Boss a run for his money. "Little Kamiko finally got a friend and she sure is a feisty one. I'd call her a keeper."

"E! What did Mum tell you about visiting covered in blood." Groaned Kamiko from behind Kat.

That's when it all clicked. The red eyes, the ram horns. The WINCE when she slammed the door open. Kat felt her face growing red to match her hair as she folded her wings up and bowed. "Sorry about that... I uh..."

Elmony just laughed again and rolled her eyes. Kat at first thought that was a little weird, but as she did so, all the blood on her started to shift and move, following along the path her eyes travelled. A few rotations and most of the blood was gone. Of course, this revealed a new problem. Elmony wasn't exactly wearing much.

She had underwear to cover the more private areas of her... but that was it. A strip of cloth above and a second below. Kat was actually surprised to see the large scar that wound its way around her stomach, as if she'd nearly been sliced in half by a wire or something. Her legs also had smaller cuts in them, that looked recently healed. A faint pink outline of them all.

Elmony's hair... didn't fair quite as well as her body. It just seemed to whip around a bit and held tight to the blood that had made its home there. Kat assumed it was pink, based on the picture and all, but it was still too hard to tell. "Well, I'll just dump this all in the garden." Mumbled Elmony as she turned around.

"Make sure you only water the blood roses!" yelled Kamiko at the retreating back of her sister.

Well... that's... Kat looked around awkwardly for a moment before picking the chair back up and sitting down. "Ah... sorry about that."

Kamiko gave Kat a big grin and hopped over to Kat's chair to give her a quick hug as she said. "It's fine. Honestly it's really nice to know you'd jump in and help me. El should know better, she's been told off for it enough. She probably thought she wouldn't get caught because Mum isn't home."

"I can hear you, you know!" came a shout from the backyard.

Kamiko turned to face the place Elmony's voice had to come from and retorted. "You were meant to! It's not exactly a secret!"

A few seconds later, Elmony came back in through the front door. Now she had an outfit on that was very reminiscent of Kamiko's. The main difference was the light blue colour scheme which Kat thought actually paired well with her pink hair. The outfit was a long kimono longer than Kat's, which covered Elmony's impressively long legs completely. *noVεlnext.Com*

It did not do as much for her chest, which poked out through the gap the two overlapping sides of the outfit left. Her pinkish white sash was tied tight underneath that, much higher up than Kat's own and seemed to be there specifically to further draw eyes to her assets. Elmony's long pink hair worked well with the few pink flowers and vines that could be found hidden under the sleeves of the outfit.

"So, how's the punishment going." Said Elmony glancing between the two of them.

"Honestly it's been pretty good. Kat could really do with a little more shame though." Said Kamiko.

"Oh do tell?" asked Elmony baring her teeth slightly.

Yeah do tell actually. I have no idea what I should be ashamed of.

"Kat just... she just keeps getting hurt and shaking it off!" groaned Kamiko.

"I don't see the problem" said Elmony, giving a small thumbs up she'd 'hidden' from Kamiko's view.

Kamiko groaned. "I should have known you'd think it's normal. I'm talking about Greed. We just got done testing a bunch of items, probably half of which were weapons, and the main Guinea Pig for them was Kat. She just had a pain nullification amulet on and her regen to get through."

Kat shrugged, before speaking, but wanting to get her own thoughts out there. "I really don't see what has Kamiko so concerned.? I have Succubus regeneration. I always made sure I had energy before getting stabbed, and the amulet made it so the only time I felt pain was that one sword specifically for cancelling those out."

Kamiko gave Elmony a look as if to say 'see what I mean' but Elmony shook her head and gave a nod to Kat before saying. "Honestly I don't see the problem. No pain no gain and all that, and you could even skip the pain part. Sounds like Kamiko's the one who got hurt the most doing the stabbing."

Kat nodded and Kamiko groaned. "Crazy people the lot of you."

"Hey, it's not my fault I got an ability that increases all of my physical attributes the more blood I have on me. Do you even know how gross that was at first? People can have sorts of horrible shit in their blood." Stated Elmony calmly.

Kamiko rolled her eyes. "You know as well as I do that nobody gets an ability they hate."

"You can still get ones that you dislike though..." said Elmony with a tone of voice that told Kat they'd had had this conversation before. "I stand by the idea it's a carry over from... Her."

"Um... who is that?" asked Kat

Elmony glanced between Kat and Kamiko for a few seconds. "You did tell her about me right?" when Kamiko nodded, Elmony sighed and continued. "I'm talking about the person I used to be. She... she was NOT a good being. No matter how much Grandma, or Mum? Depends on how you want to think about it. No matter what Grandma says though, I was not a good person before and sometimes those stories scare me."

"You aren't her though" said Kamiko softly. "You've never been her."

Elmony just gave Kamiko a resigned grin. "You know that isn't true. It always amazes me that you're physically capable of saying it. It's the same body, and the same soul, I'm just down a few memories."

Kat considered that a moment and said. "Do you really have the same soul?"

"Well of course?" replied Elmony with a raised eyebrow. "Why wouldn't I?"

"Well, I don't know how you all think of a soul. But I don't think of it as a static unchanging thing. It's just like the body isn't it? Shaped and changed by the actions you take? Fighting, building reflexes, working out, resting, getting weird blood powers." Said Kat finishing off with a grin.

"What I'm trying to go for... I guess, is that, you might have had the same soul at the start, or maybe you didn't. Maybe some of the other Elmony's soul got shaved off and you got left with the good parts. But as soon as you started to do other things your soul was changing."

Chapter 412: So what's with the Blood?

Elmony froze. Kat's eyes couldn't make out the slightest movement except for the tiny sway of Elmony's outfit. Seconds passed and she didn't blink, didn't move, didn't make a sound. If Kat hadn't seen her walking around just a second ago the temptation to declare her a statue would be strong.

"I don't think I've ever heard it put quite like that." Mumbled Elmony.

Kamiko huffed, but had a smile on her face when she said. "We've been telling you that for years."

Elmony through her arms up in the air and turned away. "I guess... but it's different. The words made me think it through a lot more and it's different coming from the people you grew up with. You guys are practically forced to enjoy my company!" said Elmony

Kamiko rolled her eyes. "Meradithna chose not to enjoy it" mumbled Kamiko.

Elmony winced and said. "Yeah... but I thought we agreed not to talk about that."

Kamiko shrugged. "I know you all agreed to it, but I wasn't exactly involved in the conversation. I have free reign to complain about her all that I want. I never agreed to anything, though I'll admit I wouldn't say anything around Mum or Dad. They still feel rather bad about it."

Elmony let out a long breath. "Yeah. Yeah they do."

Kat just sat back and watched the not quite argument. *I don't really have any reason to jump in here. Elmony clearly has a lot to deal with, and I hope I helped a bit but, I'd guess she isn't completely over it. Has the same look on her face that Sam had when I finally explained his family didn't chose to leave him.*

That was when both Kamiko and Elmony turned to Kat in sync and seemed to ask a question with their eyes. The thing is, Kat couldn't quite decipher it. *Shit what do they want? Is this something I should know? Maybe just change the topic? If they are polite enough to go with it they might forgot what they actually meant for me to do.*

"So, what was with all the blood? I know you said it was for an ability, but where did you get it all, it wasn't black enough for it to be yours?" asked Kat

Elmony nodded and said. "Well, not all demons have black blood, just most of us, so don't look too closely at that. The answer though, is it was actually wyvern blood. Honestly that last mission was a little scary when I started but it turned out to be rather easy."

"Why is that?" asked Kat

"Um..." Elmony looked over at Kamiko, asking with her eyes 'wasn't that easy to guess?'

Kamiko shook her head and jumped in to explain to both of them "Elmony was probably told she had to fight a dragon. Elmony, Kat isn't from a world with Higher energy and only recently became a demon so she doesn't know about a lot of this sort of thing."

"Ah, sorry." said Elmony, "You see, dragons are one of the few things that can compete with a demon. They are some of the strongest creatures, especially in mana based worlds, and while the strongest dragon would certainly lose to the strongest demon... there is a lot of stages between me and the strongest demon. Additionally, a lot of worlds don't manage their mana properly.

"What ends up happening is a bunch of dragons get their hands on it and just sort of keep it to themselves. Dragons are one of the few creatures that can just take in mana as they grow and then keep

taking it and getting more powerful mostly without limit. They are actually more limited by the dimension than they are their own bodies."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Kat

"Of course, should have seen that coming." Mumbled Elmony as she pulled out a chair for herself.

