

DEMONS 521

Chapter 521: Fighting against Ka-Rat-E

=Kat was trying to use her brief moment of... well it couldn't really be called a reprieve, but the small distance she'd managed to open up between her and the rest of the rats provided a little bit of time to think. It was rather unclear what to do.

I can't even take a big hit for a decisive blow because if I'm held in place too long the rest of the rats would just join in. If they can't kill me they can at least hold me by like... wrapping their claws around my bones or something. Now, Chunk is probably out of the fight if I can give it time, but because everything is moving so fast, he's still a combatant unless I can finish him off. No. I can't just leave him. A combatant is a combatant no matter how injured. If Chunk isn't out of the fight.

Kat pushed herself forward trying to press the advantage. She spread one wing to cover her attacking side and prevent the rats from going straight for her. Chunk was recovering as best he could, and managed to move towards a frantic block for her incoming fist, but it was slower than before. She could use that.

Kat barely registered the feeling of three hands worth of claws shredding her wing. There was a bit of resistance, and they might not have gotten through so easily had Kat not been moving so quickly, but she was, and the offer was easily made. Black blood seeped from the wound leaving a trail in Kat's wake... but the exchange wasn't yet done.

Kat's fist made contact with Chunk's two crossed hands as they tried to absorb the impact, but it was hardly any of her power. It would have still forced the rat in question back a bit but Kat had used her charged as a chance to wrap her tail around Chunk's leg, and instead of being pushed back, Chunk was being pushed down. Arms still reeling from the impact Kat brought her knee forward and let it strike dead centre between the rat's legs.

Now, these rats were never meant to breed. They were similar enough to swarm rats that they lacked reproductive organs and as such, no genitals were crushed in this action. Of course, that doesn't really reduce the pain Chunk was experiencing as Kat's knee completely shattered his pelvis breaking. The bone fragments broke through the skin in places as if a bomb had gone off inside the rat, and nothing useable remained.

Chunk might not be dead... but he was close enough. He would not stand anymore and his fight was over. Death would come soon, and while it wasn't immediate, Kat could be confident in the knowledge that he would STAY DOWN. Still, Kat needed to keep moving so she pulled her sliced up wing forward and in, letting it come away from the other rats so she could keep moving forward and gain a bit of distance.

The action was actually harder and more painful than she'd hoped it would be, a good number of the small muscles contained within her wings that allowed for specific changes in flight had been shredded, even if the muscles in her back that let her fly were not. Large swaths of leathery wings were simply missing even if the gaps were closing.

Still, Kat didn't go far, she only took a few steps past Chunk's body before spinning around to face the other three, now looking significantly more enraged as blood dripped from their claws. Kat tried to get

ready to fight them by closing up her wing behind her back, making it less of a target but she felt the muscles protesting.

Shit. I can't close my wings completely. It can go to resting position semi open behind my back, but 'closed' is unavailable. I don't seem to have enough of the muscles that do that left. Dammit. Ok. That just makes that wing a bit of a target for now.

She could already feel the wound healing so it hopefully wouldn't be too long. Her leg had also completely repaired itself at some point during the charge. She hadn't notice it or the pain that should have accompanied it. Kat used the brief moment to check her reserves and found them sitting at seventy five percent.

That's really not what I wanted. I've got three left and twenty five percent per rat is too much. I can't really work with less then ten percent my body just crashes. Still... I've got the big ones out of my way and my wounds are healing for now. I'll have to deal with these three without getting as injured... but that should be... doable. Hopefully.

Kat squared up, and got ready. Scratch came straight for Kat, not to take her out as no attacks word even attempted, but the rat was making sure she was in range. If she tried to run he might be able to get a light hit on her, and if she turned her wings and tail would be vulnerable for a second. Patch and Chipped were fanning out, using Scratch as a bit of cover so Kat couldn't get free hits in as they moved to complete the triangle formation around her.

Kat wasn't just going to sit there and let them do as they wanted though, so she kicked off the ground sending her backwards a bit. The plan was sound. Jump backwards, slash out at Patch with her tail, and then keep Scratch at bay. The issue was her wing. She still hadn't managed to close it, and its partner was completely shut leaving her uneven in the air resistance department.

This sent Kat into a light spin and she had no choice but to go with it. Abandoning the plan to slash at Chipped, Kat instead used her legs to kick off the rat and head towards Patch on her other side, this time letting her other wing out somewhat to compensate, not fully of course, and the wholes in her right wing meant it was mostly a guess, but it seemed to work.

Kat tried to twist around so that she could look at Patch, but the rat moved faster, getting up closer to her body instead of giving her the time to flip around and elbowing her in the stomach as she passed. Kat felt the wind being knocked out of her but managed to try and rake her nails down the rat's leg in retaliation... to minimal effect.

Shit. These guys have better fur! Kamiko might be getting stuck, I need to step up my game. As Kat's back hit the floor and the other rats tried to move in to counter, Kat decided it was time to cripple Patch. She lashed her arm out aiming for the knee joint and punched it as hard as she could. Due to the horrible angle and the pain of her back slamming into the floor, it wasn't the best.

It was enough though, she heard the joint give way, and while the kneecap wasn't shattered, the muscles holding it in place were shredded, forcing Patch to stagger. Chipped and Scratch had caught up though and were bringing there own legs down to bear on Kat.

Still, she wasn't as useless on her back as a human combatant would be. Kat used her tail to springboard herself towards Patch who was still in the process of stumbling back letting her slam into the rats legs and start him toppling over.

Kat rolled with the rat until her hands were under her and she managed to push herself upwards. She could tell that Chipped was behind her and getting ready to attack her as she came up, but that was a sacrifice she was willing to make to get back onto her feet. Patch was also pretty out of the fight. He could theoretically be a bit of trouble but the loss of a leg would be a major setback.

Scratch came in to try and stab her in the eye, but she easily deflected that with a hand as she rose, straight into the claws of Chipped that dug into her back. Kat grimaced but she was now on her feet. She pushed herself forward and lashed out with a tail against Chipped at the same time. It was blocked, sadly, but she was away from them and another rat down.

Ok. Ok that's good. Two down two to go. I can do this. I don't need to worry too much. Kat really wanted to catch her breath. Using her ability to continuing thinking so fast was weighing on her mind more than her energy reserves. It wasn't that time was slowed; it was just how much she was doing in that slowed time. She was doing full combat manoeuvres as fast as she could, mind looking for openings wherever they may be. Still, she wasn't done yet. She'd be fine. Or at least that's what she told herself.

Chapter 522: Be-Sides

Kat watched warily, Chipped and Scratch were standing just outside of what was her easy attack range. They could react if she tried anything, and she could react if they did the same. For now, she was willing to take the chance to just wait it out. Her wing was getting close to being completely healed and her new set of wounds from getting back on her feet were not as serious as she'd first thought.

Sure Chipped had gotten her back rather good but the muscles hadn't been completely shredded. Quite a few had gotten cut of course, but a good chunk of them had been pushed aside. There wasn't enough time for Chipped to... twist the knife as it were or ensure that the damage was deep enough to cause major issues.

Her back muscles were working just fine and all the extra strength she had meant that Kat's posture hadn't suffered at all. *Maybe I should wait these guys out? Are they smart enough to recognise that I can heal? It's not exactly clear... Can they even tell? No surely they must... but... hmm... maybe they're not looking at the details?*

Kat found herself, for the first time ever, slightly annoyed at the fact her body let liquids slide off of it. This meant of course, that the blood would quickly slide off once she'd been healed and never stuck of round. The lack of blood around wounds that by all rights should still be bleeding was a very clear indicator that the wound was no longer an issue. *I just have to hope that it's not something they've noticed.*

Chipped took a step forward and Kat started to bring up her arms in defence... only for the rat in question to instantly step back into position. The three stared at each other, and Kat tried not to let her relief show. A feint was much better then an attack, and the longer this went on the better she thought she'd be.

Of course... on the other hand this is burning a good deal of energy keeping my mind running at such high speeds. I wonder if the rats have the same issue? I'd guess not honestly. They probably just rely on instincts or whoever is controlling them. If Summoner can see through there eyes, they might be able to process things fast enough to react. I could believe that easily enough.

Before Kat could ponder that idea any long the air changed. It wasn't anything clear, nothing physical, but she could tell something was different now. Kat pushed her aura into the air around her and found no resistance.

Dammit. I thought they must have activated an aura of some kind... but nothings there. It's just mine. Should I press mine down? Kat moved her own aura further trying to push it into the rats until she found herself hitting a brick wall.

