

DEMONS 571

Chapter 571: An Affinity for Cuteness

After Lily dropped that revelation on Kat nobody was really sure how to reply. Kat wanted to argue she wasn't so easily misled, and while she believed that was somewhat true, she also knew that Lily could tell her the sky was green and she'd be trying to figure out why she thought it was blue for a few hours before realising the lie. Mistrusting Lily wasn't something she could do before yesterday. Now that they were together in a more romantic manner, whatever Kat's own worries about her feelings might tell her, she was unwilling to consider Lily misleading her unless it was for a good reason. If that was the case she didn't want to know.

Still, it was Callisto who broke the silence. "What about you Sylvie? Now that we know how easily Kat can be talked into overlooking things, I would like to return to the affinity selection. What would you choose if you had the choice? For my own curiosity to be sated, I would also like you to say which affinity you would pick if you could only have one"

"Ice" Sylvie said with no hesitation. "I don't even need to think about it long. I think I would always pick ice and if I had just the one I would pick it as well. While you focused on combat, Lily focused on utility, I find myself interested in the joy of magic itself I think. Imagine building ice sculpture after ice sculpture and creating an entire ice city.

"You could make something so beautiful, and even if it was temporary, it would be great to look over for as long as it remained. I imagine once I got strong enough in power I could make them permanent. It just seems so... cool" Sylvie grinned at the others as she made another move on the chessboard. "Oh and check by the way"

Lily frowned at the chessboard looking for a good move while Callisto spoke up, "I can understand that. How easy is it to manipulate affinities in such a free form way though?"

"Eeehh..." Lily drew the sound out as she continued to look over the chess board. "Both easy and hard actually. You can do it as a first circle mage and it doesn't technically take much power... but it's horribly inefficient mana wise and not easy without a lot of willpower and control even if you have mana to spare. I suspect that at maybe four circles you could get to the point where you have a much more efficient version, but likely not before. So... yeah easy and hard. Easy to start in theory and hard to master in practice"

"That's fine" said Sylvie happily as she watched Lily agonise over the chess move. "I've considered taking up painting or something a few times to calm my mind but ice sculpting just sounds so much more fun. Especially with magic. That way I could walk back mistakes I make unlike in normal human ice sculpting. I can also keep it around if I have mana and happen to like whatever it is. Though maybe Kat keeping things cold would be more efficient?"

*I'm not really sure how that would work. I can create ice yes, and I can move the fire as well... but I can't control the ice at all. I can hardly control the fire once it's left my sphere of influence, heck I can't do much with it once it leaves my hand. The best I can do is let it burn slightly above my hands. Still, that's not the question. The question is. How would my flames react to magic ice?

I suspect it would probably corrupt it in some way. Maybe not in a problematic way... but I feel like once the ice was saturated with my magic Sylvie, or whoever it actually is in this example, would no longer be able to interact with it. Then again... does that mean I could no longer sell any high level ice magic with that ability? A question to be asked perhaps. System you got anything for me?*

Kat was somewhat surprised to see no answer appear but decided it wasn't really the D.E.M.O.N.S purview to keep track of detailed power interactions. Even if it did seem like it was a common potential interaction in Kat's mind. "I'm not sure if the ice would be useable after I put my fire into it. Not sure if we'd even want to test it actually," explained Kat.

"Aw well" Sylvie said with a shrug. "I still think it'd be pretty." Sylvie tapped her king a few times, "though I'm not really sure what else I'd want to go with it. Maybe I'd take light? You can do a few fun things with light and I could use it with my ice to set up mirrors and shine the light attacks around. That would probably be interesting, or at the very least I could use it to make pretty lights and enhance my ice sculptures.

"I wonder how two magical affinities from the same person interact? Would my ice be melted at all by my light? Or would they synergy because I want them to? If I supplied the ice with enough mana would it matter? Would it be better just to beam people in the eyes with light? I'm not really sure. I do think however it works out now that I have said it out loud light would be cool to take as my next affinity.

"But I really don't know what I'd do for a third. There are quite a lot of good options. Smoke could be fun just so I can say I use 'smoke and mirrors' for my magic. I dunno if it would be any good in practice though. Hmmm. What do you all think? Any other affinity that would be great for me?"

Vivian put her hand up, the one she wasn't leaning on, like an excited school child. Sylvie grinned at the display and pointed at her before the others could really get any good ideas. Sylvie gives Vivian the go ahead and she says, "I think you should pick up time affinity. Then you can freeze objects in time as well as actually freezing them. It would allow for a bunch of cool artwork opportunities as well as making it a powerful final affinity"

Callist jumped in next with, "Vivian actually has a good idea for once. In fact, while I will still explain my idea, I think her suggestion surpasses mine in quality. I was going to suggest sound magic as you can create walls of ice to focus the sound, or use it alongside your light magic to make your illusions more realistic. Sure you could use illusions instead of things frozen in time and it would likely be cheaper mana wise, but it would be much less satisfying because people like Kat have true sight."

Seeing that they were now going around in a circle, Lily made her move, the 'better' one of the two she could see. Really it just delayed the end for now. Still, she saw it was her turn to comment and said, "I also like Vivian's suggestion and maybe that's better but I was thinking space magic. You could use it to create non-Euclidian shapes in your sculptures. You can use it for art and entertainment purposes or to trap people in an endless maze of warped space and frozen walls. Both potentially terrifying."

Finally, it came to Kat who gave Sylvie a squeeze and said, "You should go with charm magic. Not the standard type that focuses on seducing people, but a new branch that weaponises cuteness. You're already adorable enough to use it without mana. Enhancing that with magical abilities might be considered a crime across the multiverse. I could see you just smiling sweetly at the universe and asking it for stuff and receiving them"

Nobody really had a good counter argument for Kat's suggestion. They still thought Vivian had started off with the best idea, but Kat's was a close second. They could all see Sylvie using her adorable pout to con the universe into helping her out every once and awhile. It was also an interesting take on Qi. Callisto and Lily at least, were left wondering if cuteness could be an alternative to punching the universe into submission. Something they were actually a little sad they'd never be able to properly test.

So when Sylvie smiled sweetly at Kat with a big smile, Kat knew that she'd lost the contest of who had the best affinity because she was about to pick someone else... but also that she'd won in her own heart because that smile was POWERFUL. It made her reconsider who was the actual Succubus once again. "I do really like yours Kat... but Vivian is right. Using time magic to freeze things in place to enhance my sculpture is SO COOL. Plus I can use Time magic in so many ways. The other ideas were cool as well, but if Lily picks up space I don't need to. She can do all the cool stuff and work with me on my ice mazes"

Chapter 572: An Affinity for Kats

"Oooh, what about Kat?" asked Sylvie suddenly.

"What do you mean what about me?" asked Kat in response, confused as to how the topic had turned to her.

"Everyone else has talked about the three affinities they want. If you weren't a demon what affinities would you want?" asked Sylvie. "Checkmate as well"

Lily whipped her head away from intently studying Kat's face to the board only to realise that while it wasn't actually checkmate, she only had one move available to her and then it would be checkmate, and there was an understanding that the game was over between the two of them. For Kat's part, she found herself surprisingly stumped.

It had never been her dream to become a wizard. Not that the concept wasn't cool, but in her old daydreams if she had truly entertained any, were that of the gentleman thief. A strange mix of catwoman and Robin Hood. Sneaking into high tech buildings and taking the special jewel they had hidden past dozens of tripwires and cameras.