"Right, so most Dimensions have a hard cap on how much energy any single creature can contain. They can't prevent stronger things entering the Dimension, but they can prevent things within themselves getting stronger.

"They can't stop a demon, but they can stop anything else. In this case dragons. The greedy bastards are worse than Greed. They just take in as much mana as they can, and then sit around taking in more mana to keep themselves healthy and fed. The problem is, that takes away a lot of the mana for everyone else. Any Dimension has a limited supply of whatever higher energies they use and if it's wrapped up in a dragon nothing else has it.

"The main reason this is a problem, is that dragons don't use the mana particularly efficiently. Oh sure, they get strong without effort, and stronger still when they put in some elbow grease, but for the same amount of mana a lot of other creatures could be twice or three times as strong, and they can even start to produce their own mana to give back to the world.

"Dragons only really give back once they die. Don't get me wrong, they give back everything they've taken and more most of the time... but that's only if they do die. Dragons are rather good at avoiding that fate."

Elmony shook her head, letting her long hair whip around her back and slide easily around her horns.

"Sorry I was getting off topic. The reason I was concerned is you never really know how strong a dragon is, and you know that if you've been summoned to kill one it's usually quite strong. With that much mana, they can do a lot of damage during a fight, not just to you but to everything else.

"Luckily it was just a drake, which is a dragon's inbred cousin. Normally they come about in one of two ways. The first is if they are the child of two mana starved dragons. It's rare that happens, but it can, so I'm mentioning it for the sake of completeness.

"The second way is whenever a dragon manages to fuck something else and the child is a downgrade from the dragon parents. It's very rare, and I'm talking one in a million chance, that a dragon and that something else can have a more powerful child. That will still be called a dragon, and will 'carry the full bloodline' or so they say. It's not really true, or, I guess it depends on how you look at it.

"It's mostly just a measurement of strength, but the big thing about that strength is how a dragon sees it. Remember how I said they are mana hogs? Well, that half dragon that can still eat mana like a full dragon will be welcomed into the fold. It's about the only way they can be strong enough to compare is if they get that particular trait. Still need a few others, and some good genes on the other side as well, but the mana eating is the big one.

"Still, drakes are pretty scary in their own right if they've been around. Sometimes they get a bit of intelligence but that's pretty hit or miss. This one got Wyvern Control. They aren't actually related to dragons, or maybe they are in an extremely distant way. Wyvern's are like a strange mix between a vulture and... a wolf or something?"

"I say that because wyverns are pack animals. They group up and attack things in quivers that's the name for a group of wyvern, a quiver. Anyway, a quiver will fly around, normally looking for carrion, and occasionally bringing down weaker animals if they can. For some reason though, they think of drakes and dragons as alpha wyverns a lot of the time.

"Not sure why. As I said they aren't really related, and dragons don't tend to bother with them. They see wyverns as beneath their notice. Drakes though, even if they don't have Wyvern Control like mine did, tend to group up with them. Wyverns protect the drakes base, and the drake makes sure to get a couple extra kills for them.

"So, with that part explained, I guess I'll explain the blood. See, I knew I was fighting something, and based on eye witness reports it sounded like it had to be a dragon. So, as I'm fighting through the wyverns, I let them coat me in blood. For my power to work its best, the blood needs to be fresh, so I didn't just pick it up before I left or keep it on me or something.

"So I waded through all these wyverns, letting their blood soak me. I rock up to this 'dragon' I've been scared of, and I unleash my strongest attack on it as it goes to take off. Obliterated the thing. Never had a chance, my attack cut the thing in two instantly. I'll be honest I was a little surprised.

"So I just... said quest complete and left. Didn't even remember to get rid of the blood. That's actually why I slammed the door too. I wasn't quite prepared to be home and still have the bonus strength."

Chapter 413: Elmony's Skills and Philosophy

Kat winced as she thought of the first few days with her tail and all the problems it caused. *Yeah, having a different strength, or just having your body feel completely different to normal causes a lot of issues you'd never think of. *

"I understand the feeling. Before I got used to my tail I nearly fell over a few times. What made it worse was that I had to hide it. So I was fighting my old instincts where my balance was different because I lacked a tail, AND my new instincts because my tail was tied around my waist. It was not a fun time." Said Kat

"Oof, I didn't even consider something like that" said Kamiko "I thought you'd just be used to it all."

Kat shrugged and said. "I sort of was, and sort of wasn't. I had a lot of the instincts to go with the changes in my body but it didn't completely remove my old ones." Kat swished her tail around noticeably. "Forgive the pun but everything has really grown on me. Especially the tail." Kat paused for a moment. "If you don't mind Elmony what are some of the other skills you have?"

Elmony ran her hands along her horns, tracing the outline around an into the centre as she considered the question. Evidently deciding it was fine to speak, Elmony answered with. "Well, the first thing that comes to mind is my false blood. I can generate a good amount of it for only a little bit of energy. It's red unlike my own black blood, but it works well enough for the main use of my eyes.

"Which, as I already mentioned is controlling it. I can move it around, form it into weapons, harden it, and just generally make sure people have a bad time. Did you know throwing blood into peoples' eyes is shockingly effective? I picked that one up really early and it's served me well for a century.

"It doesn't work for other skills though. Coating myself is false blood doesn't make me any stronger. That's why I called it 'false' blood. I can also teleport through blood pools if they are large enough. It's not as cool as it sounds but I have practically no distance limit if I know where both of them are.

"I can make an entrance with my false blood but never an exit. So that also puts a dampener on things. What makes it even worse, is that if any false blood mixes in with normal blood then the whole pool is contaminated and considered 'false' blood by a most of my powers. My strength enhancement is a little nicer. If I get false blood on me it just doesn't count for that part."

"That's actually quite cool." said Kat, "Do your abilities synergise well? I just seem to have a bunch of random ones that don't really connect. Like... how does dream walking, true sight and Succubus regeneration all come together?"

Elmony shrugged and said. "Well, they are all quite rare? That's probably the biggest stand out. Dream walking isn't too rare, but it's uncommon to get so early and as a Succubus. Normally shadows or dream eaters get that sort of thing. It also isn't always dream walking. Dream sight is much more common.

"Um, hmm, let me think... depending on how you dream walk they all seem to be physical things. Like, Kamiko can shoot lasers from her eyes and I can conjure up blood but those aren't really physical abilities so much as they are metaphysical. Your body seems to be getting an upgrade all around really. Maybe you'll get poison nails next? If we are just going off guesses and trends that would be mine."

"That makes a disturbing amount of sense..." mumbled Kamiko. "I can't believe I didn't consider that. Though... Kat doesn't seem like a knucklehead like you. Why would she get so many physical abilities?"

"Hey, I don't only have physical skills. Why am I a knucklehead?" complained Elmony without any real heat.

"Because you joined as a Lust faction bodyguard? Like nobody does that? They just go to Wrath like normal people." Retorted Kamiko.

"Hey, I actually like the people in our faction and want to protect them. Is that so wrong?" stated Elmony with a false put-upon voice.

"Mum's in medical." Said Kamiko as if that won her the argument by itself.

Except it clearly didn't because "Yes and I get assigned to her fairly regularly" was Elmony's response. Kamiko just pouted and they both looked away from each other awkwardly.

What the heck was that? They don't seem too made about it but... I also feel like they've had this argument before. But it wasn't funny. I don't think they did it just to impart that little piece of information to me. Honestly why they did that song and dance is lost to me. Is it just a sibling thing? Do I need to come up with convoluted scenarios to get along with Sylvie? Nah she can be bought off with hugs, it's fine.

"So... um, do you have any other non blood related abilities? They are pretty cool but it seems a bit specific." Said Kat

Elmony raised an eyebrow and said. "You don't think True Sight is specific? It may be the best anti-illusion ability you can get but it's not like that comes up all that often. Most of the time it's illusion plus something else, or people just use good old fashioned walls."

Elmony shook her head and continued. "No sorry that was a bit over the line. I'm still a bit hyped from my recent battle so I'm still got a bit of trash talk left in me. Sorry about that. Um... what else do I have. Well, I do have a weird ability which is that I always smell nice."

"It's a bit like how you get to keep your perfect skin that repels dirt. I never got that one, instead I just smell pleasant all the time to whoever is smelling me. I am SO glad it works on my own sense of smell so I don't have to smell the dried blood that ends up on me most of the time."