A normal sentient creature's aura would be similar to a shroud. Something that is worn around the person slightly out from the skin. It can give way and push back and do many other things besides. An animal's is similar to that, but wilder. Closer to either a flame of protection that burns around the more predatorial creatures or a soft river that flows around the prey animals. Brushing aside concerns but ready to react to ripples.

So when Kat's aura met the metaphysical equivalent of a brick wall her instincts practically screamed 'bad thing' at her. Unnatural. Unnerving. Immovable. Kat shivered slightly and the rats seemed to twitch forward in response but they still did not attack. Kat moved just a half step back, slowly, for their speeds at least, but before the move was complete the rats had matched it. They stood apart. The exact same distance as before.

Seeing this, Kat pursed her lips and tried to ignore the displeasing sensation she got from having her aura interact with the rats. She tried again, pushing into it but got no response at all. Like she was throwing a blanket at a wall and watching it flop down afterwards. Steeling herself, she tried to hit it hard, slamming the weight of her aura towards the rats' own.

They didn't so much as twitch. But that was fine. Wasting time with this, was actually just more time to heal and Kat could tell that most of her damaged muscles were back. The skin would still be missing, but who needs that anyway...

Kat drew back and tried a different tactic. Instead of repeated sharp hits, she pushed into the aura of the rats' and just kept pushing, increasing the pressure, moment by moment, as much as she could. Nothing would give though, and the rats' aura didn't react in the slightest. It was as if she was nothing even worth mentioning. There had been no reaction at all. Even a wall being slammed at least vibrated slightly from the impact. There was no reaction at all.

When that happened, Kat made, what she would later think was a mistake. Her shoulders slumped slightly, relaxing just a bit as she reeled her aura back in somewhat swiftly. In this moment of lost focus Chipped and Scratch charged, using a speed as of yet unseen by any of the Guard rats.

Before Kat knew what was going on, they were both on her, Chipped on the left and Scratch on the right. They had moved to trap her legs between their own sets and were now stabbing towards her at odd angles. Kat slammed her arms into them, trying to forced them off, but she didn't really have any wind up, and the rats simply held on tighter to her legs.

When her own arms made contact, the rats finished their own. Four distinct sets of claws dug into her sides causing Kat to let out a sharp hiss involuntarily. It wasn't the damage that caused it but the air that was forced out of her in turn. Kat tried to turn herself, to spin and get the rats off her but she found her legs locked in place far better than she expected. If Kat had the time, she'd see that the rats had actually shattered the stone and broken their own feet in the process to tie her and them in place for this final showdown.

With that plan clearly busted, Kat wanted to say she didn't freak out and acted rationally. Looking back on things, even with her memory though... she wasn't entirely sure what happened. She sunk down into her instincts not trusting herself to make intelligent decisions at the moment as she panicked. Her instincts flared with one goal in mind. Escape the trap.

Kat burst into a flurry of movement, raking her nails across thickened fur and eyes, her body being torn up further as she struggled and moved in the rats' grip. They simply took her abuse on the chin. Each digging in deeper, ripping and tearing more muscles as they went, and Kat's ability to turn her upper torso for moment slowly started to fail her.

Seeing that nothing was working, a new tactic was found. GO FOR THE EYES. A hand full of demonic energy impaled nail went straight for Chipped's head. The rat didn't do anything more than close his eyes. Kat's hand entered the socket and didn't stop. It wasn't the eye that was needed, it was the squishy stuff beyond that. And the plan worked... mostly. The brain was torn to shreds by the movement having only a very limited resistance being normally quite safe within a skull.

That was one rat down... but it hadn't actually removed the rat from her side, and Kat was in no state to actually question it. Still, she felt her mind clearing up just a little, enough to register Chipped was dead. Not for long though as the panic spread back in. Even if Kat didn't fear dying in this moment, she did fear leaving the others behind to deal with everything or having the teleportation set off the crystal.

Using what little remained of her muscles as Scratch started pulling upwards with his claws and doing yet more damage, Kat took both of her arms and slammed her hands across both ears stunning the rat and stopping further damage for just a moment. It was more than enough as both hands plunged into their own eye and Kat pierced Scratch's brain.

Seeing the light in the rat's eyes go dim Kat came back to herself and back to the pain. She tried to breath in and gather her whits but felt blood in her lungs and couldn't stop the cough that came out instead.

Shit I'm going to need a second here. I need to get these rats and their claws off of me and I need a moment to heal. There's no two ways about it.

Kat proceeded to do just that, pulling the claws from her in a rather unsafe manner. Ripping them out and taking some small chunks of muscle and skin that had been nearby. Still, she didn't care at the moment. They were out of her and the healing could really start. She was mostly just thankful in that moment, that she didn't collapse once the rats stopped supporting her.

Chapter 523: Let the Bodies Hit the Floor

That relief Kat felt upon managing to stay standing quickly fled. As soon as Kat let her perception of time return to human levels the shock of it caused her to fall forward. Her feet tried to find purchase but all the blood on the ground didn't help things and she found herself face first into yet more blood.

"KAT!" shouted Sue from somewhere on the ceiling. Kat wasn't exactly willing to waste energy double checking the location at the moment.

"I'm fine Sue!" Kat shouted back "Just gotta heal up a little bit. I wasn't prepared when I dropped back down to normal levels so that I can heal up faster from my perspective" Sue didn't respond to that, or if she did it wasn't at a volume Kat could hear... which would be surprising but Kat was somewhat out of it at the moment.

Kat also checked her reserves and found them sitting just barely below fifty percent. *Yes! I'll take that. Much more efficient with the last three than the first one. Sure I still have to heal up a bit but that's practically nothing at this point. I'm happy enough with my performance. I wasn't expecting the suicide tactic and had it been anyone else it might have worked. Hmm... I'll have to watch Kamiko for the same thing.*

Kat forced her neck to move. It wasn't much of a physical effort but more of a mental one. When she turned to the side it was hard to make out what was happening. Kamiko and the three rats moved as a blur to her eyes even though she could keep up with them. Without slowing her perception down though she couldn't consciously process it all.

Three of the rats were hardly damaged, Kat didn't see any major cuts at all only a few small ones on their arms that barely even bled. The fourth rat was in much worse shape, cuts littered the rat's entire body and it was clear they were slower than the other combatants. Kamiko was the fastest but not by much, and it was clear that her skill was what kept her in the fight.

While Kat was watching, she didn't see Kamiko's shield get triggered even once, but there was a number of clashes between claw and staff. Kamiko seemed to favour catching their claws just below the blade for some reason, Kat wasn't sure why that was or what it meant, but it was a noticeable pattern even without speeding her thoughts up for a better look.

Kat could feel herself healing, and knew it probably wasn't the best to be lying on the ground still but it was comfy enough and the damage was on her sides not her front... well, her back wasn't quite healed but that was fine too. Nothing to worry about. Moving on from her injuries she moved her head again to try and see Stone.

She didn't succeed all that well. Kat could of course see the giant Crystal Rat that wasn't currently moving, and just a tiny bit of Stone's arm holding onto the thing, but most of her view was blocked by a dome made out of rocks that had to hold the Summoner. Kat could actually see it moving slightly, some of the rocks on top wiggling slightly, likely from Summoner fighting back somewhat.

*Hmm... should I do something about that? I could stand up if I really had to. Taking out the summoner is the entire point of this so just... getting it over with seems like a good idea... except that I'm not sure I can kill her. If she made Crystal then she might be too strong for me to take on properly.

Well. It looks like Stone has this handled for now so I should heal up first. Then I'll help Kamiko out, then we can work out something between the two of us, or maybe three with Sue included as well.*

So, Kat relaxed somewhat for a short while as she did, she kept her eye on Kamiko, not really following along, but watching so that she could act if it was truly necessary. Kamiko needed no help, at least not yet, as during Kat's recover time she watched the injured rat take a heavy blow to the neck and collapse.

Nice one Kami! Maybe you don't need my help after all. Kat thought with a smile. Still, when she felt that most of her injuries were healed, Kat stood up and stretched a little. As she did though, she glanced over at Kamiko and her eyes widened when she saw the flash of white that signalled a hit getting through. The rat that hit her paid dearly for the strike though as Kamiko's naginata flashed through the air and took off... most... of the offending arm.

Clearly Kamiko had been working on it for a bit. A few cuts Kat mustn't have noticed because the naginata made it through the skin, the muscles and instead of cutting through the bone it seemed more like the arm had been popped out of its socket. If the muscles and skin on the other side weren't so strong it would have fallen off there, and it was very useless now.