Of course, Kat 'grew out' of that dream a long time ago. When she'd taken on a bigger role in the orphanage her thoughts were filled with how well she was doing at that. With what kids needed extra attention and which would be good on their own. How to spot a breakdown about to happen and making sure to stop it before it spread to the other kids. One should never underestimate the waterfall of crying that could be invoked if even one child started crying.

It made her smile as her mind glanced over the way she'd gotten overly attached to the strangely perceptive child. The one that noticed things and had started to point out, mostly correctly, who needed extra help and who would be fine in the company of their new friends. Of course this eventually had led to Kat thinking Sylvie was desperately trying to make herself useful to prevent her own collapse. Kat had been wrong on that.

Oh sure, Sylvie had grieved for her parents once, but when she arrived at the orphanage she'd actually already been adopted out once. One of the couple, the woman, for Sylvie had never given their names, had fallen quite ill. The couple had sat her down and asked what she wanted to do. She was given the option to stay, but likely on the edge of starvation as they desperately tried to cover the necessary

medical bills. Of how they'd not really be able to spend time with her because she woman would be in hospital and the man would be working to pay for his wife's stay there. Sylvie had chosen to leave.

It had been an easy choice, from what Kat had seen. Sylvie didn't really KNOW them, and from what little Kat had managed to pry out of the little secret keeper, hadn't been particular interested in leaving the orphanage anyway. She'd said yes in hopes that it could be better, not with the expectation it would be. So when things came crumbling down she took the surprisingly mature path to return to an orphanage, a different one for sure, but an orphanage none the less. Sylvie had said it was so she could find another home that could take care of her at the time. Looking back at it now though, Kat wondered how true that was. She didn't know then. She still didn't know now.

Still, Kat hadn't wanted to be a thief in a long time, and now that she looked back at the idea found it didn't suit her anymore anyway. To be a wizard then... what did that mean? What did she want? Kat didn't know and decided to bite the bullet and let time slow down so that she wasn't just staring at the others and thinking. Was it cheating... well... Kat wasn't breaking any rules or laws. So she wanted to say no it wasn't.

Still I have no idea what I could possibly want from magic. I love what I have already. I'm not sure I'd have chosen ice but it's really quite nice now that I have it. I like it a lot. Would I chose it though? Given the chance. My ice is great but is ice what really calls to me?

The answer was yes, even if she wanted something more complicated and interesting to answer with then ice. Perhaps that was one of the reasons why she had the affinity with it already? The fact that it just felt right to have.

*Ok so ice is a must. I couldn't bear to give it up. I also don't want to just answer with Sylvie's build but focused on combat so I'll scrap light magic. Won't even consider it. What about time though? That's a really fun one honestly. Even if I know it would be expensive, I won't just rule it off my list. What about space? Another interesting one. Though... I think I'd rather pick gravity then space. The abilities I think I'd get from it are slightly more my style.

The ability to lighten myself, maybe fly, make my enemies slower, heavier, maybe take a big ass hammer and make that weigh a tonne more when I slam it down on people. Oh yes that could certainly be fun. Might let me tap into space a little bit at the higher levels as well. Ok so Gravity is a must for my second pick... what about my third?

I don't really know. Maybe healing? A bit of a cop out... I know you can get regeneration as an affinity but without diving too deep into my memories doesn't that kill your ability to use any other magic? I think Minor mentioned that and I'm too lazy to find the memory and check so I'll believe it for now.

As I am now... I think healing might be necessary. I take too many hits to trade blows. Something that I really should get in the habit of not doing... but it just works. It just works. Why does it matter if you trade a huge gash across your chest if they take the same damage but permanent instead. Then again... in this hypothetical scenario I'm not a demon and I wouldn't have gotten into the habit of taking those hits. Maybe I can skip on healing then? I'm sure I could group up with someone who did take it, even if that person isn't Lily.

Kat felt herself cringe internally at the idea that she'd ever be doing magic by herself without Lily. She didn't even want to think of being a Succubus without Lily to talk to. Living her dream without her was anathema to Kat's wishes. So Kat decided to lock that thought in place. Lily WOULD be her healer if that's the magic she wanted. Kat would not contemplate a scenario in which she became a mage and Lily did not. A small part of Kat snipped that she had sort of done that in the beginning before there was hope for Lily but Kat slammed it down. She'd never wished for this, as great as it was, and she had always kept in mind that Lily would want a chance at magic.

So no healing magic. Ok that's fine. What would I want in its place? Gravity would be my second magic I think, with ice as my first. So, what do I want as a third? It doesn't need to be space or time, because I think gravity is enough of a powerhouse element to count as a strong finisher. Shadow perhaps? Seems useful enough and if the whole shadow pocket thing really works that could be invaluable.

Plus if I take it as my final one it would be powerful. I could use gravity to bend light and give me more shadow to work with, or create ice walls that cast deep shadows as well. Yes, while it might be a little closer to the other suggested builds than I really like, I think I'm happy with these.*

"I'd take ice, gravity, and then shadow in that order" said Kat as she came out of her slowed perception. "I can't see myself without ice so that had to be first. It just doesn't feel right to me not to take it. Gravity is next for its utility and power. The likely ability to fly later of course, but more than that, slowing people down or making my weapons really heavy when I attack would be wonderful. Finally shadow for the useful abilities it'd bring, especially the shadow pockets. The fact I can use my ice to make shadows or gravity to bend light and create darkness is just the icing on the cake"

Kat found herself getting a variety of enthusiastic nods from the group. It was clear they thought it was at the very least a decent build. Still... nobody seemed to think of it as anything more than a good idea. It was clear from their faces that while it was an interesting set of choices, and quite suiting, it didn't stand out the way the others had. Of course, going last didn't come with the surprise factor as a benefit.

Chapter 573: PAPER CUTS are Something to be Feared.

"Why shadow last? I feel like you could get more use of it than gravity if you took it second" asked Vivian suddenly curious about the ordering.

"Perhaps" said Kat slowly, "but I wouldn't say it's the right kind of usefulness if that makes sense? Shadow does some things I might want, but nothing except the shadow pocket that ice and gravity can't also do. Shooting concentrated shadow at people, I can do that with ice. Binding people in place with shadows, I can weigh them down with gravity.

"Flying. Not sure when I'd get that but I can ONLY do that with gravity from my set. Even then, I can use ice to move myself perhaps. It would likely require ice skates, but I want ice first anyway so it doesn't matter in this case. In fact, if I can't fly but I do have ice and gravity, perhaps I can lower my gravity and practically glide across the ground as ice forms beneath my feet. I wonder how hard that would be to turn into a spell?

"Anyway I'm getting distracted. As I said earlier, I just can't think of anything that only shadow can do and that I'd really need. Sure some things would be nice, and others perhaps nicer but nothing I couldn't

live without. So it just gets relegated to my last slot unlike you guys. Gravity should be my powerhouse magic even if it's what I want to pick up second" *NoveLNext.cOm*

The others seemed to ponder over that information. She could see Lily in particular had wheels spinning rapidly behind her eyes as she took in all the information Kat had presented to her. Sylvie's facial expression hadn't changed much and neither had Vivian's though they seemed interesting. No it was Callisto's that really changed. Her eyes lit up like Kat had provided her the key to the Library of Alexandria.