"Granted I still smell the blood on the floor around me, but false blood is actually better in that regard because it doesn't smell like anything. Or taste like anything, but that part doesn't really come up often."

"Ugh, what else isn't quite standard. Oh, I've got my wings." Elmony pointed to her back. "You can't see them at the moment because mine came in as an ability rather than a physical effect. I can get them to spring out of my back and allow me to fly. The main issue with them is it burns energy constantly to use them."

"I can actually relate a little bit" said Kat, "when I'm in my home dimension I have to constantly use my regen for them to work. I think it's because my energy does something with them to keep my afloat even though they are always there. Anyway, because my home dimension suppresses that I'm not strong enough to use them properly without injuring myself so it takes a bit of energy."

"Kamiko. I changed my mind, your friend probably is a masochist." Said Elmony with a deadpan expression.

Kamiko nodded with mock sadness in her eyes and a grin hidden behind her hand as she tried not to shake too much from the laughter. After a couple of seconds Kamiko took in a deep breath to steady herself before saying. "Sorry, I shouldn't have laughed at that, it's just. Flying around despite breaking your wings over and over again is such a you thing to do Kat. I've realised that somewhat now."

"Glad you've realised that. Still, Elmony" Kat paused her speech to turn and look at the older sibling. "I considered if I was a masochist rather carefully once you mentioned it. I rapidly reached the conclusion that I simply am not. I did wonder what I AM but I couldn't think of anything that came to mind, so I moved on."

"I'll admit, I'm, a little surprised you can deny it" said Elmony "I think we've all been clear enough that you couldn't lie to yourself about it or just not realise. I'm also surprised your so calm about this having not grown up a Succubus."

Kat shrugged. "I mean, there doesn't seem to be anything I'd need to be ashamed of. I'm rather comfortable as myself. I do still think about a particularly frustrating moral conundrum from a recent Contract I was on though."

"Oh. Do tell" said Elmony, her red eyes seeming to light up with intrigue.

"I was on world.... one with Qi-" Kat said but...

"Say no more. They were a bunch of martial arts maniacs weren't they?" interrupted Elmony

"Well, yes but... that's not quite the problem. I found out that crippling them was worse than death. Or that's what people were telling me. I... I'm not sure I agree. I mean can't you come back from crippling? Death is the end so it just seems... like bad practice." Explained Kat.

Elmony tapped her horns. "Well, sort of. It's possible to recover yes, but not realistically and not in a favourable timeline. Those guys like to go out fighting. Even the ones that reach old age. A lot of them have a crazy last minute stand to try and go out like that. I'd kill them personally. A lot of them want nothing more than a good fight and I'm happy to give it to them"

Chapter 414: The Cold does Bother me

Kamiko clapped her hands twice. "Well, with that, I think we should move the conversation to the bathroom."

Elmony groaned and said. "Nope. No way. If you're this happy about it there is no chance that Kat isn't also an ice type like you. I am not built for that kind of weather."

"You're plenty tough sis." Chimed Kamiko with a smile on her face.

"No, you don't get to play that card. I'm a fire based demon and I cannot handle the cold at all" replied Elmony, who Kat could see already had goosebumps starting to appear on the backs of her hands.

"Aw, come on. I can make sure it's only a little cold sis. I've had enough real baths the last few days that I'm more interested in keeping you around than chasing the cold." Said Kamiko.

Elmony's eyes narrowed and her stance shifted slightly as if she was getting ready to attack. "Do you swear? I know you've said things like that before, but normally you make the water much too cold, and I'm forced to leave, but Mum will trap the door. She might not be here right now, but if it gets back to her I ran away I'm sure I'll get an earful for it."

Kamiko smiled brightly, but Kat couldn't help but ask. "Aren't you... and um I know this might not be polite but... aren't you old enough to not have to worry about your mother asking you to do things or punishing you?"

"Elmony is more of a mummy's girl than I am. Triplets actually like Dad more, but us two share that particular trait. Elmony could never bear to disappoint Mum. I mean, I can't either, but that's completely different. Oh, and I do promise. I won't make it too cold for you." chimed Kamiko.

Elmony sighed. "I'm surprised you don't have this problem Kat. Demons actually have rather intense familial bonds. We don't really forget our family, and Succubi get this even worse. Now granted, sometimes, rarely, you find family who really want to kill each other but most of those genes bred themselves out for... obvious reasons."

Elmony glanced over at Kamiko before continuing "What my short little sister" Kamiko stuck out her tongue "is saying though is that I'll not disappoint our parents. It's very true though, no matter how old I get. It's a tiny bit strange that I still live with them and not in say... the house next door, but that's mainly because people think I should have a boyfriend or a girlfriend at this point."

Kat nodded. "Well, I never had parents. Mine are dead, and I don't remember them even with my recently improved memory. I had Gramps, and he's great, but I very quickly became the 'big sister' I guess to quite a lot of people and then one girl in particular called Sylvie.

"Maybe that's why?" Kat let her tail tap her chin "I still have those instincts but I use them in the other way, protecting my little sister and keeping the other young ones in line instead of looking up to my parents, which as I said, I do kinda do with Gramps."

Kamiko shrugged and grabbed her older sister by the arm. "No idea bath time."

Elmony laughed, despite the somewhat heavy handed manner of her sister and followed along easily. *I'm surprised she's going along with this so well. She seemed actually annoyed at the idea of a cold bath and it's not like Kamiko can possibly be stronger than her. I wonder how much this bothers her. Then again, I guess Kamiko promised not to make it too cold.* *nOVelExt.com*

The trio quickly made their way to the bathroom and jumped in the water. Elmony summoned a bunch of blood and turned it into a wetsuit first though. "What's with the wetsuit?" asked Kat

"It insulates me a bit. False blood when hardened is really bad at conducting heat, which makes it a great insulator." Said Elmony.

"She's just embarrassed because we both have the skin mutation that stops dust gathering on us. Elmony doesn't want us to see how much she picked up in her hair or the rest of her body." Is what Kamiko jumped in to say.

Kat narrowed her eyes and glanced at Elmony's hair which still had a bunch of blood in it. Now that it was pointed out by Kamiko, everything had very clearly been coated in a new fresh layer of false blood. *Well I didn't expect that.*

Elmony actually blushed and looked pointedly away from Kamiko while saying. "Can't leave me any dignity as a big sister when your friends around can you?"

"Nope. It's much more important to show off how cute you are. Not enough people appreciate that and you're normally all. 'Garh I'll kill you all and the nearest seven generations of your family line' which sure, is very intimidating but you don't go to Wrath enough for it to help you make friends."

If Kat thought Elmony was blushing before, she was wrong. Previously, she had a light dusting of red in her cheeks mostly made noticeable because of her pale skin and how much closer the pink made it to her eyes. Now though, that light dusting had spread from her forehead to her neck, and Kat could see the water around the woman was actually steaming.

Oh. She's just a big softy that likes combat. Or is she just a family person? Hmm, maybe both? I'd need to see how many stuffed animals she has to really decide something like that I guess. Kat thought with a chuckle to herself.

"It's ok Elmony. I'd do anything for my little sister Sylvie. She's not a demon, but I'm pretty sure her eyes have some charm magic in them. When she wants something it's impossible to say no. I'm just glad she's so polite and quiet most of the time. I can avoid spoiling her when she doesn't actively ask for things. I think it might be why she avoids asking too much actually. She knows she can get away with it." Said Kat.

Despite the intended purpose, which was reassuring Elmony, the woman in question just sunk lower into the bathtub as the steam increased. She let out a long stream of bubbles from her half-submerged face which was set into an intense pout.

Suddenly, a minor thing clicked with Kat. *OH that's one of the reasons she can't say no to Kamiko. I wonder if Kamiko's noticed that one or if she just thinks her older sister is like that. I'd have to see how well she treats the others to confirm my guess though...*

"Would you like to drop your blood shield and I'll wash your hair?" asked Kat. She watched as Elmony slowly turned and the blush dissipated slightly but remained mostly in the cheeks. Elmony narrowed her eyes at Kat and seemed to be asking what the catch was.

"Don't look at me like that. I grew up in an orphanage. You cannot IMAGINE some of the shit I had to get out of peoples' hair. Whatever I have to wash out cannot possibly be any worse." Explained Kat.

Elmony's eyes shifted from Kat to Kamiko and back, though it was hard to tell. Even as they moved, Elmony's eyes seemed to remain perfect red spheres. Kat could sort of tell where she was looking, there was... a spark of something that always showed where that was, but it was difficult to see.