Kat checked her sides and found them still not quite healed. She'd taken a lot of damage, especially to the bottom of her lungs, and they'd been fixed first. Still, it was mostly just a few muscles and a lot of skin at this point so Kat decided it was time to do something. Dashing forward Kat watched the fight continue as she approached.

The rat with a damaged arm, now designated Army, was taking a back seat to the action, keeping their good arm towards Kamiko but mostly just staying out of range of her weapon. The other two were trying to keep Kamiko busy on the left and right but she was using her naginata in its double bladed mode so she was using both ends to keep the remaining two rats at bay easily.

Hmm, should I try and go for the healthy ones? Get them to focus on me for a bit and let Kamiko get in some good hits? Or should I take out the one that's down an arm. I can definitely manage that by myself, and I have to run past it to get to the other two. Hmm, yeah that's the deciding factor, I think.

When Kat saw that the other two rats had locked their claws with both ends of Kamiko's naginata. She'd gotten in some slices on the bottom of their arms when they did. The third rat thought this was an opening. It wasn't though, because Kat was willing to use the distraction instead.

When the rat took a step forward Kat slammed her foot into the rat's kneecap, using the weakness she'd previously found. Army folded like a chump on poker night. Not expecting it, and certainly not bracing at all the rat went flying away and had no chance of making a comeback.

The other two rats saw it in the corner of their eyes and managed to turn around to face Kat, hopefully to make sure she didn't get the drop on them as well. Sadly, they weren't smart enough to realise the real problem was still behind them as Kamiko swiftly dashed forward with her full power and sliced both rats' heads off.

Kamiko and Kat both let out a simultaneous breath as time returned to normal. "Thanks" said Kamiko as she took in deep calming breaths.

"No problem at all" said Kat

Kamiko raised an eyebrow at that, "Don't think I didn't see you collapse when you were done with your lot Kat. I saw that. I'd like an explanation"

Kat tried to wave it off but Kamiko's stare just hardened. When Sue chimed in with a, "Yeah you better cough up the details. Don't swallow" Kat knew she'd have to explain.

"Look, it was just the shock of returning to real time. I dropped the boost on my mind and body at the time and I was missing a lot of muscles on both sides of my body so the ones that were left weren't quite enough to keep me standing. It's fine, I healed up with no troubles" explained Kat

Kamiko growled a little at this, clearly not liking the idea Kat had even been damaged so much. "Dammit I only took two hits the entire fight. Maybe you should have been shielded as well"

Kat shook her head, "No, I can heal back from pretty much anything and I really am fine now. If you took more damage it would have been really bad for us and I'm not sure if Sue can do two shields at once along with herself. Pretty sure Stone said she couldn't..."

"You still scared us!" shouted Sue

"RIGHT!" shouted Stone making the other three jump. "While I do appreciate that you're all ok, could you perhaps get over here? We need to figure out how to end this properly! REMEMBER the SUMMONER IS STILL UP"

Chapter 524: OFF WITH HIS HEAD!

Oh right... um... woops? I mean... I didn't forget about the Summoner but I suppose I wasn't even thinking that it might be hard on Stone. Even if it's reasonable in terms of effort if we take too long he might run out of demonic energy.

"Sorry, sorry" said Kamiko "We'll get back on track. Though... do you actually know how to deal with her?"

"No I don't" said Stone through gritted teeth. "I'll leave it to you both to go through some ideas. It's actually a major pain to speak while speeding up my perception of time so please work amongst yourselves. Sue is safe to come down if she wants. Tap me on the shoulder once you figure out what we're doing."

What? He can actually talk in slowed time?! And listen too! That's... that... I don't even know how you'd go about that. Is it a skill he's learnt or is it just an ability he got from Ranking up...

"How?" was voiced, and Kat was actually a little shocked to realise it was Kamiko who questioned it.

"You don't know?" asked Kat and Kamiko shook her head in return.

Breaking things up, as always, was Sue, "Yeah well if you two what stop twiddling your thumbs... Kat, could you come up and bring me down?"

Kat glanced up at Kamiko and jumped into the air before bringing her wings out. The damage to them long since healed. "Sure thing, but can't you glide?"

Sue stepped forward so that she was sitting on the lip of the hollow in the ceiling Stone had made for her. It was an uncomfortable position as she had to keep her head tilted to the side to prevent her horns from scraping the top of the roof. "Maybe I just want to feel like a princess, carried down within your arms. It's almost every little girls dream to have a prince charming" replied Sue

Kat raised an eyebrow while flapping her wings to stay in place, she intentionally hovering just far enough away Sue couldn't really jump towards her because of the ceiling height. "Fiiiinee" whined Sue "It's because while I can glide I can't really stop properly. I need to use my shield to take the impact of the ground and I don't want to waste the energy right now ok? I don't want you guys to get hurt, even if SOMEONE" Sue glared straight at Kat's eyes, though the effect was hampered by the need to keep her neck bent "was bleeding enough to put three demons in the hospital just a few minutes ago"

Naw, see there's that heart of gold I'm sure somebody thought you had. Kat flew closer and easily plucked Sue from the outcropping making sure not to hit Sue's horns on anything as Kat started to go down. "Well, I suppose I can be your prince charming for just a bit then. I'll make sure you're safe when we're on the ground as well. Don't you worry about that"

Sue snuggled into Kat's chest to hide the surprise blush that crept onto her face. Sue was currently trying to work out when Kat actually managed to get good at comebacks before realising that what Kat just said was actually so very in character for her it was almost painful. That cleared up the blush rather quickly... but that's no reason to refuse the use of some quality pillows. Sue determined that more hugs would be in her future, weather her future boyfriends thought it was manly or not. While the experience lacked muscles, a definite minus that really couldn't be overcome, the tenderness was something that might be moving up on the list of her priorities.

Of course, it's not like Sue would ever reveal that. As soon as she felt Kat land... and that was a hard thing to judge, for it was hardly noticeable even when she was looking for it... Sue leapt from Kat's arms, and said, in the most faux haughty accent "Thank you my prince, you have delivered me safely from the castle the perhaps evil Stonemason trapped me in. I thank you for your service"

Kat rolled her eyes at the antics and looked to Kamiko. "Ok, now that Sue's here, what's the plan?"

"Well I was thinking..." said Kamiko leaning on her naginata which had both blades hidden at the moment and was practically just a walking stick, "that instead of taking out the Summoner, we could take out the big Crystal rat. That will free up Stone to take out the Summoner. I'm just not sure it's safe enough for us to fight them head on"

That's not a bad idea. It's certainly much safer then any idea I can think of to take out the Summoner. "We can check with Stone attacking it is safe before we try but I'm unbored. How will we kill it though?"

"I'm thinking we try to chop its head off. I don't know quite how much of it is powered by demonic energy or how much of it is biology. Still, even with just energy powering it taking off the head should be a major blow, and then we can work on the neck stump if we need to" said Kamiko thoroughly unconcerned with the slightly gruesome planning.

"How are we taking the neck off though?" asked Sue "If Stoney boy has to keep it in place and can't just kill it outright do we really have the power to do so?"

Kamiko shrugged, "I have two main ideas. The first is that we use my naginata on the crook of its neck and myself and Kat use as much power as we can to force it in. The other is to ask Stone if he has any pickaxes and maybe just try and go to town on it. Might take a bit to chip away, but I'm pretty sure that Stone will have some and if it takes a while that's fine."

"Might be able to pound it in with my hammer" said Sue "If manage to stick just the tip in you could hit it with my hammer and that should be able to put more pressure on it slamming it in good. Better then just trying to using your arms"

Despite the slightly crude way Sue phrased it Kamiko nodded along thinking it was probably right. "Ok, let's tell Stone. Anything else before we go do that?"

When the other two demons shook their heads, Kamiko started walking over to Stone, flanked by the same two demons. When she arrived she tapped Stone on the side and waited for him to give a slight nod before outlining the plan.

"It should be fine. Your plan is good. I have spare pickaxes but you should try the sword first if you think its strong enough to survive the stress. The pickaxes I have are old and worn, not in the best condition. Good luck. I can hold this rat no matter the damage" said Stone, with an unspoken 'for now' at the end everyone heard fairly clearly.

Three pickaxes dropped to the ground nearby and the girls all picked them up and looked at the giant rat. "Ok, hopefully this rat isn't too slippery for footing." Mumbled Kamiko who jumped up first.

Kat followed behind and could see the very clear gap between the head and the rest of the body. *That actually does look like a weaker spot. This crazy idea might just work!* Before Kat could get to excited though, "I can't make that jump you guys" said Sue quietly.

