

DEMONS 421

Chapter 421: Back with Kat

Kat really had no idea how things got so out of control. What with the fire in the corner, the broken desk, and the fact that she'd been juggling for the last twenty minutes. Perhaps though, that's skipping a few things.

While Kamiko was enjoying the ability to vent about her families members to someone that she assumed would never care and will never meet them, Kat was still hanging out with Excalibur... except things were starting to get strange. After she'd finished explaining her lack of interest in her parents' death, Excalibur had just sighed lightly put their face back down on the table as if it held the secrets of the universe, and one need only stare long enough to find them.

As she was waiting for the next question. Three green rubber balls appeared in front of her face. Kat caught them easily. Her reflexes were good enough for something like this back when she was human, her demonic reflexes were fast enough to catch them before they even dropped past her chin.

So, Kat did what any reasonable demon in her place would do. She gave them a couple light squeezes to determine they were rubber balls with a bit of weight to them, and started to juggle. It wasn't that hard. She'd been shown the motions during a special phys ed class once upon a time. Really though, it was a matter of abusing her increased speed of thought and extreme reflexes to make sure she caught them.

When Excalibur looked up, after preparing themselves mentally, they did not expect Kat to be doing anything other than smiling at her obnoxiously, with that slight sneer, abusing her additional height to look down at them. "Ok where did you get those" left their mouth before Excalibur could even think about the phrasing of the question or if they actually wanted to know.

"I've got no idea." Said Kat, not really knowing how else to spin it. *I mean, they just appeared, and it's not like I can mislead him to much all things consider. I don't want to imply I hid them on me, because that's just kinda weird, and I really don't know how else I would.*

"Do you have a pocket dimension ability, or hammerspace, or anything else of that nature?" asked Excalibur

Well I guess that answers the 'how else' question. Is... is that a common thing? Does demonic attire count? "Unless you count Demonic Attire then, no I don't." was the best Kat really had for this one. It's not like there was much to mislead here, she was just as confused. Of course, Kat wasn't going to use that as an excuse to stop smirking at the poor guy across from her.

Excalibur groaned, and Kat watched as their arms moved up and slight indentations appeared in their turban. *Probably trying to massage their temple? Yeah looks about the right spot. That is if they're humanoid. I guess I've just been assuming because it looks like they are, but they could look like some horrifying monster when visible.*

"This is my life now," murmured Excalibur "Apparently this is just how it's going to be. I mean really, why couldn't this be easy?"

Kat didn't know how to answer him. Someone else did though as her hair promptly caught fire. *Well that's weird. What is that even burning? My hair is fireproof so it's not like it can burn that for fuel, and my skin is more than equipped to deal with a bit of fire. Seriously what's the point?*

Excalibur slammed their head back into the desk and Kat decided, that might have in fact been the point. "Right." Said Excalibur. It clearly wasn't right. Nothing about this was 'right' for them. They didn't even bother to sit up just letting their face rest on the desk.

"Are you taking any damage from the fire?" asked Excalibur

"No. Not sure if it's real fire though, it isn't like it can burn my hair for fuel." Replied Kat

Excalibur noticeably stilled. Kat listened as their mouth opened and closed several times and could practically hear the gears turning inside their head as they realised the truth of Kat's statement. "That. That is an excellent point I hadn't considered."

Apparently there was too much considering and not enough going on though, because Excalibur's chair promptly caught fire. Excalibur leapt up and hurled it into the corner before picking up the desk and slamming that over the flaming pieces of chair and snapping it in half. Excalibur's coat was thrown off onto the while and doused by the water there while Excalibur themselves took in deep breaths.

Ok well... that seems a little excessive. None the less, Kat just kept up her juggling. It was actually a good way to train her reflexes, and peripheral vision, even if she didn't really have that anymore the same way she used to. Swapping to one hand Kat held the other one out as if asking for something. Her wish was granted in the form of a second set of balls. They were red this time.

Nice. "Thanks" whispered Kat under her breath. Mostly so that Excalibur wouldn't hear. Kat started with both hands at her side, juggling them in separate circles. As she got used to it and Excalibur continued their panic attack, Kat moved the balls closer to the centre until they started overlapping slightly. She worked hard to ensure that none of the balls would collide in mid-air, even in the space they shared in the centre.

This was actually harder than you'd think, as she needed to ensure that her hands never fell into the same rhythm. Left and right needed to be offset slightly, and Kat found herself always drifting slightly trying to line them up if her focus started to wander. *This isn't good. If Excalibur asks me a question, I might not be able to answer while doing this.*

While Kat was focused on juggling Excalibur was trying to get their breathing under control. Unlike Kat's experience, it was less than pleasant. They were not resistant to fire the same way Kat was and it BURNED. Still, Excalibur was a trained demon who'd been on plenty of missions, if ones lacking in fire.

So, they managed to calm themselves... mostly. Their breathing was steady and they weren't being hounded anymore but there was no desire to continue the questioning. That was until a bucket of water got dunked on their head. That seemed answer enough for Excalibur to continue before something else happened, a warning shot.

"Fine. Fine, I see how this is going." Growled Excalibur, no longer even trying to keep their voice down or the emotions hidden. "Kat, tell me. How did you score during your schooling?"

"I'm afraid I'm going to need you to elaborate" replied Kat. *Because even if I wasn't messing with you that was a bit vague.*

"Scores. How highly did you score in school?" asked Excalibur

"Compared to what exactly? The rest of the school? The rest of the area I lived in? Are we talking general feel from how easy the coursework was or purely what was handed in?" asked Kat

"You know what? I don't care. You tell me whatever you want!" responded Excalibur.

*That's a bit broad mate. I guess I can lie then? I was told to tell him whatever I want, and I WANT to tell him I'm the best there ever was. Not sure I can get away with it though. It isn't true. I'd have to say something like 'to answer you, I respond with...' or something stupid to avoid the whole lying issue.

I don't think 'whatever I want to say' is actually something I can run with too much. Perhaps I say 'some people were disappointed with my high scores' because the bullies were certainly not happy when I scored better than them. Let it imply I have a bad relationship with Gramps? Maybe the teachers? That could work, because if they ask my opinion on him I can say honestly he's the best!*

"Well, you know how it is. I scored well and there were a few people who weren't happy with me because of that." Explained Kat.

Excalibur was so out of it at this point they didn't even pick up the manipulation. They just smiled, or well, Kat assumed that's what happened as she listened to the muscle movements anyway. "Great kid. You want to name any names of these people who were displeased?"

"No of course not. That would be terribly rude to them." Said Kat in the most innocent cutesy voice she could manage. *That sounded horrible though. My vocal cords are not built for that, I can almost feel them healing from that stunt. Maybe I should have tried to sound like Sylvie. She's cute but she doesn't sound like she swallowed a squeaky toy.*

"Isn't it more rude to put you down for actually succeeding?" asked Excalibur

"It's a matter of perspective really" replied Kat.

Chapter 422: Kat and Kamiko are Both Having Fun in Their Own Ways.

While Kat was watching Excalibur freak out more a thought occurred to her. *Isn't this like the textbook definition of 'I'm not trapped in here with you, you're trapped in here with me'? I never thought I'd actually have a chance to say it... well I guess I still don't because the moment has passed.

Should I try aiming for it in the future? I guess I'll need someone trying to trap me somewhere first. It's not like that happens all the time. Kat looked at Excalibur who'd just taken up refuge against the opposite wall.

You know. It has now occurred to me that this much chaos shouldn't be so scarring. I mean, I've fought actual monsters and people that have been trying to kill me. Multiple times as a point of fact. How does a slightly strange conversation manage to get so far under Excalibur's skin.

Is it because I personally am scary? Like... they're scared they might take it to far and I'll lash out? That doesn't seem like it... they were still reacted to everything like they were surprises or problems, not really fear until after the fire and the juggling balls.

Seriously. I just don't understand what there is to be scared off, or even annoyed with once you've been out in the field. Does that mean I'm causing trouble for a kid? No that also doesn't make a lot of sense. They're not too short so it's a least a teenager...*

Though based on my experiences at school if I was annoying Excalibur that much and they were a teenager... or really just younger then twenty-five. Kat did not think specifically about her 9th grade History teacher... it was the one from grade 10. *Then there should be a lot more swearing and I'm just not seeing.*

Back with Kamiko and Bachan

While Kat was trying to work out if it was actually ok to continue harassing Excalibur despite the obvious encouragement from the others, Kamiko was being asked about her parents. "Now, you... you had a lot to say about Aslena. Would you like to talk about your dad? You mentioned him a few times but didn't really elaborate" Asked Bachan

"Well, I suppose I can. The first and most obvious thing that you need to know about Dad is that he's kind of a coward. Not in the traditional way, he'd fight a dragon if he felt like he needed to, or cut down a whole army by himself. I know for a fact he actually did the second one TWICE.