Eventually, though, Elmony reached the decision and 'swam' over to Kat. Well, in more honest terms she was walking along the bottom of the bath. She was much taller than the other two and while the bath was deep enough for them to swim, it was only barely enough for Elmony who was capable of walking if she was willing to drop a bit lower than was comfortable.

Eventually, Elmony made it to Kat, who righted herself and started to move towards the side and used her tail to grab one of the under water spouts. Wrapping her tail around the device allowed for her to ignore the need to tread water, simply holding herself in place. Once secure Kat reached out to Elmony's hair and felt the hard shell surrounding it.

Kat gave it a solid tap, and missed the grimace Elmony wore as she looked over at Kamiko, who just smiled encouragingly back at the pair. Elmony released another batch of bubbles from her mouth and dropped the barrier. Instantly the nearby water was dyed red but Kat paid it no mind. Kat just started at the top of Elmony's hair, where it left the water and started to run her fingers down.

Elmony's hair was remarkable smooth and soft. Quite a large amount of the dirt had been dislodged when the blood was released but Kat was here to do a job properly. Carefully combing her way through Elmony's hair, Kat started picking out the larger obstructions that had tangled themselves in one place or another.? *This might take a while...*

Chapter 415: The Impressive Breakfast

When Kat woke up the next morning after another good night's rest, she wasn't sure what she was expecting. She'd chatted with Elmony and Kamiko and headed off to bed quite content with everything. Hugging Kamiko was a great idea, and she wouldn't hear anything against that.

When the pair headed up for breakfast, that's where the surprise began. The dining table had been nearly doubled in size somehow and now had a veritable feast prepared for them. A thin redish dome covered the table while Elmony sat off to the side in the same outfit as yesterday but now had the

addition of a chef's hat that instead of puffing out at the top, seemed to be topped with a ram horn on its side.

Laid out across the table was a large spread. Most of the items were all fruit or vegetable related with one meat dish and one that MIGHT have been a meat dish, even after Kat tried tasting it later one, she wasn't sure. The main bulk of the fruits had the skin taken off of them before they were carved into a variety of shapes. The apples looked like tulips, the pears had been turned into drums and... the tomatoes looked like severed heads but Kat wasn't a big fan of fresh tomato anyway.

The vegetables were more varied, having been chopped and mixed together before being distributed. Elmony seemed to have used all the various colours to make a portrait of Kamiko, though Kat didn't recognise what was used on the hair. Cucumber slices were used for the eyes, with cauliflower shaving used for the pale skin. The dress was green instead of white. Perhaps just to make use of the peas and beans that made it up.

The meat dish by comparison was actually kind of disappointing. It was just finely sliced lamb laid out in a circle with a pot of gravy in the centre of it. *I don't know why that's at the breakfast table though. Then again, demons don't need to eat all that much so I guess having 'breakfast foods' or 'lunch foods' just isn't something they do.* There was a second, similar looking plate on the other side but the 'meat' was white. Didn't look like tofu or chicken and Kat didn't want to ask.

The final centre piece was a large mound of gelatine that had been carved into a flower, with the excess material spread around the outside to give it the appearance of a water lily floating on a lake. It was raised above the rest on a fine glass serving dish that had grooves running through the centre and was dyed red from the gelatine and the light directly above the table.

"Woah. This... this is impressive. How come you went out of your way to do all this?" asked Kat

"Nah this is normal." Grinned Kamiko as she took her seat and waited for the barrier to drop.

Kat however looked over at Elmony for a further answer. "She's right actually. This is the sort of thing I normally do for a meal. I know the rest of the family tend to stick to plants to I do as well, but I like a bit of meat on the regular.

"I took up cooking when I was very young. Mum actually convinced me as a way to get used to handling blades in a safe environment after she found me trying to turn one of the dead branches from the backyard into a... well knowing me at that age it was probably supposed to be a sword or an axe, but at best I could maybe do an awkward looking spear with a questionably sharp tip.

"Anyway, Mum gave me the permission to use a knife when cooking and I jumped at the chance. I wasn't very good at the start, and if I'm honest it took me two decades to start appreciating cooking but now I mostly use it to train control."

"Control?" asked Kat

Kamiko jumped in. "Wait, El, can you please drop the barrier first. I'm happy for you to keep chatting, both of you. But I at least am hungry."

Elmony nodded towards the barrier and her eyes glowed for a split second. The barrier started to groan for just a second before a large crack split it in two and then it shattered. The pieces were quickly

directed to fly out of the door and into the garden. "There you go. Foods up." Said Elmony "Now. About how I use cooking...

"Well, some of it is fancy knife work during preparation, if I'm entirely honest most of that is just repetition. I could do it in my sleep. It's good when you start out don't get me wrong, but the long term benefits are practically non-existent unless you are doing extreme like trying to cut millimetre fine slices of various foods. Which, I did actually attempt for a while and I can soundly say I recommend it to nobody.

"It becomes more a test of patience and frustration management. Not to mention that you need a really good knife to even attempt it. You just... you don't get anywhere training like that. Instead, I recommend people do what I later started."

Elmony gestured out at the table and picked up one of the tomatoes before taking a big bite. It looked just as disturbing as Kat imagined it would. Elmony gave a wry grin and Kamiko stared very intently at her current plate of jelly, making sure to avoid looking towards Elmony at all.

"Carving. That's what I started. I found that... with a bit of creativity and a lot of practice you can bring sculptures to life when prepping food. I like it because I have to balance speed and control. If I want it to look good, I can't just rush through it all, I need to take my time and make sure that my cuts are precise.

"On the other hand though, it's still food. I can't leave it out forever. Sure we have some demonic tricks on the plates that I could make use of to preserve the food in optimal condition but I treat that as sort of cheating and make sure to only use the plates that aren't enchanted.

"That means that if I get too hung up on the details, I risk ruining the meal. That's unacceptable. Granted, wasting food isn't a big sin to me, but it still takes a good deal of effort to get to the plating stage, and if I've spent twenty minutes getting everything done I don't want to repeat that again."

"Wow you did all this in twenty minutes?" said Kat, shock evident in her voice.

Elmony nodded. "Yeah, but remember I'm much more powerful than you are. I can perform plenty of actions in just a few seconds. I might not be able to speed up the cooking, but preparation takes almost no time if I'm willing to overcharge myself with a bit of energy."

"Ah of course" said Kat as she took a seat. Elmony had gravitated towards the meat and tomatoes, and Kat found herself trying the strange pink vegetable? It was somewhat squishy, reminiscent of tough steak, but she found the edges of it melted very quickly in her mouth. It had an overall slightly sour flavour with a hint of a taste somewhat reminiscent of baked apples.

"So, um... how much does a demon need to eat? I keep needing less and less food it seems but I haven't exactly tested it." Asked Kat.

Elmony winced. "Honestly that's something Mum should probably help you figure out. I mean, the obvious answer is it depends. Spending a day sitting in a chair is very different to spending a day fighting for your life. You need more food for one than the other, though I guess if you're doing hard puzzles and extended your time with energy maybe that could take a bit too...

"Anyway, ignore that. The bottom line is, it's all very different. Demons require such vastly different amounts of food even those of the same category like Succubi. For example, I expect I'll eat whatever

food you guys don't. Maybe leave some jelly for the others because it's a favourite in this household of Kamiko doesn't eat it all."

Kamiko just gave a big grin as she ate the next spoonful, before Elmony continued. "Yeah yeah, you're just as bad as the rest of them. I dunno why you guys like it that much. It's good sure, but not that good. Anyway Kat. You really do just need to work it out yourself. I run pretty hot and burn through my food rather quickly for my Rank. Gluttony demons are so much worse. They could eat more food in an hour then even I can in a week.

"You... well I have no idea. Your regeneration might mean you need more food, or it could mean you need less. Really I think you'll have to talk to Mum." Said Elmony with a slight smile.

Well, that's good to know I guess? I suspect I don't eat much but I'll cross that bridge when I come to it. I'm still trying to work out if I like the taste of whatever this pink food is.

Chapter 416: Envious Answers

Kat didn't end up eating too much. Mostly just snacking if she was still using the human perspective of things, but it really felt like a full meal to her at this point and her mind was getting used to her body's desire to eat so much less food.

Kamiko had actually eaten more than she did, which was somewhat surprising to Kat, and she nearly commented on it, but was able to remember that more than a few girls, especially teenage ones were never comfortable talking about food intake for some reason Kat never fully understood.