Still, Kat caught it and cursed herself mentally for not realising that. The rat really was huge, though she didn't think it actually out of Sue's ability. Still it was no big deal, Kat simply flared her wings stopping just above the rat and handed her pickaxe off to Kamiko before grabbing Sue from the ground, this time carrying her by her armpits, wanting to be able to put her down very carefully.

It was unnecessary though. Sue found her footing easily and Kat followed soon behind. Kamiko had put the picks off to the side slightly further up on the rat. You could see the wear on them, but they looked to be in working order. No rust or major chips.

Still, Kamiko got out her naginata and placed it in the clear groove before nodding to Kat. When she put her hand on Kamiko's weapon it jumped up slightly as the blade came back out. The pair looked at each other and Kamiko raised the weapon as far as she was comfortable. "On 3 Kat. Use mental acceleration on 2, we go together."

Kat nodded.

"One"

"Two"

Kat's mind slowed, she focused on Kamiko's voice and the fact she wasn't pushing down just yet. Then the next sound came. Kat watched as Kamiko's muscles tensed and copied, as soon as she felt the slightest downward force Kat joined in, letting her perception return to normal as the blade dug into the rat with the sound of breaking glass.

Chapter 525: Falling Apart

Even in slow motion the cracks spread fast, sounding like sounds of raindrops all concentrated onto a few small areas as the crystal broke away. They spread out into a thin spiderweb pattern, all deepest around the middle and thinning out as they got away from the strike zone. Small chips of crystal were dislodged but for the most part things stayed in place. Only around the impact zone were things more serious.

Right where the naginata impacted was the clear line between the head and the body. The line allowed for more cracks to spread along it rather than being purely limited to a circle. The spot the naginata had made contact with had chipped off slightly. It was a large wound for a human, with a chunk the size of a hand being knocked free. Sadly, for something the size of Crystal it wasn't anything more than a mild inconvenience. The naginata blade didn't seem to have found any real purchase either, the chunk of crystal that had gone flying prevented what little blade was buried from being covered on both sides.

Kat and Kamiko shared a look in this slowed time and together as one brought the weapon back up for a second attempt. It was slow going as neither dropped their sped up perception, somehow just seeing the other's movements and syncing them together. The enhanced speed meant there was virtually no lag between their thoughts.

When the blade came down a second time, Kat felt a very slight pause, a fraction of a moment, where the blade stopped moving and she nearly readied herself to raise it once again, but before that moment could be fully realised the blade descended once more sliding in, producing a sound more akin to nails on a chalkboard than the semi-pleasant sounds before.

Kat wanted to flinch back at the sound, but kept herself steady, her muscles focused solely on making sure that the naginata went as deep as possible into the rat. Each subjective second felt like it was stretched far beyond her usual limits, the world had basically frozen and all she had was the slightest downward motions of her arms and that horrible sound.

Then a thunk.

A heavy solid sound, signalling the end. Kat felt her arms pull down further on the weapon but her fingers were sliding down instead of the weapon. Kat stepped back and away letting her perception return to normal and releasing a breath she didn't realise she was holding. Taking in the sight before her, the blade wasn't in quite as far as it felt. It was only in about half the length of the blade, but it stayed put. "We did it" said Kat somewhat breathlessly.

Kamiko grinned back and said, "We did it." Kamiko held that grin for a few more seconds before turning to Kat. "Now I believe you should use the hammer for the final part"

"What?!" hissed Kat. "This is your weapon Kamiko, and even if that hammer is Sue's I don't see why you shouldn't be the one to hammer it in. I don't know I trust myself not to damage it."

Kamiko just waved Kat off, "If Sue's fine with it, I think you should deal the final blow... or however many it needs. You're a bit stronger than me. We proved that at Wrath. You should"

"Yeah Kat" said Sue with a grin "I'm perfectly happy to hand over my shaft to your tender mercy's. While Kamiko is nice and all, she didn't carry me down from my hide away on the roof you know. I'm sure you'll do fine" Sue even handed the weapon over to Kat to prove the point.

When it was dropped in her hands, Kat had expected for her hands to drop a little with the weight off the weapon. She found this was not the case, it simply dropped into her hands and stayed put. It took her a second to realise she could simply hold something like this now. Stepping back slightly Kat gave it a few test swings and it was a strange experience.

She could feel the weight of it as she swung it around. Even if it didn't strain her muscles much she could feel how heavy it was, especially when she changed direction and the mercury centre was forced against the walls.

Ok I can do this. It's not too hard. Just gotta hammer it in. Just like hammering a nail. You've done that before, it's nothing too serious. Hmmm... but I'm probably going to do this more like those oversized hammers at a fair ground. Ok. I might not have done that but I know the way it works and with slowed perception I can make sure it hits the right target.

Kat brought the weapon back and braced her legs. She knew enough to know that this wasn't supposed to be an arm operation but with the whole weight of her body. Letting her instincts guide her Kat started the hammer at the ground and brought it up and around. Once it hit the peak of its arc Kat let gravity take over for a second before twisting her body and pulling the hammer down as hard as she could forcing it down onto the naginata.

Kat wasn't sure what she expected, but the effect was far beyond her expectations. The hammer slammed into the flat end and pushed the sword in deeper sending waves of cracks across the rat's head flowing all the way to the front of its face nearly reaching to its mouth. Kat felt the world pause for a second before the weight of the liquid metal forced the hammer down again.

The growing web of cracks was jolted by this second impact and screeched out. The cracks grew other cracks of their own, covering the entire head in thin cracks that meant there was hardly any untainted crystal, then it started to really change once it reached the mouth. A loud thunk sounded out, and before Kat could register the change the face of the rat split from its mouth all the way to its neck and then the head just shattered, falling to pieces.

Kat felt herself slipping slightly as the naginata, now with nothing below it starting falling as well. Kat pulled back, using her natural grace to stop herself from tripping forward and Kamiko came in and swiped her weapon to prevent it from dropping.

Just as Kat regained her footing, the whole rat jolted, dropping down and causing her footing to slip forward. Kat flared her wings in an instinctive response but Sue was acting nearly as quickly. She dismissed her weapon and reached out to stabilise Kat.

The issue was, Sue was falling herself. In the end, Kat felt herself being pulled sideways as Sue dropped.

Shit I'm going to need to catch them both. Kat pulled Sue up with her arm and shifted her to a fireman's carry over her shoulder, ignoring the wing now in her face as she did something similar on the other side.

Reaching out with her tail she wrapped it around Kamiko who noticed what was going on and reacted as well, using what little stability she still had to push over towards Kat and reached out an arm and rolled into Kat's embrace.

Two demons together was a bit much for her, but Kat could at least take the impact on her legs, using her wings to push them to the side slightly. It was a short drop, but the weight of full to grown demons meant her knees buckled a bit. Still, nothing too serious and Kat put the pair down quickly afterwards.

"You guys alright? What happened?" asked Kat

Sue flicked her head backwards to get the hair that had fallen out of her face and glared over at Stone. "I'm fine, dunno if Stone will stay that way though. Doesn't he know anything about giving a lady warning before dropping on them?"

Stone levelled a glare at Sue and said "I will admit to being unprepared for the rat simply dropping. I was freezing the equivalent of its muscles so when the head shattered and the body stopped responding the muscles relaxed and because I was already trying to induce that state, it simply dropped."

Stone continued his walk over to the stone dome he had created before placing a hand gently on it and clenching it into a fist. In an instant the whole structure shrunk to the size of a baseball, blood oozing out of the cracks. "It is done"

Kat's eyes flew open wide. *What the heck! Holy shit... he... he just totalled this last enemy. Oh dear me... HOW STRONG WAS THE CRYSTAL RAT. If Stone was kept in place by that thing... but he can just... just oneshot the Summoner when it isn't interfering... woah. That's... that's pretty hardcore Stone. I didn't... wait... why couldn't he just do that before! I wonder... hmm... could the bigger crystal rat have been helping in some other way? Maybe spreading its toughness out or something? I mean... Stone wouldn't mess with us but... now I'm more confused then impressed I think.*

Chapter 526: So Close to the Answers... And Yet.. So Far...

"Well fuck me I'm glad this is finally over" said Sue looking at the rock containing what remains of the Summoner.

"No thank you Sue, I'm straight and Kat's... whatever she is" said Kamiko with a wince. It was clear she didn't really want to voice the words but felt Sue deserved the 'victory' and was willing to go along with it for a bit.