"However, when it comes to people he likes, he just... he's such a doormat you know?" Bachan actually shook her head at this. This wasn't just a ploy for information she actually had no idea what Kamiko was talking about. Seeing Bachan radiating confusion Kamiko smiled at the chance to explain even more.

"Right so...

"What it comes down to is priorities I guess? Except not really. If I asked Dad for all of the money he had. He'd just hand it over to me. Well, maybe not, he'd probably laugh first, and then when I convinced him I was serious I'd get the money.

"Luckily for the family finances, most of his money actually goes to Mum. It's not like Dad is unaware of how bad he is with things like that, so... he just doesn't try. Anyway, back on topic. Dad is willing to forgive SO many things. Sure he'll still report them to Mum, and that's when you get in trouble but he'll just let things go.

"Drawing on the walls? That's fine. Kicking a ball in the backyard and breaking the windows? No problem. Asking for a hundred books for her own personal library? Well, that one was actually run by Mum first, but not because Dad wouldn't have agreed. Is... is this making sense?"

Bachan nodded despite the confusion almost visibly radiating from her at this point. She was clearly struggling to wrap her head around the fact that people like that could actually exist. This was the Envy faction after all. They were all at least a little selfish, even when it came to family. "I... well I'm hearing you at least" managed Bachan.

Kamiko nodded to hide the slight twitch in her eye and said, "That's ok, my Dad is a pretty confusing guy. Anyway. The point is, he's a bit of a coward and a doormat. He will let us get away with anything. That's why when it comes to parenting, he's kinda bad?"

"He never stopped Aslena's attempts to belittle me because that meant telling her she was wrong, and that certainly wasn't going to happen, and I, when I was younger, just wanted to keep up with her so I wasn't going to complain. Even once I figured it out, the response I got was 'Are you sure? You've enjoyed those challenges for years' from Dad, which... no I didn't. Sorry we already covered Aslena and I'm repeating things.

"Anyway, that's what Dad does. Oh, and also he's weaker than Mum. It's not so important, but it is surprising. As strong as he is for a Rank 5, Mum is just better, despite all the healing abilities she has that should drag her down. Elmony thinks it's because he just doesn't have any killer instinct. I'm not even sure what kind of aura he has.

"The triplets think he must have a really weak aura, or none at all. I do wonder though. I've never seen him angry but I've heard some stories about things he's done on Contracts and I just can't imagine him being as weak as he seems to be. Maybe even losing to Mum is just another part of being a doormat."

"I'm really not sure deary. What about your mother?" asked Bachan.

"Mum's pretty great. A little on the busy side, but I like having her around. She does like to mess around with us and cause a bit of embarrassment which I don't get caught up in as much as my sisters do. I think it's because she knows I'm less fond of it than the others. Sure I like spending time with her but sometimes it's a little much.

"I think, despite how busy she is, she's only around slightly less than I'd wish you know? I love her, but I love her in small doses. I can keep up with them and enjoy them greatly, but if I was locked in a room with Mum for a week I'd probably lose a good deal of sanity. I would have thought I'd build up a resistance over the years but it's not something that seems to have happened."

Bachan took in a sip of tea. "That's an interesting perspective to have of a mother."

*Is it really? I've not really known that many other families intimately enough to take a proper guess. I've hardly seen the triplets' friends' parents, and I've not got friends of my own to find out. Well, I have Kat but she doesn't count because she has no parents. ... Why do I feel like a bad person for saying that?

It's TRUE and KAT doesn't care. She told me herself it wasn't a big deal and that it doesn't bother her. She can't lie just like other demons... unless she can lie because she was human? Nah she's a demon now... but if she could lie about it... I guess she could just lie and say she can't lie?*

Hey D.E.M.O.N.S do you know if people like Kat can lie?

User Kat has the full limitations and benefits of a normal demon at this point. Other Users in a similar situation, including User Kat, usually possess above average strength and rare abilities but it is not a guarantee. User Kat could lie before the transformation started. Exact details of when she lost the ability to lie will need to come from User Kat.

Thanks D.E.M.O.N.S that was actually nice of you to confirm. Guess I don't have to be worried about that in particular. Now... what was I doing? Oh right answering Bachan. "I'm not sure I would say it's interesting... I mean it just sort of is? I've not got a lot of references." Said Kamiko

"Well what about your friend Kat? Does she have a similar relationship with her parents?" asked Bachan.

Kamiko's eyes started to spin very slightly but she pushed her energy forward to freeze them in place.

Oh no you don't eyes. I'm not giving away how much that question affected me. I may be willing to air my family drama to Envy because I know that they don't care and I didn't say anything too incriminating anyway...

Well except for Aslena but she can suck it. Kat though, I'm not going to just rat her out... except she's probably in the same position, and I bet that she'd just straight up tell them. So... I guess it's fine?

"Well, Kat's parents are dead so I really don't know." Said Kamiko

Chapter 423: Three Times the Trouble

Before Kat could really come up with a suitable stance to take now that she'd discovered that she was scaring Excalibur way more than it seemed possibly a bright light surrounded her for a second, causing her muscles to tense. The world slowed as her eyes tried to adjust and her muscles tightened. Kat could feel the power flowing around her body just waiting for something to happen.

Then the light stopped and Kat felt a presence behind her. Hands bursting into flames Kat dragged her body around to face whatever had appeared to greet her so suddenly, letting her tail stay in place to it could coil up to spring. Instead of an enemy though, Kat saw Kamiko, eyes wide and starting to turn to her.

Kat cursed internally. *Ok why the heck is Kamiko here?*

 And took a few instants to realise that she was actually in front of Kamiko's house. *Shit I've got too much momentum now. Ok... I can... fly up maybe?* Kat tried to drag her demonic energy away from her arms and tail while pushing more into her legs and wings. Before Kat could get to close to striking Kamiko she bent her legs lightly and jumped with a great flap of her wings.

Kamiko's outfit was blown back by the sudden disturbance in the wind but was able to keep her face relatively clear. Years of living with more powerful sisters and surprising them on the odd occasion had made this something she was not entirely unfamiliar with. On Kat's end though, she let the momentum bleed out of her as she spun in the air, letting her body follow the strike she'd planned.

Once done stabilising herself and missing about five percent of her energy, which Kat found to be a somewhat surprising amount, Kat hovered in place and yelled. "Sorry about that!"

"No problem Kat, I'm actually a little used to it. I can tell you didn't actually plan to follow through with your attack and it was all instinct. It's just a feeling I have from living with my family" replied Kamiko.

"Um... is that normal?" asked Kat not sure she wanted to know the answer.

Kamiko shrugged. "I have no idea, I mean... I'd guess so? Have it happen enough time I guess you can get a feel for it. So I suppose it depends on how many people are in your family and how many of them are more powerful than you. Elmony probably doesn't have that skill, the triplets might not either, but I'll leave the jury out on that one."

With that, Kat and Kamiko entered into the house. Kat was actually expecting to meet someone else from the family. It had been an easy pattern even if it was really only two days. Of course, if you counted Kamiko on the first day it was actually all three days, but who was counting. Well, Kat was.

So when she saw three identical demons it was really easy to guess it was the triplets. What confused her though is that the table was moving and a couch was there in the place the table once was. All three were staring towards the door and hardly moving a muscle.

They all still had their bob cuts, thought it was slightly longer then the painting portrayed their pink hair. Their small horns much more prominent then Kamiko's because they weren't hidden by any hair. The real question was... who was who.

They'd clearly dressed up for this. They all had on a plain white dress which, if Kat was honest, clashed horribly with their pale skin being only a few shades off. The one on the far left had a patch on her shoulder with a one on it, the middle a two, and the third a three. *I bet they mix up their outfits all the time.*

"Hello Kamiko" chimed the three in perfect sync. *Oh yeah they've practiced this.* "We heard you got a friend. But we need to do a few tests first" *I wonder if they've done this for Aslena's friends.* "because we can't just have anyone as a friend for our littlest sister"

Kamiko opened her mouth but all three turned to glare at her telling her not to say anything. Kamiko's open mouth morphed into a pout and stared them back down. She was destined to lose though. It was three on one, and while Kat didn't know what Rank they were, it was at least two probably three or four, and even if they were only Rank two, they had much more experience then Kamiko and Kat put together.