"That makes so much additional sense" said Callisto but she was looking over Kat's head, not really speaking to her. "I had not considered the option of choosing affinities in such a way. I was too fixated on picking the strongest last and I may have overlooked several interesting combinations for the decision.

"I was rather focused on interesting final builds that made good and unique use of each and every one of my affinities. However, Kat's approach is much more practical. She saw Ice, which was something she couldn't live without, and then looked into what else would complement it in the most practical way possible. My suggestion, while interesting, does not work all that well with just one or two of those affinities. Or at least, not the way I might have wanted them to work..."

"Hmmm" murmured Vivian, "I think I stand by my suggestion. Wind is my only hope of doing anything at a low level... unless I really cared about training, I guess? I don't think gravity would be all that strong until later. My third was mostly a throw away affinity anyway. I know I entertained space a fair bit and I think I like that idea the most still but I'm not necessarily feeling it. So, I at least, am happy with my choices"

"I suppose I can second the idea that I'm happy with what I picked," said Sylvie. "Depending on exactly what I could do with time magic if it was my second pick I could certainly be argued to make it my second affinity instead of my third but I wouldn't change the ones I picked. I like them all, and even if time was a bit of a late minute addition I don't think I know of anything that's better."

Lily pouted at everyone. "Well, that's great and all but I still don't have a third affinity I know I want"

Kat nodded and raised an eyebrow at Lily. She certainly hadn't forgotten that. *Wasn't that the point of going through all this? So that you could see what affinities we'd pick and use that to pick your own?* Kat then looked at everyone else though, and they seemed surprised by Lily's words. Clearly Kat was the odd one out here, as the others had gotten caught up in the situation. As Kat's face settled back into a confused one she missed Lily's eyes passing over her. Registering from the slight changes that Kat's face had gone through what had happened. She'd watched Kat's face move plenty of times in plenty of ways and felt her heart warm as the knowledge Kat hadn't forgotten that small detail settled into her own mind.

Vivian however, was never one to keep things awkward and said, "Did it help though? Any knew ideas knocking around your noggin'? You've heard what we want, did any of them sound worthwhile?"

Lily bit her lip for a few moments before saying, "Sylvie's idea was actually really cute. If I didn't want to help Kat out on her Contracts then I might have done something similar..."

"You don't have to help me Lily..." stumbled out of Kat's mouth.

Lily turned a glare towards Kat and said, "I WANT to Kat. Do not think that I would want to choose a path that didn't have you in it"

Kat swallowed and explained, "Well... just because you wouldn't be helping me on Contracts doesn't mean we wouldn't be on the same path..."

Lily just shook her head slowly. It seemed Kat didn't quite understand but she felt that was fine. Kat wasn't the one having all of her dreams provided by the person she loved. The thought did sting a little but was quickly overwhelmed by the joy Kat would even do this in the first place. Lily knew Kat had never really thought of using those tokens for herself once she learnt they could give someone magic and Lily loved that about Kat.

"Kat. I will be picking combat applicable affinities" said Lily firmly.

Vivian, deciding to both cause problems and solve them at the same time said, "What if it'd help Kat more on Contracts if you had a more supportive skillset though? Kat seems to have the combat part covered already and while a second person would help. Perhaps a healer for healing other people would be better? Kat can't heal others after all. Or store things. I'm sure there are other things Kat can't do"

Kat wanted to point out that Contracts were given to her based on what she could do and not what abilities she might have... but she didn't want to undermine Vivian's point. If it did get Lily to pick affinities that she was happier with then Kat didn't want to jeopardise that. Lily chewed on the inside of her lip and her thoughts whirled for a bit before settling.

"I think I still want combat things..." said Lily softly. "While being useful to Kat is a consideration. I'm not just doing this for Kat. I'm doing this for myself as well. I... there are quite a few reasons I want to take combat affinities if there even are other options. I want to fight by Kat's side as an equal. Maybe not yet, or for a long time... but if we're both immortal then SOMEDAY I want to manage it.

"Additionally... I think it would be good for my confidence. I... I know I've struggled with bullies and I can't help but feel the knowledge... even if I'm the only one who has it... that I could summon a field of ice spikes or drown someone in shadow... well I think it would be a good way to finally internalise that their words can't hurt me. Having Kat defend me helps certainly, and I love her for that. Something I can say out loud happily. But I don't want to rely on that goodwill forever even if she is my girlfriend now"

Lily was bright red when she finished the explanation and Kat at least felt very touched. The others mostly felt thoughtful as they tried to decide on what affinities she might want. "Would paper affinity be interesting to you?" asked Callisto.

Lily turned to Callisto questions clearly in her eyes. Callisto saw them and continued. "I just think it fits you well and would have at least some interesting applications. You might be able to store things in the paper like with shadow magic. Raining thousands of pieces of sharpened paper at people would be quite deadly. Maybe if you take up origami or at least learn the steps you could turn paper you conjure into all sorts of useful things. I imagine it would be cheaper than using ice and perhaps fit you better."

Lily's eyes lit up at the idea and felt herself mentally discard ice as an option for her affinities. She was still a little sad to discard it as it would have brought her closer to Kat, but the idea of using paper magic appealed to her on a deep level. "I love it," said Lily

Chapter 574: Affinities Finalised

"Hey Lily..." said Sylvie considering the combination of powers Lily had decided on. "Could you use shadow magic to write on the paper you summon? If you can... can you combine them together with that writing?" Everyone in the room got extremely quiet and thoughtful at that.

Nothing I've seen suggests that something like that is even remotely possible... but I have a gut feeling that it would work. Perhaps not exactly as we might wish... but in some capacity at least. Perhaps is she drew shadow creatures they could be stored in paper for a minor cost? Maybe just shapes? Could she make spike traps out of them?

"I don't know," said Lily. "Nothing that I was able to get from the system even hints at the possibility of combining magic like that. Oh sure you can use them together, like wind and fire magic to get more powerful fire... but you couldn't use say... ice and fire to make cold fire. Your fire would melt your ice unless you're Kat of course.

"Still... the idea of combining them together is nice but I still don't have a final magic as a powerhouse magic. The one that I can use to really burn mana and make a difference when it's called for. So far we have gravity, space, and time, though I might argue that space is more support unless you can alter the space inside of people and get them that way. I doubt it's possible but you never know"

"I reckon that at the highest levels anything can be a power house magic" said Vivian in response. "I mean I get the idea that there are certain affinities that are only good later. I just... find it hard to believe that any of them are truly the best when it comes to the stronger stuff or everyone would go for it. I know affinities play a big role but I believe you can still use magic you are unsuited for correct?"

"That's a little unclear," said Lily "I think maybe, yes? But you have to be better at whatever your affinities are before you try. It causes issues to try and grow a magic past your natural affinities from what I can tell but that's another thing the system won't really tell me"

"Perhaps looking more at what weaknesses you might want to shore up," said Callisto. "While I think space, if you do count it as a powerhouse affinity, would suit you best for reasons I can explain if you wish, perhaps it is not what you truly need. Healing would still be a good option, or if you chose to forgo that particular power then I think earth as a proper defensive magic might be a good option. Lightning for more speed and agility could work if you want to focus on dodging instead. Though I'm not sure how safe that would be... perhaps no lightning"

Lily thought on that for a moment. Really, if she was creative enough, she didn't see paper or shadow really letting her down. There might be things it they couldn't do, but none that were terribly crucial. Healing or space were both good options. Space for its various potential tricks, and healing for helping others after a fight something that Kat wouldn't need but others might. She was torn. "I think healing or space for me. I just don't know which one. I could look further afield but we'd be here for a long time debating it. So, let's just think about those two alright?" requested Lily.