Sue was of course, going to capitalise as best she could. "What are you saying? Is Kat a one man band? A purveyor of fine produce. Perhaps a theremin player or the owner of a great toy store" Sue wiggled her eyebrows, grin increasing ever so slightly with each word.

I maybe got half of those... I... by context are they all the same joke? Kat raised a confused eyebrow at Sue, who sighed and said, "My comedy is clearly wasted on you Kat. At least Kamiko" who was now bright red, something Kat didn't notice before "noticed what I was actually saying. I'm disappointed in your lack of knowledge Kat"

Before anyone else could reply Stone stepped in "Sue!" Sue snapped to attention and looked up at Stone with big 'innocent' eyes. "While I can ignore your humour and accept it as part of yourself, before we get too lost in it let's get a move on shall we? Unless you all WANT to stand around in rat guts?"

Kat assumed that would have cowed Sue, Kat and Kamiko actually started moving, Sue just returned a smug grin to Stone and only started moving after she saw everyone else do the same. "Why Stone, I

know you're normally rock hard but that's no reason to complain when others try to reach an enlightened state. Why, I think we should all strive towards the very PEAK!"

Stone tilted his head back to glare at Sue. "I'll let you keep going with the other two. Direct another inuendo at me and I'll cut you pay understood?" ordered Stone

Sue held his glare for a few moments before sighing. "Understood Stone..."

After that she ran up to join Kat and Kamiko, because she found no reason to stay at the back if Stone wasn't going to allow her to make fun of him. Once she was moving though, she actually took to the front and everyone else kept pace. Sue set that at a reasonable speed, not believing she had the control to properly balance her demonic energy consumption, and so she simply moved at a 'jog' for her, a pace she would be comfortable with for hours.

"Well, now that it's just us girls, perhaps we should chat about our hobbies, or what boys we like. Well... Kat might want to skip that last one. Actually no. Serious time. What is your sexual orientation Kat? I'm pretty sure it hasn't come up?" said Sue

"Uh... I don't know?" said Kat somewhat awkwardly.

Sue let out a low growl that felt like a sigh for some reason before looking over to Kamiko. "Really? Really? Kamiko please tell me she isn't that bad. She should know right? I mean... how does she not know?" asked Sue

Kamiko shrugged, "Kat's never mentioned anyone she likes that way"

Kat nodded, "I've just not had romantic feelings about anybody I don't think" explained Kat.

"Bah" said Sue waving a hand back at Kat, "Screw romance, who have you looked at and thought 'Damn I want them to push me against the wall and fuck my brains out'" Kat's face twisted in distaste at the idea, not even realising herself the true force of disgust visible on her face. Sue actually flinched back a fraction but was missed by Kat, "... right right... um... I guess you could be doing the pushing against the wall instead...?"

Kat's facial expression didn't exactly improve much at that thought and Sue took notice again. "Ok fine... um... right... who are the most important people in your life? Don't tell me about them just... just name them?" asked Sue

Kat narrowed her eyes suspiciously but listed off everyone close to her in order of when she met them, ending with Kamiko and "... you might count as well now Sue"

Sue breathed out a long puff of air before asking. "Ok, apparently this is going to be difficult. Kat. Have you ever had any male friends?"

Hmm. That's... I don't know the answer to that one off the top of my head. I had... I've had male acquaintances that certainly could have been friends if they stuck around but... not really, not for half a decade at least. "Not really. There were a few that might have been but they all moved away and we didn't keep in contact" said Kat

"Right how do you feel about that?" asked Sue pressing in.

"Should we really be doing this now Sue?" asked Kamiko "I'm not saying it isn't important to investigate but... we're tired Sue. We just killed a giant rat made out of crystals and stopped a very nasty corrupted. Is this really the time?"

Sue glanced between everyone here, gaze lingering on Stone for a bit. "I... I suppose not. Sorry Kat. I mean... even if... no it's not something I should have brought up with Stone around if I even qualify which... I mean... you did list me... but I was at the end... um... why was that? I... I don't mean to be rude about it but... now I want to know..."

Kat just shrugged, "Well I don't really know what you're both looking for so I'm not to annoyed but, to answer your question Sue, it was simply in order of when I met my friends or otherwise important people. Still not sure what half of them classify as. You're the most recent maybe addition to the list"

Sue smiled at that, "Well do keep in contact once this is all over. D.E.M.O.N.S is very slow with messaging. Did you know it's actually to prevent it from being used as an Instant Messaging source and not because it can't? Shocking when I learnt it but it's not a secret. Um... anyway thanks for that. Why are the labels on that list in question though?"

Kat sighed when she heard the question, "Well I've already had my freak out over it all, but essentially. The first is Gramps, he practically raised me and his status is only sort of in question. He's either a father figure or a grandfather figure. Probably the first but his age makes it... a bit on the line.

"Next would be Lily, my best, and until I met Kamiko, only friend. Others might count as friends, but she's the only one who definitely counts. After that is Sylvie. She's more like a little sister or... well a little sister bordering on daughter to me.

"Following on from that is where things get really messy. Vivian and Callisto. Vivian's adopted me and Sylvie but it's only been a couple of weeks since then. She's also not that much older than me and certainly doesn't act like it. I don't know what I want her to be or what she wants me to be. Maybe big sister is the better idea but I don't want to accidentally make her Sylvie's other big sister and not her adopted mother.

"And Callisto... well despite what I said about Vivian I think Sylvie is actually closer with and identifies more with Callisto. The problem there of course is... I'm pretty sure those two are just roommates. Still, they live together with us and Callisto cooks and cleans because Vivian won't let her play rent so that muddles things further. Is she just... well she's not JUST the maid of course

"But then what is she? Another big sister? Another adoptive mother? I have no idea quite frankly and it's all quite a mess. She feels... I dunno. I'm personally not as close to her as Vivian and I just haven't really talked to her casually all that much to find our niche. Then there's you and Kamiko.

"Kamiko's been great this week" Kamiko beamed as Kat said that "letting me into her home, introducing me to her family and especially the Demon Hub. I don't know what I'd have done without her. Then there's you. We've only spent a day together. There you go Sue. That's all my important people"

"That..." Sue stumbled over the words. "That really doesn't seem like a lot of people. I mean... gee Kat, I've had sex with more people than you're notquite friends with. I mean... this just feels weird"

"Yeah but you sleep with people for fun and on Contracts, is it really a fair comparison?" asked Kat with Kamiko nodding together.

Sue shrugged, "It's mostly an expression but... I guess you're right. You're friends are all more important to you then most of the guys I've slept with. Heck, you personally a more important to me then at least half those same guys. At least I plan on talking to you again!"

Chapter 527: the Way Out

In the end, most of the 'discussion' that took place was Sue making as many innuendos as possible. Things had gotten rather heavy, and even though Kat hadn't gone into the even stranger relationship with Minor and Major.

There were a few interesting things of note. The first was that the corpses of the guard rats had turned to mush when they went past. It wasn't clear if they decomposed quickly after the Summoner was killed or if they were always going to disappear so quickly. Checking the patrol rat corpses didn't help because those were already mush when they were left behind.

When they got to the 'small' hole that the three demons had previously struggled with they found a stone staircase leading up to it and Stone went first, lifting the ceiling of the small tunnel to allow the group to walk through this time. Sue started to make a few comments but Stone threw a rock lightly at her and just glared.

The giant rat was an interesting sight once they reached that room. The unlike the guards, the bones of the giant rat had remained. They were still in the room but the flesh had become a brown mush covering the ground. Stone raised up a walkway to avoid the muck and made sure that it curved slightly to avoid the ribs. They all took the chance to avoid the mess.

By the time they got to the ice caves, Sue was starting to flag. She'd had a big day and was not yet as robust as the others. Stone just patted her head lightly and threw her over his shoulder. She complained lightly at the time but Stone just asked, "You sure?" and she stopped all further complaints, simply accepting the help for what it was.

It did mean the group sped up at that point moving at twice the speed. It took no time to reach the drop and Stone easily lifted a platform with everyone up and out of the hole, moulding it into a staircase after they'd stepped off, making sure it was structurally sound and that whoever came here next could get up and down without help.

As they entered the mines, Kat and Kamiko were also starting to feel the wear of the day. Kat was better off because of her regeneration. Her muscles were in good condition and her fatigue was mostly mental. It was still starting to get to her and only the knowledge that they would be able to rest soon kept her running.

On Kamiko's end, she was more used to this. She'd spent years practicing with her weapon, training until she couldn't move. Running for days on Contracts. She had more experience with real fatigue and was able to ignore it easily. Her mind was actually much fresher then Kat's, and despite Kat's greater strength, Kamiko's muscles were more used to this, not needing regeneration to keep her going.