Welp I guess this is a thing now. "Sure whatever you want" answered Kat

"Oh, whatever we want?" said the three all together, this time changing the pitch in their voices just slightly to harmonise with each other. Oh come on. *Do you three have nothing but time? Wait. They're semi immortal demons. The answer to that is actually yes.* "she shouldn't have said that..."

Kat fired back, used to these kinds of plays from some of the orphanage kids. "Sure, you've got free rain. Ask me to do anything, I'll also answer questions. Of course, you wouldn't want to do anything that would disappoint your sister..."

"Round one to the friend I suppose" said the triplets.

Kamiko jumped in with "Kat" before the triplets could argue otherwise.

"Oh we have a nice Kitty Kat, for our dear Kamiko. Seems a bit of a strange name for a succubus though" chimed the triplets.

"I was human when I got the name. It used to stand for something but not anymore. It's my name, my full name" said Kat.

The triplets shared a glance, not actually quite sure how to take that one... for about twenty seconds when they replied with. "A nondem! That means at least she's interesting!" *Ok now I'm wondering if

they have telepathy connecting them or something. That might have taken a bit to get to, but they still said it perfectly in sync.*

"Well, anyway" said the triplets after nodding their heads a little. It was kinda funny watching actually, they took turns and made it look more like a wave then a nod. "what are your parents like?"

"You can't ask that!" shouted Kamiko. "What is it with everyone and the question today?"

The triplets all raised they left eyebrows in sync while Kat just sighed. *Yeah what is with that question today. If you count the triplets as three people I've been asked that question four times, and Kamiko seems to have heard it once at least.*

"Sure they can" said Kat "my parents are very dead"

"Oh" said the triplets, with none of their usual cheer.

"Nah don't worry about it" said Kat with a grin, "I never knew them and it's not really a big deal. Honestly, other people always seem to take more offence to the question then I do. It's not a big deal. I've had a good life and Gramps is great." *Though I do technically have a mother now. Still even if I really start to think of her like that, the question was 'parents' and she would only be a singular parent.*

"Um... right well, the question" said the triplets "would you rather fight a hundred duck sized horses, or a horse sized duck?"

Kat narrowed her eyes. "What are the rules?"

"I'm sorry?" said the triplets tilting their heads to the side.

"Well, do I need to fight and disable them all? Kill them all? What's the terrain like? Does the horse sized duck have room to manoeuvre? What about the tiny horses? In this scenario are they likely to run away scared? If so is it my job to catch them?" said Kat listing her various questions for the triplets.

"Why didn't we think of that?" asked the triplets... only for them to all face the other way and answer themselves "Because we forgot that was a riddle designed for humans?" the triplets changed directions again. "but we knew she was a demon a least. And heck she's a nondem. Does that mean she's heard this question before?"

"Well... yes I have. But the answer when I was human was a hundred duck sized horses. A giant duck is much scarier and I'm not sure I'd win that fight. Now that I'm a demon though... honestly I'm probably strong enough to fight both at once and win." Said Kat

"Well that's a shame" said the triplets, "though for our next question... what's a duck?"

Kat opened her mouth. Closed it. Opened it again... waited a few seconds as if that was going to help. *I'm sorry what? You asked that question not knowing what a duck is? Doesn't the translation engine help with stuff like this? Or I guess... since it's a thing they need the image in the words or something? My question though... * "Why would you even ask me the duck horse question without knowing that?" queried Kat.

Chapter 424: Which is Which?

After Kat finished explaining what a duck is and getting over the shock that the triplets knew what a platypus was instead, the triplets all stood up a bit straight and said. "So, now that we've asked that joke question, we have the real important one. Can you tell us apart? Kamiko has surely given you enough clues right?"

Maybe? I mean, I can certainly do it if I had the chance to ask them a few questions, but surely there are other ways... Kat scanned the three again and there really wasn't much of a difference. They had styled their hair the same way and worn the same outfits. Kat did a quick check for paint splatters but saw nothing. It did however give Kat another angle of attack.

Kat powered up her eyesight pushing as much energy as she could into her eyes. They started glowing with a purple light causing the triplets to look at her strangely for a second, but they didn't say anything. Once it was clear the triplets weren't going to move, Kat started to look them over. The first thing she was checking for was muscle definition. Even if the difference was small, Merra should have more than the rest.

It was actually easier than Kat thought. Once she started looking with her improved eyesight it was hardly hidden. The sister with the number three on her shoulder had noticeably thicker arms. Well... noticeable with enhanced vision anyway. It was hard to tell because of the white dresses, but she also suspected number 3's legs to be thicker, but most of that was obscured and Kat could only really see her ankles which all looked the same.

Scanning the other two, Kat really couldn't find any difference in muscle definition, so that ended that line of enquiry. "So, without asking questions I'm not sure if I can figure it all out, but Merra is number 3." Said Kat

"Woah" said number 3, "I'm impressed you got me. How did you manage it?"

Kat smiled. "Should I really spoil the surprise before I get all three of you? Am I allowed to ask questions to help me?"

The three looked at each other and shook their heads. "I guess it is more fun if we see if you can do it. We didn't actually expect you to get one right except by chance. You were really confident though, we could tell. Can you tell us how you did it if the method can't be used for the other two? Oh and no questions that would help you work things out, other questions are fine."

Kat tilted her head from side to side a few times as she thought. *Should I perhaps just tell them? Not a big secret and it's not too hard once you think about it... Actually let's explain it. That can give me more time to plan how to pick the other two out.* "So first off, I tried to look for paint somewhere..."

"Oof, yeah we learnt to be careful of that already. But you found Merra so it clearly wasn't that" said the triplets

"No it wasn't. It did give me a starting point. I was thinking about what differences you all have and I realised that Merra engages in a lot more physical activity than Kerra and Erra. So I looked over you to try and determine who has the most muscles, and number 3 had noticeably thicker arms once I started amplifying my sight" explained Kat.

"Huh... is that how Mum does it?" muttered the triplets, not quite in sync for once. To Kat it sounded like a reactionary answer they didn't think through. Still, for something they all just spat out, it was still very synced up.

"I don't think so actually" said Kamiko "my guess has always been that she can smell the difference between us all. She's never once been tricked by you three to my knowledge and she's called out who is who without turning around while cooking or gardening a few times."

"You might be on to something sis." said the triplets now synced back up "We haven't really considered that because it doesn't come up often but I think it makes sense. Now Kat... do you have any other ideas?"

"Yeah a few... my next idea is to see if there is enough of a difference in the shades of your skin. Merra's should be darkest than maybe Kerra, with Erra as the lightest... but I'm not sold on that. You probably have to all go outside enough because of Contracts that I'm not sure it'll work" explained Kat.

The triplets shared a glance. "Ok... I think we want to think this through with you Kat. None of our friends, people we actually spend time with, have figured stuff out like you. Apparently they just get 'feelings' about it. They can normally pick out 'their' triplet but get stumped on the other two. Still, why do you think Kerra and Erra would have a different shade to them?"

Kat took a quick breath and said, "Well, I can't be certain of course but I assume that Kerra has spent time outside drawing landscapes. I'm hoping that it's a significant enough time difference between the others that I can see."

The triplets shook their heads. "Sadly we don't think that one will work." Triplets one and two were the only ones to speak. "Kerra might spend some time drawing outside but... Erra happily reads outside with Kerra or sometimes Kerra draws Merra working out while Erra reads nearby."