Everyone looked thoughtful at Lily's request as they tried to consider which would be best. Sylvie spoke first though, knowing what answer she thought was correct. "I think space is my suggestion, Lily. You can probably use shadows or paper to do some basic first aid. Bandages of paper, pulling bones back into

place with shadows and then holding them there. It wouldn't be life saving of course, but perhaps enough to get you to a healer. Certainly, enough to hold off death"

Vivian nodded but her words weren't in agreement. "I don't know about that. Healing seems like something that suits you well. You're a very sweet girl Lily and I'm sure you'd love the chance to help others. Healing would be a good way to do that."

Callisto looked over at Vivian and shook her head. "Perhaps it would be but healing would likely be a late pick for Lily, after both shadow and paper have been practiced. At that point she would be powerful and could perhaps investigate a bit of light healing magic on the side. It would not need to be a main affinity. Even if it was slow or not quite as good as a full healer, if she has mana to throw at the problem, I do not think it would matter"

*I hadn't considered that angle. The idea that healing while good... would be something better to pick up on the side. If you aren't directly in combat the mana cost isn't as big of a deal. With her robust knowledge of the human body or at the very least the ability to research it she could likely be a decent healing without the affinity. Though... I wonder how much that would limit her to humans. How similar are the other races?

Actually... what does my body look like now inside? I've been cut up enough to know I bleed black. I know I still have bones but not what colour they are... but depending on what my horns are made of... they might be the same colour. If my horns are bone, my bone is black as well. If they are more like fingernails... well then, I don't really know what that means considering my fingernails still look normal. Of course, I know I can use them to slice through metal so they can't be normal anymore.

I wonder what my stomach looks like? Do I have stomach acid still? No I can't. I don't use the bathroom anymore and I hardly need to drink anything. Water is a nice thing to have with food... and while food does seem slightly necessary that's exactly how it is. Slightly. Something I could make do without for a while if it was truly necessary.

I have to have lungs at least. I know I still breath, and while I can hold my breath that costs me energy. I can feel my lungs when I breath. I must be missing at least some organs though. I wonder if I have any new ones? Questions that would be hard to answer. Still, it does mean that healing anything that isn't human might be an issue if she tries to rely on Earth's medical knowledge. Still... I think Callisto has the right idea. Even if she does have to research the biology of other races that sounds like something Lily would do for fun.*

Kat noticed that during her lapse into thoughts all the eyes in the room had turned to her, awaiting her answer. Lily in particular seemed particularly interested in that answer and Kat knew that Lily, in this moment, would almost certainly defer to whatever judgement Kat rendered. *I'm glad I thought this through before I spoke instead of as I did.*

"I think Callisto is right. With a lot of mana and probably a bit of research you can manage healing well enough. If you don't want to take it as a primary affinity then it's probably best you leave it to the side. I do however, think you'll be rather busy with the three you'll be picking out so I don't think you'll get to healing for a long long time... but it'll be an option. Perhaps by then you can even pick it up as an extra affinity somehow," said Kat

Lily nodded and blushed before looking around the room. To Kat's eyes she looked to be agonising over a decision. Kat leaned in to ask her what was wrong, but that must have been some sort of a signal to the smaller girl because she leaned over and gave Kat a light peck on the cheek before sliding away ever so slightly. Not actually enough to stop touching Kat, just enough to not be completely pressed against her anymore.

Vivian grinned at the display. "T-thanks" mumbled Lily. "I... I think you all made good points and thanks for h-helping my decided Kat. Healing would likely be the m-most interesting to research. Other magic would be cool to look into as well but... you're right exploring the main three I chose should be more important. That's where the core of my combat will be. I'll start with paper and refine that. Then I'll take up shadow and see how it can fill in the gaps. Then finally I'll have space to do things that the other affinities can hardly manage. Even if it might be a bit niche."

Chapter 575: Wrapping up the Day

Once Lily decided on her affinities, things wound down. Vivian went off to do work, Kat was mildly surprised for some reason about that fact, and Callisto started work on what would be dinner for everyone. Lily and Sylvie played another round of chess which Sylvie won once again, and apparently it wasn't close. Lily was also offered the chance to stay over again but she declined, citing the need to visit her parents and stop them freaking out a little. She also planned to rub in her mother's face the fact Kat was her girlfriend now. She was feeling more than a little petty about the fact they'd insulted Kat for years for nothing and she'd STILL got the girl.

Lily got a hug and a small kiss as a goodbye before everyone else sat down for dinner. Callisto had decided to go all out on a salad for some reason and everyone was provided with large, though scaled appropriately, bowls for their dinner. Kat was actually the one to get the smallest one, though it was a fact she appreciated greatly. Callisto had gotten used to her smaller dietary needs and was starting to compensate so she could participate in meals properly.

Sylvie had the next smallest bowl, though it was still larger than her head. She didn't complain though, and actually enjoyed the flavour the most out of the assembled group. Callisto and Vivian both had their own large bowls of the same size, though the ingredient portions were slightly different with Callisto adding slightly more food to her own bowl.

Once the group was finished with the meal everyone split up again. Kat found herself relaxing on her bed after a quick shower. It wasn't too late just yet but she didn't really know what else to do with herself now that she had spare time. At the beginning she was getting used to living with Vivian and Callisto. The constant flow of Contracts also helped. Now though she found that she had free time and remarkably little to do with it.

At the orphanage what time she wasn't spending on schoolwork was spent helping the kids or tidying up somewhere to save Gramps the effort. Now nothing needed cleaning because Callisto did that constantly, there wasn't any kids to keep entertained and out of trouble, and school was completely finished. She didn't have any homework and likely would never have any more ever again.

*I think I see why Vivian wanted me to buy some stuff now. I don't actually have anything to do. I've spent my life busy in way or another and I don't think I ever realised it. The only thing I can really do is exercise but that'd be completely pointless. I have nothing that would get even close to being heavy

enough to count as a work out. Push ups would be a joke. I could easily bench press the bed. Heck I could bench press the room if I could disconnect it from the house safely. Probably not the whole house though.

That's something I should probably check at some point. How strong am I? I know the answer is VERY but that's like telling someone a car can go fast. Technically true, and somewhat informative if you're comparing a car to a horse drawn carriage, useless for much else though. Speaking of fast, speed is another thing. Don't know how fast I can run or fly. I don't know if I should test these sorts of things on Earth or not. I'm weaker here, and I don't know if the time and hassle testing it would be worth it.

I know Callisto wrote down a lot of information but I went and immediately ranked up afterwards so it was kinda pointless. Still, Callisto does seem to enjoy that kind of thing so I wouldn't be surprised if I was asked to help with more testing anyway.*

Before Kat could really think on it longer the door cracked open and Sylvie peered in. Kat didn't have to say anything just make grabbing motions at the door and the little girl practically bounced into the room. When Sylvie jumped onto the bed Kat grabbed her quickly when she was in grabbing range and brought her into a big hug which made Sylvie light up with a bright smile. "Hello there. Why where you just peaking your head in instead of greeting my like normal" whispered Kat as she stroked Sylvie's hair.