When they made it outside Kamiko and Kat practically tore off their earmuffs and dumped them in the box. There was a slight desire to stick around and chat but it was clear that nobody really had the energy still. Kat had also realised the reason Sue had gone so hard on the sex jokes while they were walking was actually because the other demon had been getting delirious. So much so she'd fallen asleep at some point as they were leaving.

The K's just looked tiredly at Stone, who could see, despite the lack of bags under their eyes, that they were tired and there was nothing more they could do. So he sent them off with a nod and they disappeared.

Back at Kamiko's house Kat still hadn't really let things come back into focus so she didn't notice how late things had gotten. When the pair stumbled inside Nira looked up from the couch where she had a stack of papers before her. The table nearby had a bunch of food on it all under covers but Kat's mind hardly registered that. "Are you ok? Why are you both so late?" asked Nira, concern touching her voice.

"Muum? Mum!" mumbled Kamiko "Their was... rats. Lotsa rats. So many rats mum. We got them all doe. Yup. Got the big rat. Or... no it was a smaller rat. But it was the BIG Rat"

Ok, Kamiko might be willing to admit that she was more tired than she thought after hearing herself speak. Kat was tired enough that the answers all seemed very reasonable to her. Nira though, smiled thinly at the pair and said "Well, I'm sure that's quite the story you'll have for me. You need to go bathe first though"

"Can't we jus' sleep?" asked Kamiko

Nira stood up and then she was suddenly beside the two girls, dragging them by the arms. She was strong enough and had enough control that when they fell behind she lifted them up slightly and pulled them forward so they were moving at a decent speed. When they hit the drop, Nira just lifted them both and took the full impact on her legs, not even needing to bend her knees.

Eventually they got to the bath and Nira put the two down against the wall before turning on the water. It didn't take long for the tub to fill and when it did the two K's had already started drifting off with their heads on each others shoulders. Nira wasn't having it though and threw them both into the water.

Kat, for her part, was willing to stay face down for a bit. *I don't really need to breathe that much. I can deal with this for a while.* Before she could finish the thought properly Nira had jumped in as well and turned them both over to face up. "Now, you pair are going to get clean and then you are going to eat. Ok?" instructed Nira.

Five minutes of dozing later and Kat felt much better. She'd sunk into a light meditation for a bit and was good to go once again. Sure, she still needed proper sleep or a longer time for meditation, but pulling herself out of the water was possible now. "Should we go eat now?" asked Kat

Nira nodded and answered with, "If you're both awake enough for that"

Kamiko blushed but nodded, "Yeah... sorry about earlier mum. I didn't mean to say that exactly..." said Kamiko

Nira grinned and sung, "Oh my dear sweet Kamiko, it was A DOR A BLE. You haven't done as much cute stuff with me lately and I needed that. Now, come on let's get some food in you both and you can tell me all about it."

Once they were dressed and sitting at the dining table the younger two demon's started eating rather ravenously. Kat had picked up a large noodle dish with large chunks of something that tasted and felt a lot like chicken. The sauce was a little spicy and very tart. She was surprised how well it worked together.

Kamiko had chosen a large fruit that looked like a watermelon. It had been carved out and filled with more fruit that had been mushed slightly with large chunks sticking out in places. It was a bit like a fruit only version of nacho cheese and chips with the chips included. Kat didn't even want to know what that madness tasted like.

Once the first round of food, for Kamiko at least, was finished Nira spoke up. "So. Now you can both tell me more coherently what happened"

Kamiko flushed again and opened her mouth but no sounds came out. Kat however was willing to pick up the slack and went over the whole story with Nira. Kat could see that Nira's eyes got a little bit sharper as the story went on. She clearly wasn't exactly pleased with how things went.? "... and that's it. We walked back through the tunnels after that"

"I'm not happy this Stone character was able to send you both on such a mission" said Nira with a frown, "And sure, it worked out at the end but what if you'd gone out to fight without back up? It sounds like you wouldn't have managed. That is certainly above your paygrade. At least normal swarm rats isn't really a concern, but after that first Giant Rat you should have known something was wrong. Such a fight just during a punishment? We are not that cruel to such young demons"

Kat shrugged unapologetically. She didn't have any reason to know that and everything worked out in the end so she didn't feel like there was any real issue. Kamiko on the other hand looked down at her hands awkwardly. "Well... I mean... the giant rat wasn't that outside of the realm of possibility?" said Kamiko with question heavy in her tone.

Nira sighed. "The size maybe but not the size and toughness both together. It just isn't how that works. Not with swarm rats unless the whole swarm got the toughness, which it clearly didn't"

"Sorry Mum" said Kamiko

Nira sighed again, "I'm not really mad at you... just worried Kamiko. I know I could heal you if you got hurt but I still worry"

And she probably thought it wasn't too bad because of Sue's shields which prevented Kamiko from taking damage. Finding out we were up against something pretty scary must have rattled her.

Chapter 528: Looking at Future Prospects

Kamiko then paused, taking an additional moment to consider her mother's recriminations. "Wait a minute Mum... why aren't you also annoyed with Kat? She took way more damage than I did. I at least had shields" said Kamiko

Nira's eyes snapped to Kat's for a second before she looked away, allowing her head to slowly return to its position gazing at Kamiko. "Now... while you make that sound bad, and I agree she also shares some blame, I know she has regeneration. What makes you so annoyed?"

"But... every time Kat fought she lost tonnes of blood. In fact, blood pools near her enemies were normally at least half her own, even when fighting multiple enemies!" said Kamiko with an understated passion.

Nira glanced over at Kat and shot a blue beam out of her eye. It was rather slow, and Kat felt she had plenty of time to dodge it with room to finish another serving if she really wanted. Maybe get up and grab a cup of water before sitting back down just to waste a bit more time. When the beam did eventually make contact Kat didn't feel any different.

Nira just nodded and said, "Well Kat's completely healthy. In fact, I bet if I was to do the same scan on you she'd come out on top Kamiko"

"Really Mum?" said Kamiko unsure. Her desire to believe her mother warring with the damage she had seen Kat sustain.

Nira smiled and said, "Yes. Kat is perfectly healthy. Something that only really happens to people with regeneration. Especially the good kind. Furthermore, because Kat doesn't even scar while using it she has no need to come to medical outside of extreme services. She doesn't need internal scarring fixed up, or external of course. There aren't even many proper markers for fatigue. There is no need to worry yourself Kamiko."

Kamiko pouted at her mother letting out a long huff of air and poking her food a bit to try and drain the tension from her shoulders. Eventually, she said, "I still don't like it. You didn't see the damage she took mum... it just seems... so excessive. Maybe training would be better? Could we train her?"

Nira pursed her lips. It was a more difficult question then it appeared on the surface. The easy answer was yes. Kat was clearly untrained and Nira was more than capable of running the girl through the basics, heck Kamiko could do that. But it wasn't the best offer Kat could likely get. Nira knew that just being a nondem made her important and if she really wanted she could probably negotiate for a lucrative deal somehow.

Even with options though, perhaps it would be safer to train her a bit up first. Nira shook her head though, realising that it wasn't worth it. Despite Kamiko's fears, Nira knew that Kat's method of abusing her regeneration was actually very effective and not easily taught. That and she had no idea what kind of weapon Kat used. So she asked. "What weapons do you know Kat?"

Kat grinned sheepishly and looked down at the table a bit. *This is awkward. I know I should have training. I guess I'll mention I technically have it lined up.* "I use the fans. A weapon fanatic told me it was one of my best options. Two fans one in each hand. I even got a Heartfelt Contract from it so I know she was sincere. Don't worry though I actually did a job with the payment being training. Once the punishment is over I'll get to that." Said Kat

"Oh?" said Nira surprised, "While I will not ask about the Heartfelt, for that is very private and you should perhaps refrain mentioning it in the future, having training lined up is a very good thing. How did you manage that? D.E.M.O.N.S usually requires payment then and there."

"It was for an Emergency from my Beacon. Once the situation was sorted out they asked what I wanted and I explained what I really needed was teaching but that I didn't have time right then so it got put off. That combined with the fact that the fan teacher they knew wasn't nearby at the time meant they'd need to reach out to them first." Explained Kat.