"Huh... yeah that will probably make this too hard then. Might still be able to pick out Merra that way but probably not Kerra and Erra. Plan B then I guess?" said Kat

"And what is plan B?" asked Merra

"Plan B is to look for specific callouses. If you could show my your hands that would be ideal." Said Kat

The triplets smiled, and 1 and 2 held out their hands for Kat to inspect. It took all of five seconds, which granted, was a bit more time from Kat's perspective because she'd sped up her perception of time, but it still didn't take long. Number one had noticeable marks on her hands. Both from holding a variety of brushes and the paint palette. "Number 1 is Kerra" said Kat

The triplets let out a cheer and hugged each other before jumping up and hugging Kat. "Ok, you're officially part of the family now. That was so cool. Nobody has been able to do that except Mum and sometimes Dad. Certainly not friends, not even our own friends! Oh we're so happy. You've chosen well young Kamiko"

"Thanks guys" said Kamiko, "I'm still a little annoyed you felt the need to test her like that but if it was enough to get you to hug her then maybe I can't be mad"

Kat was currently enjoying the hug pile, and was surprised to note she was actually taller than the triplets. It hadn't been instantly obvious when they were all sitting down, now though it was quite clear and it felt a bit weird to Kat. If you included her horns which gave her more height than the triplets own set, Kat had quite the bit of extra height on them all.

*And isn't that weird to think. These guys are at least five times my own age but I'm taller than them. I knew I was tall but most of the adults I know are around my height or taller. Only a few teachers were shorter than me and Vivian acts like a child enough of the time that I'm not sure if I want to count her.

I'm taller than Gramps but that's because he's hunched over. I'm not actually sure if I would be taller than him or not if he actually stood up. Elmony was easier because she's got the height and the age... but I do wonder if she had the same problem for a while.*

"So Kamiko, what did you learn being over at Envy?" asked the triplets, still hugging Kat and not loosening their grip in the slightest.

"Honestly..." said Kamiko with a smile and a tilt of her head. The triplets all nodded. "I learnt that mum is probably right and that I need therapy."

The triplets were floored at this statement. Pausing in their hug attack against Kat to surround Kamiko instead. "Hey, what's wrong. Is it something we did?" asked the triplets.

Kat raised an eyebrow and gestured to the door, asking Kamiko if she wanted to be left alone, but Kamiko shook her head before answering the triplets. "No not really. I just found that I might have more issues than I thought. Plus, I just... I didn't have any friends to offload it to? So I just sort of bottled it up for over a decade. I mean, I have you guys, and you're all great but some things I can't just say to you, you know?"

Chapter 425: This is Why I need Therapy

"You know you can tell us anything sis" chimed the three. "We won't make fun of you for it we always enjoy chatting with you!"

Kamiko bit her lips, and glanced at Kat for support. Kat of course, recognised the look. She'd seen it very often at the orphanage, and it was one of the few expressions she could read with exceptional reliability. She just wasn't sure why Kamiko needed it. Still, Kat took a stand and puffed out her chest, flaring her power through her horns making the lines glow purple releasing a soft light around her face as she nodded, trying to look as authoritative and supportive of her friend as possible.

The triplets that could see Kat in their vision raised their eyebrows slightly at the change in Kat, but tried to downplay their reactions. Kamiko saw Kat's support and took a deep breath. "Well, just one example of my problems is how you three like to treat yourselves as interchangeable. This whole gimmick with Kat and the three of you speaking in sync somewhat helps my point" explained Kamiko.

The triplets frowned. "Well" started Erra "We wouldn't want that" continued Merra "But what do you mean?" finished Kerra.

Kamiko sighed. "Well, the best example was when Kerra was working on her 'masterpiece' two years ago. I never saw you Kerra. It was always Erra or Merra if it wasn't meal times. Even when I hinted or outright asked to spend more time with you, it was Erra or Merra who came instead!"

The triplets all winced in sync at the accusation, recognising the truth as it was spoken. The three looked between each other, as they tried to work out who would speak first. In the end, Kerra apparently got that honour. "Sorry about that Kamiko. I mean... I was really busy and I asked the others to spend time with you to help out... I didn't realise it was a problem..."

Before the other two could chime in Kamiko continued her point. "Look, I understand that, and I can empathise. The thing is though, at least twice during that time Erra and Merra tried to pretend to be you! I could tell the difference you know! When Erra took your place I even tested it to see if you were trying to hide who you were. I referred to you as Kerra twice and you didn't correct me. Then when I referred to you as Merra, knowing it was wrong, you corrected me and confirmed my guess when you said you weren't Merra, but Erra, and that I was losing my touch..."

Erra and Kerra both winced at the description while Merra glared at her two sisters before saying. "You pair did what?!"

"Wait you didn't know?" asked Kamiko

Merra shook her head. "No I didn't actually." Said Merra "I did know that Kerra wanted me to spend more time with you, and I made sure that I did but I was actually in that martial arts tournament around the same time so I wasn't really as clued in to everything at the time as I maybe should have been. I mostly spent my time with you, Kamiko, relaxing and trying to come up with strategies for the people I knew I'd be fighting next."

Erra and Kerra swallowed slightly. The triplets were good fighters especially together, but Merra was undoubtedly the best. There was some risk that she could actually beat Erra and Kerra together, especially if Kat and Kamiko helped out. "We didn't mean anything by it!" said the scared pair.

Kat narrowed her eyes, and decided to use this chance to remind them she was standing behind Kamiko in this. Throwing some energy into her vocal cords Kat boomed out. "I think that's kind of the point. You didn't mean anything by it at all. It was just a thing you did, and Kamiko is annoyed at how little you think it changed."

Kerra and Erra whipped their hands around to face Kat with paling faces. Kat didn't realise but the energy she'd been sending to keep her horns glowing had started to leak into her eyes a bit so they were glowing as well now, and she cut a rather intimidating figure, especially when her aura was pressing against their own. Even if Kat's was a calming aura... the fact that it was actively fighting both Kerra's and Erra without control from Kat was something to be feared and the duo knew it.

"Kat's right. That's exactly what I'm annoyed about. I like all three of you, not the three of you together. You're all my sisters and I love you for different reasons. You are NOT replacements for the other two no matter what you, or I guess, you two seem to think" explained Kamiko.

"Sorry" said Kerra and Erra looking away, the still hadn't broken the hug with Kamiko though.

Kamiko sighed and said. "Look... it's not like this is something I can't forgive you for. Before today I might have even said that I'd already forgiven you considering how long ago it was and that you did it FOR me, but... now that I have been given the chance to rant a bit I can see I'm not over it. Thus, my reasoning for therapy. Not serious stuff but... well Mum always told us not to get cuts infected. I think this is kind of the same"

"I actually think it's a good idea" said Merra. "I mean, I might be biased because I was able to prove I'm not responsible for that incident, but I'm sure I've probably done something similar enough to cause issues. I know I haven't gotten either of the other two to lie about being me but I have asked them to take my place on occasion, we all have"

"And that's fine" explained Kamiko "I know that sort of thing happens and while it is a little annoying when it does, I do understand. It might grate on me a bit, but as long as I'm told, especially in the future I won't mind"

"We promise" said Erra and Kerra, before Erra continued by herself. "One question I do have though, is why isn't this something you could talk about with is? It would probably have been worse if you didn't speak about it to us eventually, at least now it's over."

Kamiko sighed. "Well, I picked that as an example somewhat because of the fact it could be addressed. Plus I did just get done yelling about it to an old lady, or one who acted like one. I'd had at least some time to come to terms with it, and I knew I needed to ask"

Kamiko glanced at Kat again, signalling something Kat couldn't quite discern with her eyes. *I think she wants me to change topics? It's a little unclear.* "Kamiko brings up a question actually, if you wouldn't mind moving on...?" Kat asked vaguely

When the triplets nodded along with Kamiko who gave her a wink and smile which Kat returned, she was sure she'd done the right thing. "Well, what actually constitutes old for a demon? How does it all work?"

"I'll take this one" said Kerra, somewhat to Kat's surprise. I'd thought either Erra or all three of them would answer. "See, there are a few tiers of demon society that normally influences their lifespan. This is separate to Rank of course.

"The lowest are those that are demons by technicality. They can use demonic energy but the ability to use it properly has been bred out of them. A lot of them can't withstand the weight of the demonic energy in the hubs while I bet you haven't even noticed Kat." *She's right on that. If there is a difference I haven't really picked it up.*

"Then, the second tier, is more variably based on Rank, but it is the more common demons. They can live for a few thousand years, but mostly rely on Rank ups to keep that lifespan expanding. Say one thousand for Rank 1, two thousand for Rank 2, and then like ten thousand for Rank 3. It gets to be a lot as you go up.

"Finally you have the third and highest tier which are demons that have some way of gaining complete immortality without achieving a higher Rank. Sometimes this comes from powerful parentage but normally it comes from an ability. You Kat, might actually qualify for this third tier with your regen. We'd have to find out how it affects your aging."