Sylvie pouted at the question, not necessarily wanting to explain her thought process. Especially now that it had been invertedly answered by Kat's actions. She did however, also recognise that Kat would keep on asking her, likely daily, until she answered the question because Kat would think she still had an issue. Sylvie knew this was because she was good at controlling her expressions and was mostly her own fault for avoiding her issues in the past.

She debated telling a white lie but decided against it not willing to risk Kat catching her out on it and making an even bigger deal of things. Eventually she said, "I wasn't sure if you'd still want me around now you can sleep with big sis Lily instead"

Kat felt a twinge in her heart and tightened the grip she had on Sylvie. "Nope. You're adorable and I don't want you thinking that. We had to have a bit of a long conversation yesterday and I'm sure you were asleep by the time we finished."

Of course, we even though we didn't do anything we didn't exactly wake up in the most appropriate positions. Still, I have no issue with Sylvie joining us whenever she wants. Lily might but I can't say no to Sylvie when she's pouting and I doubt Lily is ready for anything we shouldn't be doing around Sylvie anyway. Hopefully if Sylvie does stay the night, we won't do anything inappropriate in our sleep. Might even be a good thing.

Sylvie was more than smart enough to pick up on what Kat wasn't saying but didn't really mind. She knew it was the most Kat was likely to offer and that she didn't like to stop people as long as it wasn't causing issues. So she had Kat's permission, now she just needed Lily's. With that knowledge secured though, she was more than happy to simply curl up and go to sleep. Kat followed shortly after.

The next morning once Kat began to stir she could see a notification from D.E.M.O.N.S even with her eyes closed and let out a sigh.

User Kat is requested to be present for Arbitration today. User Kat will have one full hour period to ready herself to appear.

Welp. Guess that's what I'm doing today. She glanced down at Sylvie and hesitated for a second before shaking the younger girl slightly. She was therefore surprised when Sylvie instantly opened her eyes, eyes that were completely clear and focused, and said, "Yes Kat?"

Kat realised she was actually the second of them to awaken and smile. "I've been told I have to go to Arbitration today. It's because I was punished when I maybe didn't need to be. I've got an hour before I'll be called up so I thought I'd wake you and we can see the others."

"Ok!" said Sylvie cheerily. "Are you going to get Lily as well?" Kat found that to be a difficult question.

I'm not sure. Lily sure likes to sleep in even if she's pretty bad at going to bed on time. I really should tell her but I don't think I'll be gone long. I suppose it's really a question of two things. 1. Can I possibly be back before she notices. 2. Will she be more annoyed that I didn't wake her up and informed her, or annoyed that I woke her up for something like this.

Kat decided on a hidden third choice. Ask Vivian for advice. Picking Sylvie up and letting the girl rest on her shoulder Kat headed downstairs to find Callisto cleaning the staircase railings with a cloth. "Good morning, Sylvie, Kat." Said Callisto in acknowledgement. "I was just doing a bit of cleaning before breakfast did you want to make any requests?"

"No" said the two girls together, not really having developed much of a preference beyond Callisto's food in general. They took up vigil on the couch after that and Callisto continued to work her way down the stairs finishing up the last of it shortly. The two girls knew better then to ask Callisto if she wanted help. They'd be treated to a rather pointed stare from Callisto if they had tried.

Eventually Callisto got started on breakfast and Vivian came down. "Oh? How are my three favourite people doing. I see you're all already downstairs. What's on your mind Kat? I see you have a question for me"

Kat sighed, not all that surprised at Vivian's notice and said, "Well... it's like this..."

Chapter 576: Not so Arbitrary

"... So I'm off to get that cleared up today" said Kat

"Is the money important at all?" asked Vivian curiously.

Kat bit her lips as she thought of the appropriate answer. The money wasn't important, it not really. She didn't need it for anything at the moment especially with the debt paid off. A larger part of her was tempted to just call it good. However... money was always useful and it was hers after all.

Plus, this arbitration thing could be interesting. I'm also sure that quite a few people would be upset on my behalf if I didn't fight it. I know Lily would pout about me just letting it go. Sylvie would probably say 'you deserve it for your work Kat' with big eyes. Yeah. It seems so much easier to just go along with it and fight the thing instead of seeing disappointed eyes. Still... what exactly do I say in answer...?

"It isn't a big deal no. I'm mostly doing it for the experience and because I can you know?" said Kat glad it was close enough to the truth to get away with. "I'm not overly worried and hopefully things can get sorted out easily."

Vivian nodded. She didn't like the idea of Kat going by herself, but Vivian knew she had no idea how the legal system of demons works. So, while she may wish to come in person to support Kat, she also knew that was unlikely. So, she just limited herself to a few words. "I'm sure you'll be fine dear. If it's no real worry to you, you're more likely to be able to speak clearly"

Well, if you could win a legal battle by speaking clearly, we wouldn't need lawyers. Huh, I wonder if I'll get a lawyer or if it'll be just me arguing my point. "I'll certainly do my best" said Kat noncommittally. "Shall I mention it to Lily?"

The three looked torn at the question. Sylvie was instantly in favour of waking Lily up, but she never minded waking up to see Kat in the morning, or had the same issues with sleep Lily did. Once that was noted by Kat, she realised she'd made a mistake. Vivian was always happy even in the early morning, Sylvie didn't care, and Callisto didn't sleep. When they all advocated for waking her up, some more strongly than others, Kat decided to ignore the lot of them.

Clearly, they don't realise how tired Lily can be. I think I'll let her sleep. When Kat said as much, everyone just nodded along willing to trust her judgement. After that Kat just spent time hanging out with them all before she was taken away for her Arbitration.

When she arrived, it was to a grey room with a grey door in front of her taking up most of the wall. Nothing else seemed to be nearby and as she looked around nobody came forth. The carpet was grey, the walls were grey, the door was grey. There wasn't any paintings or carvings, it was all just grey. Seeing little choice but to approach the door Kat walked forward and easily opened it despite its large size.

The room was split cleanly in three. On the left everything was a pure shining white. On the right, everything was blacker than night and felt almost as if it was sucking light from the white side. In the middle was a grey section that also formed the carpet that took up the centre of the room and clearly marked the path Kat was supposed to travel. On the left and right were a number of seats that were currently empty. The walls also had a number of interesting carvings that were also mirrored but kept to their chosen sides colour.

The only exception to these things was right at the back of the room. There was a podium at the back with three Succubi sitting there. The one on the white side was completely black, the one on the black side was completely white, and the one in the centre looked to be split down the middle with black on the right side of their body and white on the other. Their hair and fingernails were counted among their colouring. Only their eyes seemed to have escaped, and were in what seemed to be their natural colourings. Kat couldn't see it as being a natural colouring. It was possible sure, but the split made it questionable and the fact they matched so closely with the room was strange.

She also knew the whole thing couldn't be an illusion because it was all quite clear to her eyes. The podium was also different. The structure looked to be made out of marble however the split ran horizontally with white on top grey in the middle and black on the bottom. The middle section was

pushed forward so that the individual split between colours was closest to the open area Kat was currently walking towards.

Despite the colour scheme though, all three demons were Succubi, but noticeably different in their appearances. They all had the same robe like outfits that matched their colour perfectly and seemed to hang off them with large sleeves. They were also extremely baggy and hid whatever curves the three women might have had from Kat's eyes. That was where the similarities ended though.