Nira face got a bit more serious at that. "Hmm, Beacons can be dangerous things Kat. They can be abused. For all the safeguards on them it is still very much possible. I won't say you got a bad deal, for it really does sound like it's worked out well, don't go handing them out too frequently. I know you've only been on a few Contracts, especially for a Rank 2 but we don't get an infinite amount"

That's a fair criticism. Kat didn't notice her tail drooping when she accepted Nira's words, lost as she was in her thoughts. *I still think it was worth it. At least with Major and Minor. Maybe not the Tournament guys. They're cool sure but it's not quite as personal with them. I probably shouldn't have given it to Minor the first time... but I don't regret that. She needed assurance and I was able to provide it.*

Then add on the fact I saved her and her sister's life because of the thing I bet their family will keep it very safe. They're good people. Hmmm... I wonder if that's more about me. Having good people as Contractors? No that doesn't make sense I met Xiang... but he didn't actually make the summoning circle did he? It was an old one... I wonder if that messed things up?

Might be something to keep track of. The only other questionable person was when I was sent on that mission by D.E.M.O.N.S specifically and I know that was for me ability to lie and not because I'd want to do the Contract. "I don't regret it" said Kat, "I've given out two beacons and while it might not have been strictly needed for one, I regret nothing with the first I gave out"

Nira nodded slowly letting her hair bob with the movement. "Well I'm glad about that. You need conviction in your choices. I still think you might have been a bit hasty but if you're willing to stand by it. Actually voice your approval that means enough for now. A surprising number of demons can't even do that"

Kat let out a breath she didn't even know she was holding and nodded. "Yeah it was... well the Emergency I answered really was an emergency. A... yes I'd call them a friend now, she managed to nearly die. If I didn't come to help... I'm not really sure anyone could. They needed someone fast and it had to be someone Minor trusted. That was pretty much... me and the Queen, her mother and I don't think she'd have gotten there in time"

Nira winced in sympathy. "I see. That certainly does help you justify your choice when you know that had you not done so it would have lead to a death of someone you know. However, I warn you, that's something you will have to be prepared for in the future"

Kat frowned at the insinuation. "Why is that? My original world is quite safe, and the friends I've made in other worlds are pretty safe for now."

"Yes for now. But not forever. An even greater point is that... Kat... you're going to live a very long time. You're already quite close to immortality. It's not even hard for demons to pick up. Old age is a genuine risk when taking into consideration what you might need to defend your loved ones from. The hardest

part can be when they decide to move on. Not all species or individuals can handle being alive for ever. Heck, some demons can't do it, and it's quite normal for our species." Explained Nira

Hmm. I'm not super worried I don't think... I'm sure there's plenty of ways to increase people's lifespan. Lily will be sorted out pretty soon and I can use that other token if push comes to shove to stop the worst from happening. Gramps... Gramps probably won't stick around though...

Kat bit the inside of her lip and forced herself not to cry at the thought. *Gramps would probably say no. Even though he has no desire to die right now, or in the near future. I know he misses his wife too much to live forever. He doesn't fear death, for himself, but for the orphanage. Maybe I could take that angle? No, I shouldn't be trying to think of ways to force him to stick around longer. I'll figure something out if need be.*

Callisto, Vivian and Sylvie should be fine. I have plenty of time to figure something out for those three and likely a token for Sylvie if push comes to shove. I doubt it will though. I can make sure they're happy and safe. Getting sick or injured... I can probably find something here to help without the token. Maybe just using money will be enough.

Chapter 529: Lust that Scrapes the Sky

After the topic got so heavy Nira backed off, encouraging the younger demons to head to bed. Neither complained at all and swiftly found themselves in Kamiko's room. When Kat sat down on the bed, she wasn't expecting Kamiko to move forward and settle herself into Kat's arms. "Um Kamiko?" asked Kat

"I just... it'd be nice to know you're ok. I know Mum said you're fine, but you lost a lot of blood. At least during Greed it wasn't so bad and the pain was mitigated but... I'm still a bit worried" explained Kamiko

Kat just shrugged and pulled the other girl in closer. Having someone to hug was always a great thing and didn't find the idea awkward in the slightest. Kamiko shuffled herself slightly so that she was actually higher up than normal so that her horns were above Kat's head. Kat's own horns were on the front of her head, so Kamiko made sure that despite how high up she'd moved, her head didn't go past Kat's own horns.

The next morning Kat woke up, she still felt a little off. The sleep had done wonders but after all the battles yesterday combined with the work at Gluttony the day before, it was a bit much on her mind. The sped up perception likely being the biggest issue as she had, from her perspective at least, more memories.

Still, it wasn't anything major at all and Kat didn't even bother to mention it to Kamiko. The pair had a very small breakfast together with Kat sipping on some juice that was orange. It wasn't orange juice, but what it actually was, not even Kamiko knew. Kamiko had a bowl of jelly which prompted Kat to ask, "How healthy is that for you? I'm mostly just curious..." asked Kat

Kamiko smiled at the question and finished the small amount of food she had before answering. "Well, it's a matter of perspective really. The biggest issue is that it doesn't have a lot in it. It's just flavour for the most part. It's not bad for you, but it's also not really all that good either. It's... hmm... the stuff we

by is a specialty brand from Gluttony. Not overly expensive but the details are rather strict. We treat it more like rice or bread. Nice and somewhat filling but not overly nutritious."

Excuse me what? This is their bread replacement? I was not expecting that. Though... hmm... I guess if it actually is a proper substitute. "Is that normal for Succubi?" asked Kat

Kamiko shrugged. "It's... not rare exactly. Quite a lot of families start to develop odd tastes over time. I mean, that's practically the entire point of Gluttony, is catering to the ever growing new and strange cravings demons develop.

"The jelly, just for example, was not always so acceptable as a bread substitute. It was probably quite bad for whoever developed it first. Jelly isn't anywhere close to the strangest diet a demon could have, but I wouldn't say that it's common in any way. As long as you weren't asking members of my family, you'd be lucky to find one in ten Succubi who find it as enjoyable as us." Said Kamiko

"Do I have something like that?" asked Kat

Kamiko shrugged again and said, "Maybe? Not everyone has food they really prefer over other kinds. I wouldn't be surprised of course, but it's certainly not necessary."

Kat nodded and finished off her juice, seeing as Kamiko was eyeing the fridge and didn't want to leave the temptation open for Kamiko for too long. Kat had considered eating something for breakfast but she wasn't hungry. Food didn't feel like the answer to her being slightly under the weather today.

Then they teleported off. When Kat opened her eyes to the new scenery, it was to a skyscraper in front of her with a truly giant dome of glass behind it. Kamiko led the way as Kat stared around. There were other buildings nearby, but none of them eclipsed ten stories at the absolute maximum. Excluding the massive skyscraper it all felt very residential.

When the glass automatic doors opened Kat felt like she was in the city back on Earth for a split second before really taking in the area. It was Lust's reception area clearly. Along the back wall was a number of demons sitting behind a large desk that stretched across most of it. They each had a computer at their terminal and were wearing formal business attire.

That was about all they had in common. Even the ones that were Succubi had such wildly different appearances that Kat wouldn't be surprised if they counted as separate species. Every colour of the rainbow was represented, and then some more for good measure. Everything from blue to purple to orange to bright yellow to black like coal to one demon in particular, that actually emitted white light. Granted, they were clearly not a Succubus, and in fact made of glowing crystals, but the variety of colours was breathtaking.

The rest of the area had no fewer colours. Groups of demons stood around chatting and taking up space on the various plush couches and chairs in the lobby. There was also a café stand on either side of the area with a line nearly approaching the door from either side. *The more things change the more they stay the same. I wonder if demons have some kind of super coffee?*

Before Kat could get too far, she spotted a very tall Succubus out of the corner of her eye that was clearly making her way over to her. She was bright red, and it even extended to her horns that came up from her temples and extended decently high in a manner somewhat similar to Kat's, though missing

the framing of course. She had a tight business suit on that didn't leave anything to the imagination. Her skirt was so short that Kat was surprised nothing indecent was showing at the edges. When she smiled at the K's, Kat was surprised to see her teeth were pitch black with a glossy sheen. "Greetings Kat and Kamiko, please follow me for a moment"

Kat glanced at Kamiko, who gave a shrug in response. That was enough for 'Red' apparently because she simply turned around and the pair followed. They were led to the side of the large desks and into a hallway of elevators. It was somewhat busy, and Red moved them towards the back where things were a little calmer before taking one of the benches lining the wall and offering a seat for the two. She didn't take one though and Kat could see this wouldn't be a long thing. Deciding it was more comfortable to remain standing and not squish her wings she just shrugged and Kamiko seemed determined to do the same.

"Now, Kat, you have no reason to recognise me, but I am the secretary for the Director of Lust. Her name is Lillian. You'll be taken up to her office for a chat if that is ok with you." Said Red in a very calm and soft spoken manner.