"Is there much difference in social standing?" asked Kat

"Not really" said the triplets "Well, tier ones get it hard, mostly because they almost never Rank up and even if they do they don't Rank up enough for their lifespans to increase significantly. Tier two and three though. The treatment is only slightly different. Mostly when younger. It's because you already know

they're going to be around a long time, so older demons tend to be more polite but people around the same age won't care."

Chapter 426: Reflecting on Others

"Interesting" said Kat, because it really was. *It's such a surprise that the discrimination is fairly minimal. I wonder if demons are more tolerant because of the wide variety of appearances they have? Plus... the discrimination they? do have only makes sense. As much as it might annoy some people, there is a big difference between how you should treat someone if you know they're going to be around for centuries. It's just common sense to not make any major grudges.

If someone really pissed you off, you could hole up in a mountain somewhere and train for like... one or two hundred years nonstop just to get back at them. It'd be fine because not only is it a small portion of your life but becoming stronger increases your lifespan by a huge margin.*

"Another question, perhaps in the same vein. How easy is it for demons to have kids? You seem to have a rather big family... and you're parents can live for a very long time afterwards... it just seems like overcrowding would be an issue." Explained Kat

The triplets smiled. "Well, it really depends on the kind of demon. Though, for the most part space isn't an issue because the multiverse is really large. You can find empty planes all the time. Some are more suitable than others, but finding places to leave has never been a major concern.

"The other thing is that the more powerful you are the harder it is to have children. Succubi are somewhat exempt from that... but only for like two generations. That trait gets bred out really quickly for some reason, so unless you're like us and have two Succubus parents it can actually be somewhat of a concern.

"Even some demons that look like Succubi don't have the ability. We'd say it's about a eighty-twenty split when it comes to that. It's something you tend to disclose early on. A lot of demons... especially ones descended from Succubi... take joy in those sorts of acts so it's just common courtesy to inform people about it."

Kat nodded with a thoughtful expression on her face. *I guess that makes sense. You wouldn't want overcrowding to be an issue, so it breeds out quick. The other demons probably don't mind because as large as the succubi population grows, their propensity to marry outside of their specific type means that their traits get spread through the population instead of just getting more succubi.*

"So... like what is common then?" asked Kat

The triplets looked at each other for a few seconds before saying. "Well, we guess it depends. Our mum is actually a bit behind the norm... but she got to Rank 4 before she had her first child so that evens it out a little, and considering there's three of us... that might put her over the edge.

"Look, it really is just a 'it depends' thing. A lot of demons, even Succubi don't want kids. They think that they'll get around to it later and... just don't? We may stay young for a long time but it is certainly NOT the best idea to have kids later. It gets much much harder Kat. That's something so many demons fail to understand.

"It's not just 'a rank or two' it could be the difference between having a child at all and never having any children. It gets harder, it takes longer and, from what Mum has said, it's more likely to fail part way through if whoever they chose as a partner has a drastic difference in power level.

"This gets even WORSE at high ranks because some demons are just more powerful than others. Mum and Dad are surprisingly evenly matched power wise despite the fact that Dad is bad at combat, and Mum works in medical. They're some research Mum has been doing to suggest that spending time with people actually brings weaker demons' power levels up to their strongest companion... but it's still early days yet. Are you thinking of kids Kat?"

Kat shook her head. "No not at all. Plus I'd probably just adopt I think. Having lived in an orphanage, I know that there are plenty of great kids that have lost their parents, and I'm not sure I'd want to just... create more? I guess? It's really not something I've thought too much about."

"Not at all?" asked the triplets "Don't you have anyone you..." the triplets dropped their hug on Kamiko, which had been going on quite a while at this point, to surround Kat and whisper in both her ears "have feeling for"

Kat shook her head. "Not the way you're looking for. I have my best friend Lily, my new friend Kamiko, my adopted sister Sylvie and my... well I'm still not sure what to call Callisto and Vivian, oh and Major and Minor as well... but explaining those two would be hard."

The triplets stood back so Kat could see them all wiggling their eyebrows. They managed to sync it up so that it looked like a wave was going on along their brows. "Oh ho ho? Are you interested in them both?"

Kat shook her head violently. "No, that's... just no. Not only does Major have someone that's already in love with her, and seems to share a mutual affection with... they're both kind of like... maybe not sisters... cousins? Let's go with cousins. It'd just be... so weird to even think about it. I shouldn't really talk about it too much even though you probably won't ever meet them... but Major and Minor share the one body, but they have a soul each."

The triplets all dropped their mouths opened wide, with Kamiko doing the same thing in the background. "Ok what?" asked the triplets with Kamiko adding in "How!"

Kat raised two hands in surrender. "Look, it really isn't my place to say. Some parts of why it happened I was specifically asked not to talk about. Just know that... it was a really weird situation when I got the job to escort Major, and then my true sight lets me see through an illusion put on the girl that causes a massive freakout and suddenly I'm talking to Minor instead. They were... are? Were? Honestly the fact that I can say both just adds to the confusion... they are or were twins?"

"She does raise an interesting question" said Erra "Are you still twins if you share a body?"

"Well the um... what's it called... I don't remember the name, but when twins are born with body parts connected. They're still called twins..." Kerra added.

"But based on what Kat's saying... did they always have one body? Or did they have two at one point?" asked Merra.

Kat was shocked the three actually spoke separately for the question, even if they did add their responses together. "Two, once upon a time"

The three triplets looked over to Kamiko. "We probably aren't the best people to figure that one out. Kamiko ideas?"

Kamiko shrugged. "Aren't you three the best to decide it? I mean, you can talk to each other mentally and you're triplets."

Ha! I knew they were cheating. So they can hear each other's thoughts? The triplets seemed to really think about Kamiko's response. "We guess you're right sis. We were thinking that we might be a little too close to the issue, but we suppose if it was to look from their perspective instead... I guess it depends? Are they still equal partners in all this?"

Kat made a 'so-so' gesture. "Hard to say. Major would argue they are, Minor would argue they aren't and I'd say... it really is difficult to answer. Minor has some... forgive the pun, major issues, and I'm not sure if they are inherent limitations or if they're just psychological issues.

"Minor doesn't like to be the dominant personality, and also neither of them are the people they were before it all went down. Minor likes to say she's... like half a person and Major is one and a quarter. Together they are only like... one and three quarters of a person, and it has caused issues" explained Kat.

"That does make it hard" said Kamiko

The triplets all winced, trying to imagine what sort of thing must have happened for you to consider yourself only half a person. "We really aren't sure where to go with that. If one of us was hurt we'd never think less of them... but it sounds like... they actually are less?"

Kat nodded. "Yeah, I had a second Contract with them and had to go inside their head to help fix a few things... Minor's area is much smaller than Major, and Major has been in charge for over a decade. The way Minor tells it she just wants to be a little voice in Major's head. She doesn't want to be forgotten but she really doesn't want to be in control either."

The triplets all winced. "C-can we move on?" Kat was amazed that they stuttered in sync. "Not that... not that we have anything against your friend? Friends? S-sorry but... we're... we're overthinking the whole thing now and w-we just want to move on if that's ok..."

Chapter 427: How I met My Best Friend

"Sure that's no problem" said Kat. She wasn't really all that interested in pressing the triplets on their insecurities. Minor's situation was rare certainly, but it was something that the triplets could clearly see happening to them if they weren't careful. *It does make me wonder how common injuries are. I can't really be the best judge of that consider I regenerate. Maybe I should ask? I'll save it for later.* "Is there anything you'd like to bring up?"

The triplets shared a glance and asked. "Well we'd love to hear about your first summoning"

Is this a thing? Like... do people just ask about this? I'm beginning to think this is one of the things all demons must do with each other. Like 'how are your parents' or 'what school did you go to' just... things people always ask.

"So it went like this..." Kat decided to explain her first summoning in detail. She'd previously kept the recount short and mostly to the point, but knowing that the chance she'd repeat the story a few more

times before she died... *Or hell, based on the pattern I'll probably meet Aslena or Kamiko's Dad tomorrow and go through it all again.* So Kat made sure to really spruce it up. She used her perfect memory to talk about how she was feeling and how confused she was.

As well as how the master and apprentice talked to each other and what she thought they were feeling. She even decided to go a bit further and explain the aftermath, how she'd freaked out in the morning and then the conversation she'd had with her best friend.