White had ram like horns that hid her ears partially. Both had large towering horns similar to Sue, however these curled up slightly at the top with the points facing down. Black had horns that came right out of her temples and extended about half as high as Both's horns. The odd thing was, they seemed to be covered in skin, but it was a bit hard to tell because of the colouring.

"Greetings Kat" said Both in the centre, "You are here for arbitration involving your most recent Contract which subsequently caused you to undergo punishment for unpaid debts. Due to this you will either gain monetary compensation in return, or you will walk away with nothing as this is your first Arbitration. Black will be your advocate, White will be your detractor, and I will be the Judge."

Kat stopped at in the open space and looked around confused, seeing the questions in Kat's eyes Judge spoke again, "Do you wish for the introductory speech to be given? It is standard procedure for those unformed."

"Yes please. That would be great," said Kat.

Judge nodded. "As this is your first Arbitration all three Arbiters were chosen to match your race and gender. It has been shown to produce a calming affect on first time participants. In the future you may or may not have demons of the same race as your Arbiters. It could even be a mix.

"The way our system works, is that an Arbiter will volunteer to either support you, or support the original ruling. Various bonuses are given for things that get demons to volunteer and I will allow them to explain."

White spoke up next. "I will be arguing against you. I receive a bonus if you should fail to win this Arbitration, as well as for making sure the Arbitration takes as little time as possible. However, as this is your first Arbitration, I also get a bonus for being willing to turn up for it."

Then Black spoke up. "One thing that White neglected to mention is that we get one further bonus, all three of us, for showing up in the required make up. Normally we would only be masked by an illusion of our chosen side however because you have True Sight we were forced to put on the full ceremony make up. Other than that, I have a similar set of bonuses for speed, first timer, and winning your side in this argument."

Judge spoke up again to finish off. "Finally, I am the Judge. I chose who I believe has the right of things at the end. I do not get a bonus for speed unlike the other two, however I am required to have served as both an attacker and a defender for at least five hundred years before the option to become a Judge is open to me. I also have a higher base rate of pay to ensure that I feel no need to speed things along.

"We consider this a fair system, as you can speak in your own defence, as well as have a dedicated defender, while the prosecuting side only has a single voice to speak for it's vote. I will mostly be

regulated the discussion to ensure things remain productive and to deliver the final verdict. Do you have any more questions?"

Well I mean... seems pretty clear. Little strange Black is on my side but maybe that's a human thing... or I could ask? "What decides whether I'm supported by Black or White?" asked Kat

Judge smiled and nodded, "Black and White switch roles once a century. Currently we are in the era of Black as the defender. It was decided that associating too heavily with one colour over the other was a bad idea and that it keeps things a little fresher this way"

Chapter 577: Black and White Review

After the short explanation of why Black was representing her Kat realised something else that should have occurred to her before. "How is it any of you can speak on the matter? Wait that sounds insensitive... I mean... um... how do you know what happened? I guess? Sorry for the poor wording"

I really hope that wasn't an insult. I wish I'd phrased things better there. Or maybe I wish I knew enough about how the translation power works that I could sound formal to them no matter what I say... but it might cause one of those weird double meaning words.

"That is a valid question Kat" said Judge, "You will find that Black and White were both provided with a detailed account of the Contract. It keeps most of your thoughts private, but it does explain most conversation and all important actions." Kat pursed her lips at this knowledge but Judge continued speaking, "Do not worry Kat. We are under Contract ourselves not to reveal such information outside of a few specific circumstances."

Kat nodded calming down at that knowledge. *Ok that's good to know. I wonder what they think of the Angel encounter.*

"Are there any further questions before we begin and start the timer for the proceedings? If so, I will be speaking much less and Black and White might be unwilling to answer them unless they seem relevant to the conversation." Explained Judge.

Hmm, that's a good point. I hadn't considered that. Let me think for a moment I suppose. Certainly nothing springs immediately to mind. I kind of want to ask about the Angel but I'm not sure I can do that. Um... hmm... we can get to that later if it's important. Anything else? I don't really think so.

"I have no further questions. I'm ready to start" said Kat as clearly as possible, but she couldn't quite stop the slight waver in her voice.

Her nerves didn't quite falter, but it was a close thing when the atmosphere in the room completely changed. The three Succubi that had been sitting fairly casually before all sat up in one motion, straightening their backs and raising their arms to the front to rest lightly on their desks. Kat could also feel their aura's expanding. None pressed on Kat but she could feel them thick in the room as the three's eyes started to glow slightly.

"Then by my power as Judge over this court I declare the start of the procedures. Kat the Succubus stands here to rectify a Contract error she believes to have occurred. I formally ask White to start their case." Said Judge in a booming voice that covered the whole room easily in sound.

White shifted ever so slightly to face forward instead of to Kat, as if she was speaking to an audience that wasn't there. "The first point of proof is in the fact that D.E.M.O.N.S did not consider the Contract complete. She was extracted not for completion but for medical aid. This I present as the primary evidence."

The words seemed to hang in the air for a few seconds almost as if they were displayed. Somehow the sound felt like it was continuing though Kat heard nothing else. *Sooo... do I like... wait for someone else?*

Kat's question was answered when Black started to speak, however unlike White she didn't turn to the front but kept her body looking directly at Kat. "My offered counter to the primary evidence is that the exit from a world is not when the Contract is complete, but when both parties, even grudgingly, accept that the Contract is over. It is possible to force the issue but that is the traditional method of leaving.

"In this instance I put forth that because Xiang, the Contractor in this case, was not in control of his mind, body, and potentially spirit, at the time of Kat's forceful departure. As such he was unable to give the credit to Kat, she was due. If he had been in full control, I proffer that the contract would have completed easily. Xiang's state was not due to Kat, and was not part of the Contract. She had no need to return him to thought, or to wait for acceptance from a being no longer in control"

White remained still as she replied with, "That is a guess Black. There was no confirmation that what you described happened to Xiang. While it is a reasonable assumption, and one I might be persuaded to agree with, it cannot be confirmed from what knowledge we have been provided. I move that it does not count as full evidence for the Judge."

Despite being addressed directly Judge didn't move a muscle, almost as if she was a statue. Black however gave the barest of nods that only Kat could have seen because of how the three podiums were positioned.

Hmm, why is she nodding? I suppose she expected that... but why bring it up? I guess it's because Judge hasn't accepting White's counter argument. Just... acknowledged what they have both said.

"In that case" said Black, keeping her eyes on Kat, "I motion that despite Xiang's lacking acceptance, which I still hold was due to being unable to act, is not required in this instance. Due to the wording of the Contract and Kat's force of will she was only required to provide assistance in Xiang's quest. When he attacked her unprovoked, he declared that he no longer required her help thus completing the Contract"

White raised her head just slightly at that, "If you posit that Xiang was not in control of his actions then you cannot argue that the actions of this other party taking using his body free Kat from the bounds of the Contract.

"Indeed, however you posited that Judge cannot accept he was acting with anything other than his own mind" retorted Black, "If that is the case, I may argue that if your version of events is in fact true, it still would not matter as his actions would have confirmed the end of the Contract."