Kat glanced over at Kamiko who had her lips pressed together. "Is there a reason we're being separated?" asked Kamiko

"Indeed Kamiko. We are offering you a full course spa day while Kat meets with the director." Said Red
Kamiko took a half step back in surprise "I'm... I'm sorry what? I thought we were on punishment duty?"

Red nodded, "Yes, however, the director has decided to use this as a chance to properly recruit Kat for the faction. It was decided the easiest way to do this was to have Lillian speak to Kat herself, and so you have something to do you've been offered a chance at relaxation."

"Why not try to recruit Kamiko at the same time?" asked Kat

Red smiled, once again showing a mouth full of black teeth which still somehow looked calm and inviting. "We believe that because of Kamiko's sisters and their own employment here, if they have not sufficiently swayed her there is nothing we can do. As powerful as the director is, family is a much stronger motivator. While we'd love to see Kamiko join us as well, she has a much better understanding of if it would be right for her"

"I see..." said Kat hesitantly, truth be told she was a little surprised the words made it out of her mouth.
That makes some sense I suppose. I wonder how truthful it really is. It all seems above board. I wonder if that's mostly an act or because they just want to be upfront about everything? "Is that good with you Kamiko? I'm fine with meeting the director on my own"

Kamiko looked from Red to Kat and back again somewhat torn. As nice as the offer of a spa day was, and truly a full course from Lust HQ no less, was valuable. Meeting the director was likely just as rare. A large part of Kamiko just wanted to see the strange figure in charge of everything. The main thing holding her back was the faction was clearly trying to be nice about this as was reasonable. It didn't necessarily mean Kamiko would be unwelcomed, and perhaps they even thought they were giving her the better option. Kamiko hesitated for a few seconds longer before deciding the ability to rub the spa day in the faces of her sisters if they started annoying her was worth it. "I think that all sounds good Kat!" said Kamiko with a smile.

Chapter 530: The Door To Hell

"Do you require assistance moving around the compound Kamiko? The signs are all very explicit but if you haven't been around recently you might not remember. I can acquire a guide for you if needed" said Red.

Kamiko tilted her head to the side as she considered the question for a short moment before admitting both to herself and Red, "I'll take the guide if that's ok. I don't have confidence I'll be able to find my way around"

Red nodded and pressed a hand to side of her horn at its base. The horn in question started to glow slightly before an elevator nearby dinged and opened. From the door walked another Succubus with the same outfit Red had chosen, and, with the current naming conventions, would easily take the moniker Blue.

She had blue skin and even bluer eyes. While her skin was dark, her entire eyeball was bright piercing blue that seemed to see everything. Her eyes also contained small specks of light that seemed to rotate without any input from Blue. Her horns on the other hand were very small, even smaller than Kamiko's. They sat at the side of her head in the same spot as the other demon, but barely extended past her hair, which was a red matching Kat, and the only natural part about her that wasn't blue.

Blue just nodded at Red before grabbing Kamiko lightly on the shoulder and guiding her away back towards the row of elevators. Before Kat could spend too much time thinking about it Red spoke up again. "Now that Kamiko has approved of the plan, would you like to come with me to Lillian's office? Her schedule is current quite open, so we don't need to rush you but her time is... somewhat important"

Somewhat important? That seems like a weird thing to say about your boss. I don't quite understand what could be the point of that... why only somewhat? Despite these questions, Kat didn't feel comfortable asking for the answers, so she said, "Yes I'm ready to go now"

Red nodded and lightly put her hand on Kat's shoulder before leading her towards the final elevator in the room. When it opened Kat could see a mirror at the back and a large number of buttons for the floors in question, though they only covered the ground floor before moving on to the 500's. Red didn't hesitate though and pushed the button for the 555th floor.

Kat watched the doors close and prepared herself for the ride only for the doors to open back up again into a large lobby. Her mouth unwittingly dropped open, and she heard a giggle coming from beside her. "The elevators in this building all teleport to there destination Kat" said Red between the laughter.

Kat was still very impressed. The reception area she stepped out into looked similar to the one down below just with no people around. There was a large desk next to the elevator exit with several holographic screens spread around it and a few knickknacks on the desk, however it was currently unoccupied. Mostly because the owner was currently standing next to Kat. *nOvelnext.com*

The rest of the various chairs and couches were all of fine make and scattered around the large area. They gave ample room for seating and the doors on the side of the room were reasonably sized but giving no indication of where they went. The back of the room, held no such illusions.

The door itself was easily fifteen metres tall. It towered over everything else in the room and commanded a presence unlike any other. The door was made of some kind of black marble that seemed to draw in light towards a few key points on it. The really strange part though, was that Kat realised the door wasn't carved like she initially thought. She was looking at a stone copy of herself and Red.

Every step she took closer caused her reflection to grow larger. The light from the door seemed to end up in her eyes, hair, and the flowers on her outfit. 'Her' eyes shone bright purple casting deep shadows around her face making it seem sharper and more intense. The carving of her red hair shone red yet cast no shadows, either on the rest of the carving or the carving of her body.

The final thing was the flowers on her dress which shone a bright white and moved slightly around, spinning carefully as she walked. Kat's tail flicked around in surprise and the stone double copied easily.

The rest of her details though, were missing in the dark black of the substance. Red's picture was much the same though the glow for her was concentrated around her horns and nails. Leaving a glowing red coming from both that did cast shadows. Her attire giving off no light.

Kat swallowed deeply as she got closer to the door and the copies form started to tower over her, stretching upwards as it started to reach towards the full height of the doors the closer she got. It was really starting to hit her. She wasn't meeting with the equivalent of Boss here, someone decently important from Greed, or Stone a mine supervisor. She was meeting with the HEAD of Lust. She controlled the entire faction in this Demon Hub. She was at least Rank 5 like Nira, and almost certainly more powerful.

Maybe I'm in over my head here... I mean... shit ok... um... Kat tried to organise her rapidly spiralling thoughts as the door loomed closer. *Am... am I even worth this sort of attention? I'm just a Rank 2 demon dammit. I... shit what the heck am I doing. Well, freaking out is the answer but... I guess I'll have to do my best.*

Red bowed forward at the door about fifty metres out, and then held her hand forward in a strange gesture Kat couldn't properly keep in her mind as she looked at it. As Red did so, the copy of her on the door bowed back and turned ninety degrees reaching a hand out towards the centre of the room.

With sharp crack the door split cleanly down the middle and started to open inwards to Lillian's office. Kat gulped and stepped forward as her eyes took in everything. The back wall was a giant glass window shedding light on the entire room and keeping it well lit and bright.

The left and right walls were lined with books from floor to ceiling but the shelves themselves were slightly curved inwards towards the top to make it look as if the shelves were looming over the person in the centre.

Two giant chairs blocked the view of where Lillian must have been sitting but as Kat took steps into the room the two chairs started to shrink. Every step closer they continued to get smaller and smaller revealing more of the desk behind it. When they did it was a surprise.

The desk itself was huge, but mostly for its width. It stretched all the way across the room from left to right. It was very thin but had screens opened all across it and a few pieces of paper across it. The surface was white marble looking substance that contrasted with the door. When the chairs shrunk

further and Kat saw someone who had to be Lillian, she nearly stopped walking. Only the fact she was already freaking out prevented her from faltering.

Sat behind the desk was the smallest Succubus she'd ever seen.

Even propped up on a chair it was clear this was the case. Kat could see Lillian's whole body and nothing was truly hidden by the desk. She stood at most one metre high and that was likely pushing it. Her body was the same purple shade as Sue's but had silver lines running along it in strange patterns and disappearing into her clothes.

Which, like apparently every other Succubus in this building, consisted of business attire. Though Lillian had chosen to wear long pants instead of a skirt with a black and red striped tie. Her hair was a deep golden colour and Kat wouldn't be surprised if it actually was real gold. Her eyes shone bright silver to match and seemed to be less biological eyes and more shrunken seas of liquid mercury.

"Ah Kat, please feel free to take a seat," said Lillian. The Lust Leader's voice was strange, and reminded Kat somewhat of the short Angelic encounter she had. Lillian sounded like three people speaking at once, one was a breathy and seductive voice that sounded like Kat was being offered a place in the bedroom then an office chair. The second voice sounded like an old regal lady who didn't really show her age. It was powerful, a command instead of a suggestion. The final voice sounded like it belonged to the body but felt the least appropriate. It was the soft spoken tone of a young girl, eager to begin and ready to play.