The triplets' eyes met a few times before they decided to share their thoughts. When they did, they were slower when speaking, as if they were still thinking of the answer. "You... you took that exceptionally well. Based on that story there's no higher energy at all in your world?"

Kat shook her head, and explained. "No there isn't. D.E.M.O.N.S was actually somewhat surprised. Apparently, the word didn't pick a specific type of higher energy to inhibit, it just said 'no higher energy' and so it actually works against demons. Not perfectly, but better than most it seems"

"That's actually somewhat strange" said the triplets "We're not sure we've ever heard of a dimension like that. We suppose it isn't that impossible considering, and they'd be hard to find for obvious reasons, but still, very strange to think about"

Kat raised both hands in surrender, "Certainly was, and still is. I think more small... family unit? I guess? Whatever they are, they took in really well. Sure I have demon parts, and that was shocking but none of them actually tested it. Lily could have insisted I was wearing a fake tail, or that everything was a prop. We actually used that to go into a crowded area"

Kamiko beamed a smile at Kat and said. "I think you've got great friends if they are willing to go along with something so crazy."

"Yeah Lily's pretty great. Sylvie's nice too, but sometimes I wonder if she goes along with half of my shit because I'm one of the few people that didn't treat her like a kid. I mean, she IS a child, but she's probably the smartest child I've ever met. She's always calm, she knows what she wants, and she just... isn't a brat most of the time." Said Kat

"Tell us about Lily!" shouted the triplets.

"Well... where do you want me to start?" asked Kat ~~nOvel~~Next.cOm

The triplets turned as one unit to look at Kamiko. "Why are you looking at me?" Kamiko asked, panicked. She glanced between the triplets and Kat a few times before hesitantly continuing with. "The start?"

"As good as place as any I suppose" said Kat "For me... I guess it was when she transferred to our school. It was a little strange because she was only... the second transfer? I think? A lot of kids left our little small town school but, yeah nobody was transferring there. The area didn't have a lot, and if you were moving into the area it was just as easy to live in the suburbs near the nearby city and go to one of the schools there.

"So when Lily swapped to our school, it was a very surprising, but also quite cool. Everyone was interested in this strange new person. I... wasn't actually. I saw new people come into the orphanage all the time. They joined the school too of course but... we didn't refer to them as transfers. They just got added to class and nobody questioned it... does that make sense?

"I think it was a system Gramps worked out with the school. They'd just show up to class, after he arranged everything, and the school would treat it like nothing had happened. Gramps explained it was to ease the new students in because if they were at the orphanage it meant that they'd already lost something and needed some normalcy in their life.

"For the most part, students respected that. It helped, when I was younger at least, that the orphanage kids could sort of stick together. They had other friends sure, but if something went down, we'd back each other up. This changed when I moved to the high school.

"It wasn't so much 'the orphanage kids' as there was... me, and that was basically it. By the time I was thirteen, I was the oldest kid for the most part. I... vaguely recall two times where someone older came in, but it was never for long. Our orphanage was always more for younger kids, so they were just staying over for short times.

"I certainly never saw another orphanage kid in my age once I was in high school. That's when the bullying really started for me." The triplets sucked in a breath all in tandem, but Kat gave them placating gestures. "No no, please don't feel bad. I never cared. See, I have red hair, I actually kept that. This hair colour didn't come in when my tail did it has always been like this.

"A lot of people thought it was died, because while red is a potential colour for humans on my world... it isn't like the red I have? That make sense? If you add onto that I was TALL. I still am even now, but I really shot up that summer between primary, and high school. I was at least a head taller than all the other girls for a long time. I retained my title as the tallest girl in my age group till I left, but some others got closer.

"Anyway, with my hair and height I stood out, and because I was part of 'the orphanage kids' group everyone knew me as the tall orphan girl. Which... I'll admit is not the best title to be known as.

"Apparently I was also somewhat attractive. I didn't find that part out till later, because I never cared. I had other things to worry about, but that all added together made this group of three girls start attacking me. It was a joke. I've dealt with SO much worse in the orphanage.

"A bit of name calling? That's nothing emotionally compared to a kid you've looked after for two years telling you they never want to see you again. Putting glue in my hair? That's you're average Tuesday afternoon if you aren't careful with the younger ones. Calling me out for my height? That's a joke, I lived with kids normally two years my junior if not more, so to them I was a giant.

"So then they tried physical things you know. Bumping me in the corridors, picking fights, that sort of thing. Of course, I'd been walking and running to and from school for my entire life as well as looking after energetic children. Those three bitches skipped out on PE half the time. They had NO chance confronting me physically. Eventually they just got bored.

"Of course, what I'm sure to them looked like a gift from god, as soon as they got bored of me Lily transferred in. She was interesting, and that protected her for like... three days, before everyone realised how quiet and timid she is. If you met her today you'd still say that...

"But she'd freeze up whenever someone tried to talk to her. She'd flinch at casual pats on the shoulder and she was quite short. She managed to grow up a bit in later years, but when she transferred in she was just so tiny. So, my tormenters moved on to her... and... well I just couldn't allow that."

"So I stepped in. I told them that they would not be bullying her. Of course they were all 'who are you to tell us what to do' and I was like, 'you can bully me and I won't fight you, but if you bully her I'll kick the shit out of you' and at this point, I'd already proven to be their physical superior, even three on one. And that's how I met my best friend Lily."

Chapter 428: How I met My Best Friend Part 2

"Surely that can't be it though?" said the triplets.

Kat raised an eyebrow and glanced at Kamiko who shrugged before saying, "I really don't know what they mean it seems like you covered everything..."

The triplets shook their heads violently, their aquamarine hair bobbing from side to side as they did it.

"No, no no. That's how you met her sure, but what did it take for her to become your best friend?"

Kat tapped her mouth a few times with a finger as she went over the question. *It's a little sad how easy it is to answer that question. They probably want a bit more... and I'll give it to them but...* "Really, she was my only friend, so she became my best friend by default"

The triplets frowned at Kat's response while Kamiko pouted off to the side. Kat saw this and grinned before continuing "Ok, so it was actually a bit longer of a journey then that. First is, we didn't magically become friends, and the bullies didn't stop then and there. Lily mostly avoided me for... a week? I want to say?

"During that time though, the three bullies would still do little things to Lily when I wasn't around. I caught them at the tail end of slamming her into a locker. Not hard, not really, but it knocked her glasses off and gave her a bruise the next day.

"So I did two things. I think it was... It was Tuesday when I said I'd take the bullying instead, and it was next Monday I caught them. Lily actually had a large bruise on the side of her face that next day, but anyway we're getting ahead of ourselves.

"Seeing what they did, I was tempted to just beat them up, but they were being a bit smarter then normal. They only went places as a group of three at the time, and they stuck to well travelled areas. They'd pick on Lily if they could, but they wouldn't go away from the crowds. I think they? knew I was on the look out for issues.

"So, I took to spending time with Lily. I'd sit next to her at lunch, follow her to classes that sort of thing. At the beginning she was terrified of me. I was some scary girl that could take on three other teens my age without backing down. Which... made me scarier then the bullies just because of that. If I scared them, I must be worse."

Kat could see that neither Kamiko nor the triplets were happy hearing this. To Kat it just seemed reasonable, and tried to explain for her now best friend. "Look, she was terrified. She'd just moved to a new school and the first thing that happens to her is she gets bullied and picked on, then some super tall girl threatens to beat up the bullies if they keep at it.

"For us, back on Earth... there is sort of an understanding between females. Well, not all of us, I certainly didn't care, but the others did. It was that we don't get into brawls. Spread all the horrible rumours you

like, a bit of pushing and shoving is fine, sticking things to people's hair is probably the only one that would be considered over the line most of the time."

"Why?"? to Kat's surprise that question was asked by Kamiko and the triplets together.

"Um well... it's... it's sort of regarded as a cheap shot? Like... bruises are easily hidden, either with make up or clothes and they aren't that painful but ruining someone's hair, especially if it's long is basically the same as punching them every day for a few months because your appearance has been ruined. Do... do you guys not have that issue?" asked Kat

Kamiko shook her head. "Um... not really? A lot of demons' hair grows to the length we want it then it stops. For the ones that don't... there are plenty of people with the ability to manipulate hair, so even if you shaved it all off, or grew it down to your knees, just an afternoon at the hairdressers can fix it up."