It really is a weird one to me. Surely if you're so embarrassed about the amount of food you eat it's actually a sign you should be eating less? Even back when I was eating three meals a day I'd answer if asked. Some girls I know though would be happier fighting a guy with a knife then revealing the fact they enjoyed eating, or god forbid, ate like a healthy individual instead of one drastically underweight.

"Ready to go Kat?" asked Kamiko

Kat nodded and they locked arms before being summoned to the next place. When Kat's eyes cleared though. Her arm was no longer intertwined with Kamiko's and the scenery was very different. Instead of the cosy cottage Nira owned. She was instead in a dark stone room with water running down between the cracks in the walls and a flickering light above her head.

It was a little annoying, as it highlighted a table with two chairs on either side of it. One, a nice plush chair made from leather and fine detailing on the arm rests. The other was a plastic folding chair that looked to be a few sizes too small. *Now, I don't consider myself particularly large, but there is no way I can fit on the little chair. Even ignoring the issues my wings will have, it's too anyway small but with them I'd be lucky to have any of my butt on the seat.*

Before Kat could consider swapping to the other side of the table, a creaking from a door she hadn't seen, and was hidden behind the large chair opened. Kat turned and saw... or well 'saw' might be inaccurate when describing this new demon. Before her stood an invisible person. It wasn't clear if they were a man or not.

They had a white turban on their head alongside a pair of Groucho Marx glasses complete with fake noses and moustache. Their lips were outlined with a dark red lipstick that would stand out on anyone let

alone someone with no face. Their neck was adorned with a white scarf that matched with the turban and gave way to a black suit.

And this is where Kat got confused. Looking closely, especially at the tie, Kat was almost certain she could see a small rise around the chest area indicating the presence of breasts, but it was hard to make out as the suit itself was at least two sizes too big for the figure and hung draped off them and bunched around where Kat assumed their wrists must be. Below that they wore long black pants that also looked too large, giving hardly any indication of the figure beneath.

"Hello taller one, you can refer to me as Excalibur, it's not my name, but you won't be hearing that during our session." Said the invisible figure who'd just introduced themselves. Their voice seemed to oscillate between a comfortable baritone and a somewhat hard on the ears soprano. Nothing seemed to help with Kat's quest to determine their gender.

"Um... ok sure Excalibur. Can you tell me where Kamiko is?" asked Kat

"No. I'm here as your questioner while in the Envy domain. You will be answering them as part of your punishment. You will be here one day. You will be required to answer questions." Said Excalibur

Right because that sounds fun. At this point Excalibur took the chair obviously meant for them and sat down before gesturing for Kat to do the same. Kat took one look at the chair and decided she could just stand. *It's not like my legs get weak from standing too long anyway.* So Kat simply grabbed the chair and moved it off to the side.

"Oh? Choosing to stand, are you?" said Excalibur

"Yes" replied Kat not really understanding where things were going or liking how this particular punishment was being performed.

"Oh, you will be one of those demons I suppose. Fine. State your name please" said Excalibur with a voice that indicated it was only saying please to be professional.

"Kat." Replied Kat with a grin on her face. *Wait for it...*

"Full now please" asked Excalibur and Kat could even hear the frown in their voice.

With a much bigger grin that showed her sparkling white teeth Kat replied. "Kat"

Excalibur paused. The silence stretched for a few seconds before Excalibur decided to continue. "What are the names of the people who gave birth to you, as well as their Rank?"

If Kat wasn't smiling already her grin would have appeared full force. *Apparently Envy thinks they can mask their interrogation as a punishment. I think I'm going to use this as a chance to get creative with my answers. Of course, this one is easy because.* "I have no idea."

Excalibur shifted and Kat could hear their invisible hands digging into the leather of the seat they were in. "Please tell me something you know about your parents." Excalibur said between their teeth.

"They died when I was young and I never knew them." Said Kat

Excalibur latched onto this quickly asking, "Ok good. How does that make you feel?"

Kat shrugged slowly, never allowing her gaze to leave the glasses the person across from her was wearing. *They might be invisible, but surely this is uncomfortable for them. If their eyes are actually somewhere else it might be even more so.* "It doesn't make me feel much at all. I'm not sad I never new them, not happy either. I don't think about it, and when people bring it up it's like me informing somebody what I ate for breakfast"

Excalibur now very obviously drummed their fingers along the desk. "Right. Ok, ok... how about... Guardians? Who took care of you when you were younger?"

"Gramps" replied Kat

"Ah? You're Grandfather? Tell me, what Rank was he?" asked Excalibur

Kat shook her head. "I wasn't related to him. He was not my Grandfather."

Kat was paying more attention now, using her regeneration to send energy to her ears constantly without loosing any of her reserves. She could hear the faint clack as Excalibur's teeth clanked together. The tightening of their muscles as Kat's responses started to irk them.

"Right. What was his name?" asked Excalibur

"I never asked him for it. Wasn't important to me." Replied Kat casually walking off to the side, while keeping her eyes fixed on Excalibur. She could hear the light tapping of a foot, which, she realised, wasn't in any shoes for some reason.

"Fine." Spat Excalibur. "Clearly you had a rather boring upbringing from a man who didn't care about you. Good for you. Tell me, growing up, what was your biggest fear?"

Gee that's a good one. What's my biggest fear? Kat paused as she realised she didn't actually know the answer to that one. *Hmm, that's a little odd. Did I never think about this? Well, more recently my fears have been something bad happening to Lily. Well, that's from a little before I became a demon anyway back when she was bullied more.*

*Now that schools out and I'm a demon who can scare the shit out of them it's less of a concern. Hmm, before that though... I don't really know? Wait... snakes? Snakes. Yeah when I was really little that was one. Heck that was... maybe a decade now? I haven't been scared of snakes since I found that little on that tried to bite my finger and just... couldn't. I had a good laugh at that and I don't think I've been scared since. *

I do have some normal fears. Well, I used to. Getting shot at isn't exactly a concern anymore or bombs or what have you. "I guess I have to go with snakes" said Kat

"Oh? How did that develop?" asked Excalibur

"No idea" responded Kat. *It was hard enough for me to even figure out an answer for you and now you want how it developed? Glad I can give such non answers and because I'm forced to tell the truth, know that it is indeed true.*

Excalibur tapped their foot loudly for a few seconds before ask. "How long have you had it?"

"I don't have it anymore." Said Kat with a smirk.

Excalibur sighed. "How did you break that fear?"

Oooh yes I can have fun with this answer. "By getting bitten by a snake." Answered Kat calmly.

"I'm sorry... can you repeat that?" asked Excalibur confusion filling their voice.

"I lost my fear of snakes when one bit me." Replied Kat

Chapter 417: Why is This so Much Fun?

Kat took a spot on the wall and leaned against it, ignore the slightly rough texture that dug into her skin and the water that dripped around her outfit. Her skin was tough enough that it was no major concern but it was still a little annoying. It wasn't like her knees were going to give out but she was starting to get into the role, and Excalibur was making it hard.

The lack of expression is what makes this so difficult. I can see and hear that they haven't really moved in the last ten seconds or so, but that's my limit. I have to try and guess what they look like and what they are thinking without facial expressions to guide me. Still, I'm having a good time.

"Right... um... well" managed Excalibur quietly. It was clear Kat wasn't intended to hear that, and it was only because of the constant flow of energy that she picked it up. Kat was actually a little surprised someone could manage to speak that quietly at all, it wasn't even a whisper.

Hmm, should I mention that I heard that? It would probably shake up poor Excalibur even more but I'm not sure if that's the best option. Maybe keeping silent about how good my hearing is will be more fun.

Finally, Excalibur managed to recover. "I see. That is a rather strange way to overcome your fear is it not?"

Kat stood up to give Excalibur a proper shrug letting her tail snake around and point to her chin as she tilted it along with the motion. *Going for maximum 'I don't care' energy right here.* "Seemed pretty normal to me. I mean, I can see a lot of other people reaching the same conclusions if they were in my shoes."

Kat had to slam energy into her cheek muscles to tighten them and keep herself from smiling as she heard Excalibur's mouth drop open. *I wonder if she thinks I'm crazy. That would be hilarious if I can convince her I'm off my rocker. I wonder how hard that would be to do.*

"So what's your favourite food?" managed Excalibur, not letting themselves get too caught out this time.

"Pears" replied Kat easily.

"I am talking about full meals. How does that change your answer?" asked Excalibur

"It doesn't." replied Kat. *Because taking all factors into consideration pears are just great. You can have a couple of them for a meal if you really need, they take no prep time they taste really nice especially fresh and are shockingly under utilised in other dishes.*

"Right. Of course" said Excalibur "Perhaps you could speak about other fruits you enjoy?"