White let the corner of her lips raise ever so slightly but Kat didn't feel like it was in happiness at all. "If that was the case then Kat should have been returned to her home dimension. The fact that she remained indicates your assumption to be wrong."

Black however truly smiled at this insinuation. "Perhaps, however I proffer that it was Kat herself that considered her job incomplete. That is why she was not returned. She was attacked at the climax of her fight with the branch sect leader and did not have time to consider the implications before she was attacked in turn by one she thought an ally"

White glanced at Kat for the first time since the official start. "What say you Kat? Does Black argue correctly in that you did not consider the Contract done at the time?"

Kat gulped slightly as she felt White's eyes on her. *Now how can I explain this in the best way possible. No idea. Shit. Well, I guess I'll just say the truth then.* "I was not in my right mind. I was in considerable pain and highly confused at the time."

"By her words you hear that she was confused and did not accept the completion of her Contract" said White, "I proffer that while she was confused, that does not change the fact she did not believe the Contract to be completed. If that is the case then surely you cannot argue that it has been completed after the fact"

Black's eye twitched ever so slightly and quite quickly in response to the insinuation. "Kat may not have considered the job done at that moment, but there is nothing to indicate it was out of laziness or malice. Despite the pain and confusion, she went to discover what was going on. A lesser demon would have considered her job done and simply left. Kat stayed despite the pain to assess the situation."

"Only to then fight against her Contractor" said White sharply.

"She was never requested to kill children" said Black in response, "In fact the only reason she was summoned for the job at all was because the runes were broken and Xiang grossly overpaid for the job to summon a demon at all. Even in the wording, she was asked to help get revenge on a sect. The children were blameless in this even if you wish to argue she agreed to help with revenge, she is not required to involve the innocent in that quest."

White lowered her head ever so slightly at this, though not to the level it had started at as she seemed to mull over the words for a few moments. *Well. I think I'm winning? Black seems to have a counter argument for everything White says and while White has countered with other things, I don't find her to be as convincing as Black. Is that my bias or something else?*

Chapter 578: Rug Metaphors

The silence rang out into the room once Black finished making her point. White didn't seem to have an argument against the fact the children were innocent in this. It seemed to be an issue of morals as well as wording. Sure White potentially could argue against it, but it wouldn't do her any favours morally. This might be a courtroom with only Judge to convince but such an argument might not make you popular.

"Do you wish to call a final ruling?" asked Black

White's face got somewhat pinched at this, knowing the trap Black had manoeuvred her into. White also knew that simply allowing for the ruling would likely result in her lost. She let out a long hiss of air and a little bit of her demonic flame leaked out. Kat was surprised to see that White's demonic flame was actually black.

Hehehehe. I don't know why I find that funny but I do. I know the white colouring is just make up but it's still funny to see the completely white person spit black fire. I doubt Black has white flames though it's possible. Actually... that makes me wonder. Does the real person behind White always pick White? As in do they always argue against things or is it just arguing against me specifically.

Seeing that White wasn't making any further comments despite dragging things out Kat decided to let her mind wander some more. *So, following on from that thought. How do they put all that makeup on? I can see down their sleeves and it seems like a complete covering. I wonder if they have an enchantment for it? Or a machine? If not do they have to do it by hand? I know they were complaining a bit about it...*

But was that because it's annoying to have makeup on you all day, even if it is special demon makeup? Or is it because it was an issue to put on. I mean surely there is a way to do it quickly. I refuse to believe they haven't figured something like that out for the courthouse at least even if it isn't practical for private use.

While Kat was considering the wider implications of the makeup she was forced to wear White was making a few further faces trying to decide what was in her best interest until Judge spoke up. "White, if you have no further arguments I am willing to make my final verdict. I'd like to see at least the start of an argument within the next minute or I will consider it you accepting the request for final judgement."

White frowned at this while Black smirked slightly making use of the fact that she was hidden from White to get away with it. Kat started to wonder if this was the reason Black called for the Judgement. *Is this to make White uncomfortable? Not that she's completely confident in the verdict but that she can use it to force White to make some poor arguments?*

With just a second to go White finally spoke up, "I... I proffer that despite the moral correct nature of Kat's actions that has never been the purpose of Contracts. We as demons are required to uphold them before anything else. Stepping in the way of Xiang during the revenge Kat was requested to help with should be considered a failure to uphold the Contract."

Black didn't seem phased because she responded quickly with, "Even if we are willing to accept that Xiang was in his right mind, and that Kat's actions could be considered in violation of the Contract, the fact that she fought the sect leader nearly completely on her own, and certainly could be considered helping Xiang finish him off.

"As he was the leader of the sect, it could also be argued that he is the one truly at fault for the events at Xiang's village. Thus, with his death it could easily be concluded Kat completed the Contract and assisted in helping with Xiang's revenge."

White let out a long puff of air at this. The only way she could think to argue against the statement was to argue that Xiang wasn't in control and thus it was another being that took revenge and not him. With that being the case she could argue Kat assisted the other being and not Xiang. However, as Black had already brought up the fact that the only actions Kat took contrary to helping Xiang was when he wasn't in his correct mind at the end.

White further cursed internally that Black had brought it up as an opening argument. Now her thoughts kept drifting back towards that fact and she was finding it difficult to argue around that supposition. She realised her mistake now. Black had essentially won with that first argument in her eyes.

White knew now that because she didn't directly refute the fact that it was a different being she had backed herself into a corner. She had said there was no evidence of that being the case, and it was a good argument to force Black to back off from the point. Instead Black went fully on board, always arguing the case, only if one believed White's forced interpretation of the events. White sighed a second time and said sadly, "I'm ready for Judge to make her final verdict" knowing that she still got a bonus for timeliness even if it wasn't anywhere close to the amount, she'd get for winning.

"White has called for a final verdict. Do you agree with this Black?" asked Judge.

"I agree to move forward with the final verdict" replied Black, and Kat felt this set of lines were certainly rehearsed. *Then again. I suppose if you have to say that every single arbitration then you'd have rehearsed it well after a while. I mean they could have been doing this for hundreds of years at this point.*

Judge nodded at the statement and banged both hands on the desk twice. "Thus I declare my Judgement. In the case of Kat and the uncompleted Contract with Contractee Xiang she is found to have met the terms and completed the Contract to the best of her abilities considering the nature of the request and how poorly chosen the demon was for the job.

"Thus I reward Kat with the fu-" suddenly Judge was cut off as she glanced slightly up into thin air.

"Hmm, this is unusual. I didn't realise the runes had been so broken. Hmmm." Judge trailed off letting the words hang as she bit her lip. It was the first time Kat had seen Judge, or any of the court room demons, show that much emotion.

"Um... what seems to be the issue?" asked Kat confused.

Judge sucked in a breath. "I suppose I can explain." She then looked to Black and White and added, "Note this does not count against your time. This is slightly unusual situation that I wish had been properly mentioned in the packet. You are both free to leave as no argument will affect my Judgement in this case. You are also welcome to stay as this is covered by your current oaths"

Black and White leaned back to look at each other and shrugged before returning to a resting position and nodding up at Judge. "I see you have chosen to stay. That's fine. Now Kat, the issue is that this arbitration was not given the power to award you this much money. I have authority to release a certain amount of funds to you plus extra for inconvenience if I so chose. However the payout from the Contract was extremely high"

"Um... why is that?" asked Kat confused.