That... that makes an awful lot of sense actually. The whole reason that was something avoided and the bullies only did to me like... twice? Once? It wasn't much considering all the other shit they tried. Anyway, my point I'm making to myself is if you can have your hair however you like all the time and it's an easy fix it really isn't an issue.

"Can you colour people's hair?" asked Kat

Kamiko bit her lips and looked to the triplets. The triplets all turned their eyes specifically to Kerra, who sighed. "Ok fine I do know the most about it. Changing hair colour around is actually a pretty weird subject. Some hair is considered part of your demonic features and it's VERY hard to change. Other demons' hair is easily changeable and can go through a unique colour a day... and then there are dyes, which... they tend to need to be specifically made for the demon in question and don't last long so if you're going that route it's expensive."

Once Kerra's explanation was over, all the eyes in the room drifted to Kat, clearly wanting her to continue the story. "Right, ok, so terrified Lily, bullies kept coming, I started following her around. This helped a lot with the bullying. They saw me around and didn't really know what to do. That lasted two weeks before they started doing things to me, and I just... let it happen, because I didn't care.

"Lily... she didn't really start opening up to me for a while. She also didn't hit her growth spurt until later on in her life, and she's always been a bit small. So this short, shy girl, with glasses that hides behind her hair all the time... she just kept herself in corners with me blocking the way. Well, she went to the corners, I joined her there... but half the time she made it look like I was keeping her there rather than it being her choice of where to sit.

"It took... three or four weeks? My memories a bit hazy on that, for her to finally talk to me. I remember it because the bullies threatened to lock her in a locker, and I said they weren't, they said 'well we'll just lock you in instead. That was the deal right?' to everyone's surprise, including Lily's I said yes and walked straight into the locker.

"Once they walked away, Lily looked so scared, still, but she worked up her courage to ask me 'why'. It was the only word she could get out. She clearly tried a few others but that's the one she eventually got out. I said 'well, you needed a bit of help, and I really don't mind'.

"That was the big turning point for us I think. See, Lily doesn't mind dark spaces, but she's hopeless with locks. She realised that I was trapped in there until someone let me out and she didn't know the combination to the locker. It was one of the bullies actually, which was rather funny if I'm honest.

"They actually got in trouble for that one, because the janitor found me real quick and asked what I was doing. Anyway, we don't need to get into that part. From then on Lily started to talk to me more and more. She was actually really good conversation. I was smart sure but Lily was, and still is brilliant. She's top of the class in practically everything and even that doesn't do her justice.

"She's always so nervous on tests. I personally think, if she'd gotten over her nerves earlier, she would have been able to apply for a scholarship anywhere she wanted with top grades in the state if not the country. Still, it didn't happen. She did open up a bit, and she chatted to me and the teachers, but basically nobody else.

"One of the bravest things she did... was that she'd accept one form of bullying from the other three. She said she was fine getting stuck in either her locker or my own. I... I think it was both a way to stand up for me a little and to throw the bullies for a loop. Having her in those lockers meant I knew the combination so I could let her out...

"And if they chose that form over something else, they wouldn't get in trouble for it. I'd let her out so the school wouldn't care, and it was part of the deal so I didn't strike back at the bullies for doing it. Still annoyed me of course, but it was just so much easier to keep them focused on me with Lily taking a little of the heat. The one time after that deal was made they poured a drink on Lily's homework I gave the girl a black eye. Never tried anything too bad with Lily ever again."

Chapter 429: That's... a Thing... I guess...

"Well that was an interesting story" said Kamiko. At some point she'd moved onto the couch with the triplets. It was actually a little funny because the three would rotate who was on the end closest to Kamiko. Kat never saw the switches, she wasn't watching for them, but unless they were changing out the numbering on their patches it was something they were doing. "but that doesn't really tell us what your friendship with Lily is like. How do you interact normally?"

Kat raised an eyebrow, letting a breath of air fill her lungs as she considered what that question meant. *Honestly though I don't get what it means...* Kat let her thoughts speed up so she wasn't standing around like an idiot. *Really though how are you supposed to answer that? I interact with her... normally? I mean, the same as everyone else? I don't do anything special as far as I know. We just chat a lot? Is that the answer?*

"I'm not really sure what your asking" is what Kat finally settled on. She wasn't confident enough to go with her guess.

Kamiko frowned, shoulders lowering just slightly as her eyes met Kat's and the confusion was noticed upon Kat's face. Kamiko rolled her eyes towards the triplets, asking them to step in. Merra went first, "Well, my for me, hanging out with my best friend always gets me pumped up.

"We're eternal rivals before we are best friends. She shares my passion for sports and I'm constantly trying to one up her in anything we end up playing. I tend to start off a little worse but I get better more

quickly then she does. She isn't a fan of always switching things up, but she does it for me. I do think that's a little weird though because if she wanted to win more she'd be better changing much quicker."

After this, Erra hopped in, shifting forward on the couch so that most of her weight was actually supported by her own legs rather than the construct behind her. "My best friend is nice and quiet, and she helps me enter the zone. It's nice reading in my room sure but reading back to back with her is a great experience and somehow just... much nicer. Though, on the other hand we get into the most heated arguments throwing opinions back and forth. We don't actually agree on all that much, but we both think that makes it more fun..."

Merra and Kerra dragged Erra back into the couch so they could speak. Because apparently they couldn't just talk in place, no they had to be the frontmost triplet or triplets when they did that. "And we think those two should get over themselves and date already. They've been pining after each other for like three decades, and were friends before that!"

Erra lifted her two sisters up by the back's of their clothes swapping places with them. *No seriously what's with the comedy routine guys? Clearly it isn't a matter of power...* "I keep telling you guys it isn't like that..."

Before she could continue to argue much though the other two swapped places with her again, but this time they went out of their way to wrap their legs around each other's making it a tangled mess and much harder for Erra to escape. "You don't look at each other like friends. If you had that weird mutation that makes your eyes turn into hearts when you look at the person you love it would be less obvious."

Erra growled and stood up, forcing her two sisters along for the ride, though they stayed in a seated position. Once up, Erra simply grabbed both by the arms and lifted until they were 'forced' to let go of her legs. Once done Erra placed them back down on the couch and then raised an arm.

Thousands of pieces of paper streamed forth from Erra's raised hand and wrapped both Merra and Kerra up in a cocoon. When Erra started her retort, her back was to Kat. That however didn't stop the demon in question noticing that Erra's cheeks were starting to brighten with a fine dusting of red. "It's not like that, I'm telling you!"

Kat carefully slinked over to Kamiko using just a bit of speed, before whispering, though without that much hope of avoiding being overhead. "How can they both say opposite things without either of them being caught lying?" asked Kat

Kamiko lowered her voice even further, knowing Kat had better hearing than she did. "Notice Erra didn't say she wasn't in love with her best friend, AND that she didn't deny things outright. She just said 'it isn't like that' which, she can say easily by meaning it isn't exactly as the other two describe. There can easily be extra details left out. Maybe they've kissed, maybe they're actually already dating. Maybe there's something else involved. It's pretty easy to escape answering things like this"

Maybe I need to step up my game. Thought Kat as she moved back into position. The fact that the triplets hadn't said anything while Kamiko and Kat chatted further reinforced the idea in Kat's mind that the triplets did hear everything was that Erra didn't continue to speak until Kat had stopped. "Well, what about your best friend huh Kerra? That pretty painter boy you always hang out with?"

"Errrraaa~ it's not like that. He's very gay, and has two boyfriends. Even if I was interested, which I'm not, I'm not going to come between him and the people he already loves. Plus I don't want a poly relationship. I want someone all time myself... and if he cheats on me I'll skin him alive and dump his body in front of Mum so she can heal him, and I can start again..." replied Kerra in a nice cutesy voice as if she was talking about her favourite kind of flower back when she was a child.

Woah holly shit. Kerra is... hardcore. I... I really didn't expect that to take such a dark turn. Is that... is that normal? I mean I will admit I've gotten much more used to pain then anyone really should be... but I have regeneration and I don't LIKE the pain. Is... is skinning people really a thing that's common.

"No it isn't common" said Merra from her paper cocoon.

"Did I say that out loud?" asked Kat

Merra shook her head carefully, making sure to limit her movements so she didn't accidentally fall over while her arms were pinned to the side and her balance was a little precarious. "No but I could see it on your face. Kerra is... I'd like to say she's in a class of her own but it's not that uncommon...