"I am capable of speaking on that subject" said Kat

Excalibur didn't even resist the urge to slam their face into the desk. Straight down, with a solid... crack? Kat wanted to whip her head around at the noise but fought her gaze to let it slowly drift over. Looking, she could see that the table now had the impression of a nose and the rims of glasses.

Wait hold up. I was just assuming those were something Excalibur was wearing... but if they can punch themselves into a table then... is that their face? I don't quite know. I mean... wait is my nose tough enough to survive that? Probably not... but my regen would fix it? That's the best guess I have.

"Why have you decided to be difficult?" asked Excalibur

Kat looked over and said. "What do you mean? I'm answering your questions as clearly as I can?"

Mwhahahaha I managed to say it! I wasn't quite sure if that would get past the lie limitation, but I was thinking about a couple specific answers that were indeed just that. Exceptionally clear and concise. Misleading? Yes! Clear? Apparently clear enough

Kat heard Excalibur bit into their lip followed by a sharp intake of breath that probably indicated that they had bitten through and cut themselves slightly. Kat just let them take their time before the next question.

"What other fruits do you enjoy?" asked Excalibur

I do wonder what the point of this is? I mean, I get it, Envy is collected information on people, but does my favourite food really play that much into it?

"I enjoy most fruits though I'm not all that fond of bananas for some reason." Replied Kat. *That reason being that I always get the stringy bits caught in my teeth and I HATE that. Taste is mediocre, and while I could eat them, I've got enough other things to avoid it.*

"Good. Good" said Excalibur, and Kat noticed that their breathing had steadied somewhat and their heart had calmed. *Well we can't have that, can we?* "What food do you hate?"

"Nothing." Replied Kat with a soft smile on her lips as if reminiscing. In her head however she was grinning like a madwoman. *Because no food is so bad to actually hate. Sure I dislike things, but hate is a strong word. So glad I know about this loophole. Best yet it's actually something I think about.*

"What food do you dislike the most?" asked Excalibur.

"Did we not talk about the bananas?" Kat shot back.

"Are bananas your most disliked food?" responded Excalibur, not falling for the trap Kat had set. *I suppose they can't all be winners.*

"No it isn't, though a compelling argument could be made." Replied Kat

"What is the food you like the least?" asked Excalibur

*Oh yes I can have fun with this. Of the foods I like which do I like the least? Plain noodles perhaps? Nah that probably falls into 'ambivalent'. Maybe if I hadn't thought about it, I could have said it but now... hmm. Hawaiian pizza? It's alright but it's a waste of ingredients. Doesn't taste bad, but I think I can do

better things with everything. Better toppings, pineapple is tasty on it's own, and ham is mediocre as a meat? Yeah let's go with that.*

"Hawaiian Pizza" replied Kat. *I wonder how that translates actually? Demons don't exactly have 'Hawaii' now do they? This might have been a better answer then I originally thought.*

"What does a place called Hawaii have to do with pizza?" asked Excalibur

YES! IT DOESN'T TRANSLATE. I have no idea why though. Is it because I also have no idea why that's the name? I at least know the name is wrong? Maybe that's what they got? That the name doesn't relate to the ingredients?

"If I'm honest I'd love to know that as well" was the answer Kat vocalised. It led to Excalibur's long sigh afterwards. *Really, you should be getting used to it at this point.*

"What about it don't you like?" asked Excalibur

Hmm, I'm not sure I want to give my real answer. That actually reveals a good deal of information about me. That I can cook, and that I tricked them a bit with the previous question. Could I just say the taste? I mean that is part of the reason even if it's not the real reason? Wait... 'what about it don't you like' shit. I actually still consider it something I 'like'. Is there anything I can say I don't like other than how it uses ingredients?

How about... Wait, I can just avoid the question somewhat. "The cheese could be better" answered Kat. *Because it really can be. Melted cheese just isn't as good as cheese that has yet to be melted. It's a subtle dif- Ok need to not get lost in that thought.*

To Kat's shock, Excalibur actually nodded, as if agreeing with her. Kat even heard their heartbeat slow just the slightest amount alongside their muscles relaxing. *Holy shit they agree with me? Maybe I should give them a real answer just for that. Most people don't see the difference.*

"You named Hawaiian pizza there. Are there other kinds of Pizza you do enjoy?" asked Excalibur.

Right. Proper answer time. "Yes actually, quite a few. I'm willing have most things on top of pizza, but they aren't all great. I favour simple pizzas that stick to a coherent flavour profile. Peperoni and cheese is good, and beef and onion can be good as well. Meatlovers tends to feel a bit overdone."

Excalibur tapped their foot quietly. Kat liked to think it was because they were trying to figure out why exactly she'd given a longer answer, but Kat couldn't know that for sure.

"Ah, sorry, but I've just realised I forgot a particular question" said Excalibur, but it ran slightly hollow to Kat's ears. Just slightly. "You mentioned your parents died? How did that happen?"

Kat decided to let her smirk come through for this answer. "Well, I never asked, and it's not something I ever confirmed. I've heard a few different versions of the story, but I've no idea how close any are to the truth."

Mostly because I just took Gramps' word for it and that was enough for me. I'm glad I could stretch the truth using the bullies sad attempts to get to me by making how horrible fates for my parents.

Chapter 418: Land of Fluff

While Kat's interview was going on in the room next door, and mostly consisted of Kat trying to cause as much chaos and heartache for the questioner as possible, Kamiko's was taking a very different route.

What neither had realised, is that both of them had been investigated slightly during their first three days of their punishments. This led to them trying to set up the most 'ideal' environment to get information out of them. It was... not working all that well for them when it came to Kat, but Envy felt somewhat justified because she just couldn't find much on her, thinking she was a very private person.

Kamiko on the other hand, was a somewhat known quantity after they found her schooling records. So, her room was drastically different. Instead of a dark dungeon the room was lit perfectly, with the whole ceiling essentially being one giant, if soft on the eyes, light. There was an air conditioning unit pumping cool air around to keep the temperature chilled as well.

When Kamiko opened her eyes and found Kat missing from her arm, she panicked just long enough to examine the room before letting the scenery calm her. The walls were looked like they were made out of white fur and blended nicely with the ceiling lights. Just looking at it made Kamiko feel warm and fuzzy on the inside.

The door to exit her room was actually behind her, not that she noticed, because on her side was a large number of beanbags of various sizes. They were a mix of colours, yellows and reds and blues and greens. Most of them just on each, but they were piled onto each other in the edges of the room leaving only a few near Kamiko by themselves.

A nice blue one that seemed to be a little more stable than the rest seemed to call to Kamiko but it wasn't time to sit down just yet. Across from her was a small coffee table with sweets on it, with a person standing behind. Unlike Excalibur who had gone out of their way to hide information from Kat, this person further reinforced the feeling of the room.

They looked like a little old lady, though with less wrinkles. They were short, very short. Currently they were sitting down on the other side of the coffee table on their knees, but even at full height they'd make it no higher than Kamiko's elbows. To add to the look she was wearing what looked to be a very worn light pink shirt with flowers on it.

This combined with her large glasses that highlighted her grey eyes that gleamed with intelligence and wisdom to match her grey hair that had been tied back into a bun using a pair of chopsticks with more flowers on them gave the impression of a very calm person.

"Um... where am I? Where's Kat?" asked Kamiko, still somewhat on edge despite the calming atmosphere.

"She's just hanging out with someone else dear. I wanted to get to know you a bit first. You don't have to answer my questions while you're here but it would be nice. You can call me Bachan, if you want, or use my name, which is Meridith." Said Meridith.

Kamiko flinched slightly at the similar name. *Um... do I just go with Bachan? I don't want to be rude... but she offered... but she gave me her real name... but it's so similar to HER name that I'm not sure I can manage that...*

"Um... if I can call you Bachan that would be nice." Mumbled Kamiko as she slipped onto the blue beanbag she was eyeing earlier. She sunk down into it easily.

"It's no problem deary. Would you like some tea?" asked Bachan pulling out a teapot from seemingly nowhere. *Wow! She must have a pocket dimension! Those are super useful and somewhat rare. Well, no, a lot of high rankers get them, but still they are normally pretty tiny. Unless... nah I don't think that's her weapon or part of her outfit.*

Kamiko nodded happily and Bachan pulled out two cups before pouring tea into both. Kamiko was about to sit up so that she could grab her cup, it floated over to her while surrounded in a faint blue light. Taking the come gently, Kamiko was happily surprised to find it wasn't hot. Taking a small sip helped her identify that it was cold brew tea and her smile grew.