"Demons can be... more than a little vindictive when it comes to love lives. Parting amicably is one thing but... we do not take cheating lightly and some... probably to many in my opinion... take the whole thing VERY seriously."

Kerra sighed, before flexing her muscles and just eviscerating the paper bindings around her. Loose strips of paper fluttered around her as she brought her hands together as if in prayer. "Look, I know it's not exactly healthy, but I'm mature enough to know I'd do it. Lust is more than happy to provide... sexual services and I'm not going to complain too much if my partner needs to... pay a visit.

"However, doing so without telling me... that's grounds for some serious trouble. There are plenty of Succubi who are very... open with their relationships. If that's what they want, it isn't hard to find. I want to find someone for me, and only me, just as I would never go for anyone else once I'd found someone. I'd be VERY clear about it, as well as the consequences, so I don't think it's wrong."

Um... is that wrong? Well... I'm not actually sure now that I think about it. The whole thing seems a bit extreme... but there's no permanent... physical... damage done the person and while it might be mentally scaring, finding out your partner cheated on you is as well. Plus demons get into fights on the regular because of summoning so some pain and violence is to be expected...

Skinning someone alive just seems a little on the extreme end... or a lot on the extreme end really. But... wait, didn't Merra say it isn't that uncommon? So... this happens? Wait... "Hey Merra... how... legal is that sort of thing?" asked Kat not sure she wanted the answer.

"Well, Kat," said Kerra answering instead. "I'd make sure they signed a contract, with at least one witness, maybe with D.E.M.O.N.S backing. You can do a lot of people agree with a clearly written contract..."

You know what. I don't think I want to know. I don't want to know at all. I mean, it makes sense, demons are clearly a very Contract base society. And it's not like they can lie about it, so if Kerra asked she'd find out... they also would HAVE to have signed up for it. Plus knowing that, they might be able to feel it mentally. Demons can't forget a contract...

Chapter 430: I'm COMMITTED TO THE PATH

"So... that being said" all the triplets chimed in together. Not so in sync with their bodies anymore... Kerra was brushing off what remained of the paper that had trapped her... Merra was still trapped in said paper and Erra was sitting back down now... leant back against the sofa. "We've explained our best friends, and you're Kamiko's so we know how that works out. What's it like having Lily as a best friend?"

Oof, why do I feel guilty about Kamiko not being my best friend? I mean, it really isn't comparable. I've known Lily for years, we spent most of that time together both in and out of school. I've spent more days with her than I have away from her... honestly this Contract business has been responsible for the largest amount of time spent away from Lily and I find myself oddly annoyed by that.

"Well... I guess I can start with the fact that we've always been there for each other. I'll admit, because of the ever present threat of bullies, I'm... metaphysically there for Lily more often than it ends up the other way around but I don't mind at all... I love spending time with her and protecting her is second nature.

"It's a different kind of protection to the one I feel like I need to offer Sylvie. For Sylvie, she's young and... na?ve isn't quite the right word because she's smart and has an understanding that's rare for someone so young... but even still she has an innocence to her, and while she's smart her answers to things are rarely complicated.

"Perhaps it's better to say Sylvie is wise beyond her years. She uses her intellect not to overthink things but to understand them and go for the best answer every time." Kat paused, realising this had rapidly become more about Sylvie than Lily but she couldn't help it. Lily was a huge part of her life, just like Sylvie was, and the only thing she could compare to Lily was her little sister for a lot of the important details.

"Sorry, I didn't quite mean to speak so much about Sylvie just now but... that just sort is how it is. Anyway... for Lily, I know she's seen the world and been hurt by it. She's seen what dark things people can get up to when they having nothing better to do and are just being hurtful in general.

"She's stronger than you'd think. She's very quiet, and calm, and she can deal with bullying nearly as well as I. I didn't realise it when defending her, but unlike me who will stand against it with my head held high and ability to shrug it off... Lily has a core of steel and the ability to recover quickly from her problems.

"I've seen her sad at lunch time and then when I meet up with her to walk home together her face lights up with the biggest smile, and I know things are going to be ok." Kat missed the looks the triplets and Kamiko gave each other. They were thinking somewhat different thoughts about Lily's actions. "Still though... I feel like... like she deserves better, perhaps the best.

"She's so smart. Smartest in the grade easily, and if she was better at tests then she'd be state level, though I did say that before. I know she's helped me study, I got good grades... or well, good enough grades before I met her but I finished school as one of the best, mostly for my consistency across the board that I got from Lily, and that I helped get her physical education mark up by encouraging her to run with me a few times a week.

"A lot of our time together, outside of school, is Lily telling me about what she's learned. It's just... so interesting all the time. Hearing her speak about her new interest always brightens my day. She can learn so much in so little time, and it's just awesome." Kat missed the very obvious smirks on the other demons in the room as she kept speaking. "The two main problems... well, the first is an old one and the second is new.

"The new problem is this Summoning business. She wants to join me, and has found a method to do so." *Not sure I can directly mention the tokens so I'll leave it at that.* "I'm not sure if I do or not though. On the one hand, she's studied magic and mystical things more than any other topic... and that was before she found out at least some of it was real. She's dreamed of this far more than I, so I don't want to take that away from her...

"On the other hand, going on Summonings is dangerous." There was some polite nodding from the triplets, but the smirks remained "I don't fear for my own safety because of the D.E.M.O.N.S safety net, and my ridiculous regeneration, it means that I can take any number of hits without issue, and I've so far been put on missions where I can always get through it.

"On the final... hand? Limb? Tail maybe? I don't know... anyway, the final point is... I don't know if I can say no to her. Even if I decide it's too dangerous, if she looks me in the eyes and says she wants to come... I'm pretty sure I could never stop her." Finished Kat. At this point, she was well and truly lost in her speech. She didn't notice that the triplets and Kamiko could barely hold back their words. They knew what was going on, even Erra, but they held their tongues, for it was not their place just yet. Perhaps in the future...

But Kat was not done. "That's just the new problem though. The old one is just as bad if not worse, but for a whole host of different reasons. The problems also sort of connect, because that's great." Kat didn't see the 'get on with it' gesture from Merrra, but it was there. "See, Lily's parents, mostly her mother kind of hate me.

"I'm really not sure why, it's always been that way. It might have something to do with me being an orphan? She's brought it up a few times as a complaint but it doesn't have any heat to it, that would lead me to believe that's the real reason she doesn't like me."

Too many thoughts had built up in Kerra's mind, and she couldn't stop herself as her mouth blurted out. "Have you considered murder?"

Kat choked on her own words at that. She hadn't finished making her point, but that brought her up short. She tried to answer 'No' of course. Why would she want that... but the words didn't come. It was a lie. Sure, it was mostly in jest... but even in jest it was contemplated, so Kat sighed, and answered with the truth. "I have actually and it just isn't that realistic. It's rather messy and hard to clean up and Lily does still like her parents. Less than me, to my surprise, but she does still like them"

The triplets all shook their heads, eyes glued to the floor. Kat thought it was because it was sad to like your friend more than your parents. She was wrong of course, but they weren't going to correct her. Kat let the odd silence stretch for a minute before picking up her rant about Lily's parents. "Another one of the complaints against me was that she accused me of being a demon. That one is rather funny in hindsight, knowing it's true, and that Lily doesn't care, but it's much funnier now.

"The other thing is that I'm hurting her grades by hanging around her. Not sure how, Lily spends her time away from me researching, but most of it has nothing at all to do with school so I never really understood how my presence hurt that one.

"Still, I might have to agree now that I've been a bad influence considering she's trying to join me on perhaps the most dangerous job she could find. It might not be dangerous on a multiversal level but it's not like it's common to need to risk your life doing a job back on Earth."

Then again... soldiers, power line operators. Sewage workers perhaps? People operating heavy machinery... yeah maybe it is more deadly than I thought.

"So that's really it. Not all that much to say about my relationship with Lily really. I've covered most of it" said Kat.

The other demons could feel themselves sweating at that declaration. Comparing how everyone else had spoken about their best friends to how long Kat had spent it wasn't even marginally close. Merra decided that she could bust out of the paper now and did so, as everyone continued to stare at Kat, and wrap their head around the fact that Kat could truthfully say she had 'not all that much to say' when it came to Lily.