"Do you like the tea dear?" asked Bachan

"Yeah it's great! Most people who've offered don't know, or sometimes even forget that I have issues with hot drinks" said Kamiko with a smile.

"Oh? What about hot foods?" asked Bachan 'innocently'

Kamiko raised a hand and flattened it out before waving her fingers up in down in a 'sort of' gesture. "It's... a little more complicated then drinks for some reason. They really don't agree with me and I can't stand them. Food though... it's a bit of a mixed bag. I still don't like it too hot, but letting things cool down a bit is normally fine in ways that hot drinks just aren't.

"Even room temperature drinks are a little inconvenient. I actually learnt how to release my demonic fire into my mouth so I can chill them without offending people. It... it took me a while to learn how to do it, but I think it's been super worth it" said Kamiko. She opened her mouth up slightly to show her small pink tongue which started to burn with a slightly brighter pink fire.

Bachan smiled. "That's a rather unique skill you know. Most people can't, or I suppose it's better to say, they don't bother to learn, how to release their fire inside of them. It's actually really useful. With some practice you could freeze poison in your veins or in your stomach" said Bachan.

Kamiko blushed and hid her face with her teacup as she smiled. Bachan's eyes flashed at this, but that was overlooked by Kamiko. "Well... I don't know about that. I mean, maybe I guess... but I think the poison resistance I'm going to keep building up alongside the poison in my nails makes that skill a little redundant..."

"Nonsense deary" said Bachan. "I'm sure your mother could teach you how to do it properly, and what nice tricks you can pull off with it."

Kamiko thought for a second, before answering with. "Is it like how Mum said I might be able to use it to cool myself down? I don't remember it too much, the conversation that is. I think I was complaining about how hot it was outside?"

Bachan shrugged and asked. "I can't be sure deary. Still, your mother sounds like a smart person. What Rank is she?"

"Oh she's Rank 5. It's super cool. She's one of the highest Rank Medical faction members in the whole Hub. I don't think she's the strongest, but she does really well for herself. She doesn't need to work so hard anymore if she didn't want to be she likes the job. I do wish she was around a little more sometimes, but my sisters like to make sure I'm not home alone so normally it doesn't bother me." Said Kamiko

"That sounds very nice deary. My family has drifted apart over the years. Even for a demon I'm getting on in years and I suppose it was bound to happen. We meet up of course, but it isn't quite the same." Said Bachan.

Kamiko nodded while taking a sip of tea. Not the best idea, but she somehow managed to avoid spilling anything. "Yeah, it's sometimes hard when we meet my Grandmas and Grandpas. They just don't quite get it the way the rest of us seem to. They like to bring up HER and make fun of Elmony. It's rude, and we don't spend time with them that maybe we should because of it. I mean, they're still nice to me, and I love them, but for the relatives liked my sister it's as if this new version of her is a personal offence to them...

"And it's even worse for the ones that DON'T like her. They seem to think she's one day away from becoming some terrible monster, all the worst traits from my sister and the old Elmony back before she lost everything. And... she just isn't like that Bachan. It's really sad to see her treated that way. They don't do it when Mum is around because she got sick of it before I was born and started beating them up... but they do it when she isn't or they think she isn't paying attention."

Bachan gave a lengthy sigh before saying. "Yes sadly family can be like that. I've got an old cousin that's still around that I don't like. They could never get over the fact I didn't marry you know. Would you like some more tea?"

"Yes please" said Kamiko as she held out her cup and let it leave her fingers under Bachan's power.

Chapter 419: Family History

Once Kamiko's cup was returned, Bachan asked Kamiko "So, how are things with your sisters overall?"

Kamiko tried to remain happy despite the question but her wings were fidgeting in the chair. "I love my sisters... though I guess if push comes to shove I love some more than others."

Bachan smiled pleasantly. "I can see that frown you're trying to hide. Would you like to talk about it? They say a burden shared is a burden halved. I promise I won't speak about this to anyone else." Is what she said. Knowing of course that everything was being recorded.

Kamiko however, didn't really consider her family drama to be all that valuable or worth recording, so it didn't occur to her to even question the wording. "I... I guess. I mean... first though I do want to mention the good things.

"Other than Mum and Dad of course, Elmony is cool. She likes to cook for us, and probably lets us younger sisters get away with more than we should if Mum isn't home. Her cooking is especially nice but... she can be a bit distant sometimes. I think it's a combination of how much older she is, the fact that she still blames herself for Meridthna's issues and because she has some guilt over not quite her past.

"Even I can feel the age between us sometimes. Personally, I think Mum wanted to have kids in lots of two's so that we'd all have 'a sister' and then the rest as well. It just doesn't make too much sense to me otherwise because our ages are not spread out evenly in the slightest. Um... don't repeat this part but Elmony and Meridthna have like... fifty years at least on the triplets. Elmony's really cagey with her age. I think it's because she doesn't know how old to count herself, but nevermind that.

"The other nice siblings are the triplets. Back to the whole 'in two's' idea I think my mum has, I suspect she decided that because she had three at once that counted for that... generation? I guess? Of sisters. They are much closer to each other than anyone else, but I guess that's understandable. I get a little annoyed at them sometimes because they try to spread their time out with me so usually at least one of them is around...

"But they aren't the same people! I mean... they say that all the time, but I'm not actually sure if they believe it themselves. They have a really bad habit of cycling through each other, and occasionally if one needs to skip another covers for it but... I remember once when Kerra was painting some particularly impressive art... and don't get me wrong it was amazing...

"But I didn't see her basically at all outside of meal times for two months. When they overheard that, instead of Kerra making a bit of time for me, Erra and Merrra made more time for me. Which, was lovely and I enjoyed that time... but it still didn't change the fact I hadn't spent time with Kerra you know?"

Kamiko took in deep breaths and chugged half of the glass of tea at once. She realised that she was starting to get worked up. "Sorry Bachan. I said I was going to talk about the nice things first but I'm already saying bad things. The triplets really are all lovely, and even though Elmony sometimes feels like a second Mum I'm closest with them."

"It's ok dear" said Bachan calmly. "Do you want some more tea? You drunk quite a lot there."

Kamiko blushed but nodded failing to hide her smile. *She's rather nice. Is this why Mum says we should talk to a therapist from medical occasionally? I... I never really thought I needed it. I'm happy most of the time, and my family is great... Oh and I have a new friend Kat... but... I feel lighter for some reason. Guess Mum is always right.*

When Kamiko had her cup back she took a brief sip before continuing to speak. "Sorry, I started skipping around a bunch. Um, I guess I'll say a bit about Meridthna? She... she's sort of left the family. I mean, I say sort of. In most ways she has, and I know that, and we don't really see her...

"But I've also seen some photos in an old album. They are from when everyone was born er well, everyone except Elmony but... you know?" Kamiko just waved that one away and Bachan nodded like she understood. Perhaps she did. "Anyway, Meridthna was in all of them. Not just her own, but she was around for the triplets and for me and Aslena as well...

"So... I find it hard to believe that she really cares so little for us, or hates us, or, or doesn't want to be around. I mean, based on some of things Mum and Dad say, I'm not sure either of them would have told her without being asked when we were getting born but... without fail she's always there.

"So I do wonder about that I guess. Like... why does everyone just avoid talking about her? The little bits and pieces I do have are from small things I've collected but even then I seem to still know more

than anyone else except those around at the time. Which I think is weird considering how much older the triplets are than me and Aslena."

Bachan took a sip of tea. "Meridthan could have a memory altering power?"

Kamiko opened her mouth to reject it, but paused. *I mean... she could? Maybe? But why doesn't it effect me? Maybe it's because she hasn't met me since I made those memories? That doesn't explain why she isn't around though. Plus if it is memory manipulation why continue to show up for her sisters' birth? If it ISN'T her power why doesn't she visit then? Plus our family doesn't have a history of them...*

"I don't think that's it Bachan. It just doesn't really make sense. Too many holes." Said Kamiko.

Bachan shrugged. "I was just throwing things out there to get you to think Kamiko. I don't know as much as you, and if you think it's unlikely you're probably right."

Kamiko took a sip of tea before she elaborated. It wasn't ask for but she felt she should. "It's just... if she was doing it, what's the point? If she was doing it to keep us apart and not look for her why visit for important things? If someone else is doing it why isn't she around? Nothing really quite adds up looking at it that way."

Bachan nodded. "Yes I see what you mean. I suppose it could be more complicated but it isn't as though your family is weak, from what you've told me"

Kamiko smiled and nodded, missing the slight slip up from Bachan, just happy to have this wise person agree with her. She didn't want to think memory abilities were involved. That just caused things to get messy instantly, and ones that worked on demons were really rare, especially ones as powerful as her mother.

"Well, um... now that that's covered, I guess we can talk a little about the triplets? I know I sort of did that already but now I'm just going down in age and I want to... if that's ok?" asked Kamiko hesitantly.

Bachan looked Kamiko in the eyes with a soft smile. "Don't worry dear. You can speak about what you want. I might give you questions and prod you along the way, but if you want to say something don't be afraid."

"Thanks Bachan." Said Kamiko. "Well, like I said, the triplets feel the most like older sisters. Or perhaps feel the most like one older sister with three faces? No I guess that's still wrong because they have the same face... hmm, that is weird phrasing it. Anyway, they act fairly differently most of the time...

"But when it comes to family and certain other things like food, you can hardly tell one from the other. Dress them all up in identical clothing and put a banquet in front of them, and all of them will go straight for the same dishes. Lock them in a room with me, and... well I probably could do it... not to brag but I can tell them apart the best out of everyone except themselves.

"Elmony would struggle. Mum might be able to do figure it out, but she'd need to actually think about it and use some powers. The point is, despite their varied interests, pretty much everything outside of their focus is so similar. That does mean though, that I think they're all awesome. They love hugs, and spend plenty of time with me when they aren't busy. Erra will read me books sometimes and Kerra will let me watch her paint. They don't let the others do that. I of course, think that's great. Merra... well she

is a little different. She'll take as many interested parties she can grab for her sports endeavours, but I think she just wants more training. So I dunno if it's the same..."

Chapter 420: Aslena though

Kamiko let the words drift off again. Thinking about the triplets can be such a headache sometimes. You never know when you need to consider 'the triplets' or 'Erra, Merra, and Kerra' but maybe I should move on... talking it out has helped so far, so maybe I should talk about the real 'her'

Bachan continued to drink tea in the background. She could see the wheels turning inside of the girl's head and knew she'd get more information soon. They'd researched this, the light touch was already yielding them so much information and there was no reason to stop now. Bachan would happily give the girl five, ten, hell even twenty minutes. She was well ahead of projected estimates in terms of valuable information already and it seemed like it would only get better.

And it did.

"I'd like to talk about Aslena." Said Kamiko lowering her tea down to her lip, as if to give Bachan a full view of her.

"You don't have to do this if you don't want to deary," said Bachan "we can still talk about your other family members."

"No, no. I think... I think this will be good for me you know?" said Kamiko *NOVELNext.com*

Bachan just waited for Kamiko to take a sip. Then a second. Then a third, alongside a deep breath as if she wanted to unload all her problems without breathing. "Right so, not to be too dramatic about it but I think it all started when she was born. I wasn't around for it obviously and I don't hear about it too much. What is important, is that she's only three years older than me.

"That's like... one gestation period for someone as strong as my mother. Like... we could not be born any closer then that unless we were twins. Anyway, she was always older then me, but young enough for me to not realise she had so many years on me when we were younger. Once I could think I started to treat her as someone just a tiny bit older than me.

"She very quickly encouraged that behaviour... and then took ruthless joy in proving how much smarter then me she was. It... it's not really true. I mean, she was three years older then me, and if she was actually smarter then I was at three I doubt she is now. She actually made sure of that.

"So, she sets up contests really. Of strength, sometimes, but mostly intelligence. It was because I'd just say how much bigger then me she was when it came to strength and that it was unfair. I mean, it was, but I didn't really know that. I kept signing up for the puzzles she'd give me.

"Now... I think I was two? Maybe 3? I'm sure she was doing it younger then that, but I don't remember when I started remembering? Does that make sense? Anyway, as long as I can remember then I guess. She was challenging me to prove how much better she was. The triplets caught on the fastest. They wouldn't stand for it. They'd make us do cooperative things, which Aslena hated, or just separate us to have fun.

"Elmony was somewhat the same, but she'd let Aslena get in a game or two. I don't begrudge her for that. As I said, I think it really pushed me in the end, but it wasn't fun. She'd let Aslena challenge me, win, gloat for a while, and then force us to move along. Entertain us with cooking food, or watching recordings or something. I'm not sure if Elmony knew how much I was already disliking Aslena but... she's my sister you know? I didn't want to cause any problems really.

"Then there was Mum and Dad. Mum wasn't around much in my early memories. I know she was around before, I can sort of tell, but toddler years she wasn't. I suspect it was her trying to catch up with work. She'd been light on it since likely before Aslena was born and she has a lot of responsibilities. She was probably making up the time she'd spent caring for us at the start.

"The problem with this... is Dad just let her get away with it when it was his turn to watch us. I think it was a holdover from the other kids. Apparently they were terrors. Elmony and Meridthna tearing up the garden with spars, the triplets, mostly one in particular, painting the walls with the other breaking things using them as sporting goods...

"So when Dad saw us engaging in some 'friendly'" Kamiko could feel the word burning on her tongue, as if it was close enough to a lie to be withheld, but she knew that's what her dad thought. "he just let it go on. No trouble at all. Just a little playing between kids. Doesn't matter that the older one, twice the age or more depending on when it was, was just... just celebrating there greatness."

Kamiko took a long drink of tea and another deep breath. Bachan almost jumped in, to keep things calm, but could see Kamiko, despite all the frustration in her movements, was still keeping herself together well. "Now, the next round of problems came when schooling started. Now, Aslena was smart. I'm not going to deny that. She wasn't as smart as she thought she was, but certainly still better than average.

"And she wanted to take the advanced path. Learn not just the basics but whatever she'd need to be a designer. This was to get her a job before her first contract, and so that she could claim employment with the system and avoid a lot of missions. Oh don't get me wrong, she does enjoy designing, but avoiding missions was a prestige she craved.

"I of course, actually wanted to do a few contracts. I mean, it seems really cool, you get to meet a bunch of people, and explore new worlds and maybe even get a new friend. Granted I've had some trouble with that last one but the main thing is that it's what I wanted.

"Despite this, every day more or less, for years and years Aslena just goes on and on about how much better she is because she got into that prestigious design track. Never mind she failed to earn the scholarship, and never mind that I was able to pass out of classes a year early, and even then I never did it earlier because I didn't know it was possible.

"Still though, I'm the dumber of the two. She did it all the time. Mostly as veiled insults you know. 'Oh what were your test results?' and 'Still banking on contracts like an imp?' or the best was 'People will actually appreciate my work when they look back. You'll just be a basic handyman never to be remembered no matter how many people you help' which... now that I'm older I can see how silly they were but...

"It hurts you know? I just can't understand why she was so needlessly hurtful about it. I think the only compliments I've ever gotten are when she's forced me to model things for her." Finished Kamiko

before taking a deep breath. She had been breathing through the tirade of course, but not as much as she likely should.

"I see." Said Bachan. "Would you like me to say anything? People normally just like getting that sort of thing off their chest, but some like to hear my own thoughts. I don't want to make you uncomfortable."

"It's alright Bachan. You don't have to say anything." Said Kamiko

"But now I think I will." Said Bachan.

Kamiko shook her head. "No it's really fine. If I didn't have a friend now maybe I'd agree with you, but it was just nice to rant about her you know? I don't really bring it up with my family because it's just her, and I don't want it to cause another Meridithna situation. I know of things got bad for her she'd just move out.

"I certainly don't want to be responsible for that. The triplets might not care, but I bet Mum and Dad would feel bad, and maybe annoyed at me? Elmony would definitely feel bad. Blame herself for letting it happen again, even though she hasn't done anything wrong."

Bachan took a light sip of tea and said, "Well, I'm not sure if they're all perfectly blameless. Surely the schooling Aslena went through would have also included lessons on etiquette in the fashion world? If not that then at least the teachers would have forwarded some complaints?"

Kamiko nodded. "Yes actually there were a few. Mostly boiled down to not enough evidence though. Didn't help that both parties kept their words vague like. 'I don't know why she's this upset' or 'Things aren't quite what they look like' the standards you know? Other side was like that too, so I'd guess that they were all fighting Aslena included, but normally she's good enough to not let herself get carried away."