Judge put a hand in her sleeve and pulled out a rug. "Think of this rug as the fabric of a dimension. Normally, when the runes are done right," a piece of string snaked its way out of Judge's sleeve and slipped through the rug to the other side, "it acts like a beacon to pull you in," the string retracted, "however if the payment is high enough, the runes don't need to be good," Judge punched her hand straight through the rug tearing it as she went and then made a grabbing motion in the air, "you can just grab something close enough," she pulled the clenched fist back through and the rug knit itself back

together, "and use the extra power to seal the gap. The power comes from D.E.M.O.N.S and that's why it takes part of the cost of summoning. In this case I'm honestly surprised at how much it cost. With the broken runes it was essentially the fortune of an entire ancient sect. Even with D.E.M.O.N.S taking a large chunk of that... there's still too much to give you outright."

"Is there a way to get the extra? Is it worth the trouble?" asked Kat

"I'm not sure off the top of my head" said Judge thoughtfully, "I know it's certainly possible, but not the procedures for it. I'm not even sure if you'd have gotten it all had the Contract completed properly. What I can do is authorise releasing as much as I am able and making a note in the case file that the reason you didn't receive the full some was that I'm unable to give it to you and that I recommend rectifying that"

Kat shrugged. "Sure"

Chapter 579: Lily's Morning

While Kat was off at Arbitration Lily was just waking up. Her hair was even more of a mess than usual and her glasses were pressed into her face. The book she had been reading before bed was just out of reach and the light in the room had been left on. For Lily, all of these things were fairly regular occurrences and while she knew the light really should have been turned off, was relatively unconcerned about the rest of things.

She took up that book and found she didn't really remember what was happening in the page she had managed to slip a book mark into and had to turn back a page to jog her memory. *Should I head over to see Kat now? No just because you're dating doesn't mean you need to see her every day... I do want to though. Hmmm... that would require getting out of bed though and Kat didn't even have the decency to be here to wake me up so I'm going to read for a bit.*

And so that's what Lily did, she read for a time until the call of the bathroom was too strong. She dragged herself out of bed and fixed her glasses up slightly before turning off the now unneeded light and headed for the bathroom to relieve herself. She was heading back to her room to keep reading when her mother called out, "Lily, I can hear you up. Come and get some breakfast instead of forgetting again"

Lily glanced at the door to her room and felt the strong temptation to just ignore her mother but practicality and the knowledge she was right about the food had her turn around and head for the kitchen. Her mother was sipping on a cup of coffee while reading the news on her tablet. Lily walked passed her to the cereal cupboard and grabbed herself out a box.

A bit of milk, a glass, and a bowl later she was sitting across from Evaline and eating cereal while letting her mind wander. *What is Mum doing here? Normally she'd be off doing something else somewhere in the house. Sure it isn't too strange for her to read the news on her tablet but normally she wouldn't do it at the kitchen table.*

A few more spoonfuls of cereal later and she had her answer when Evaline asks, "Well?"

"Well what?" asked Lily confused, "You're the one being weird..."

Evaline let out a long sigh. "Lily, I may not approve of your choice in friends, and while I might be willing to be a bit nicer to her because of your father and you, that doesn't mean I've ever stopped caring about you or noticing things. Is there something you'd like to talk about?"

Lily froze at the question. *Oh. Shit. It's been a long time since Mum used this tone of voice. What has she noticed? What changed recently that she would... or right duh Lily she clearly she noticed that something changed when you started dating Kat! Shit how could I miss this. I should've known Mum would pick up on that.*

What do I tell her though? I... I'm not ashamed of dating Kat and I know Mum doesn't care I'm a lesbian... but should I really tell her the truth? Last time she saw Kat with demon parts and all and while she might have just shoved that to the side and ignored it... I bet she'd be thinking about it if I tell her the truth. Still... I guess I have an angle... might throw her off? Maybe? I can hope?

"You're being awfully quiet" said Evaline seeing her daughter freeze. "I'm not going to force you on this but I would like to know." The words were pointed, and Lily could hear the 'I won't force you but I will look disappointedly at you if you hide it' message in the words.

"Well I suppose you'll be happy to know I'm not friends with Kat anymore" said Lily with a smirk.

She was actually a little surprised when she saw Evaline freeze for a few moments before frowning. There was real sadness in her eyes when Lily said that and now the younger girl had to fight off the stab of pain in her heart.

Why do I feel like the bad guy now? Don't just look at me like that Mum SAY SOMETHING so I can finish the joke. Please... I... maybe this was too mean. It isn't as bad as harassing me about my best friend for years but why does this hurt so much to see.

"Oh." Said Evaline distantly. "I'm sorry"

"Why are you sorry?" Lily said trying to make it sound snappy and sharp but it mostly just came out as sad and soft.

"Well... I... Um..." Evaline stumbled over the words before breathing in deeply, "Look. Lily I... I'll admit I've been harsh on Kat and you about Kat but... I... I feel like I've made a mistake now. She was your only friend and... and now I can't help but feel it's my fault you're alone again"

SHIT ABORT. ABORT. "MUM!" shouted Lily dragging Evaline's gaze back to the present. "It... sorry. Um... I mean I'm sorry. Er, that is... um... this was a bad joke. Um... it's true though. Um... Kat she uh... isn't my friend anymore but not because we fought or um anything... but she's now..." Lily started to mumble "she'snowmygirlfriend"

"Oh" said Evaline trying to deal with the emotional whiplash she was experiencing. She was still a bit upset but there was much less self-hatred and much more confusion now. "How did that happen?" asked Evaline without really thinking just to have something to say.

Lily felt herself choke on whatever answer she might have had to that question. *What is this conversation? How can you just ask something like that Mum? What am I even supposed to tell you? Actually Mum, you'll be telling me.* "How am I even supposed to answer that Mum?" asked Lily half desperately.

Evaline shrugged as if that would displace some of the uncomfortable emotions in her chest. "Well... I suppose who confessed? How did things go afterward? Is there anything I should no dear?" asked Evaline in an almost pleading voice.

Lily let out a long breath to steady herself. "Well... oh I'm so embarrassed thinking about it. I really shouldn't have done it the way I did but it worked out I suppose..."

"Lily, just calm down. We have time and I'm not going to judge. It's not like you just kissed her randomly, is it?" said Evaline with concern

Lily went bright red and looked away from the concerned gaze of her mother. "Lily you didn't?" said Evaline shocked. This shock was compounded when she looked further away and the blush deepened. "It was WORSE?! Lily how could you have done anything worse?"

Lily's eyes strained away from Evaline as her head couldn't move any further. "You broke down crying didn't you?" said Evaline knowing her daughter well enough to start to guess the series of events. "Oh no... You were too embarrassed to tell her you were in love with her. After trying multiple times you used what courage you could to tell her you loved her, she probably returned with something involving friendship before you kissed her and then tried to run away crying."

The slow nod was all Evaline got from Lily. Seeing this Evaline let out a long sigh. "Ok, well clearly it all worked out then right? What else happened?"

Lily managed to drag herself back so that she was facing her mother again. Her blush had died down a fair bit but it was still there. "Well... I... I told her about Stella, then I told her what she meant to me, and then she told me a few things and then we ended up together."

"Wait you'd never told her about Stella before?" asked Evaline shocked.

Lily gave a confused glance at her mother. "How was I supposed to do that Mum? The whole issue at my last school happened because I was gay. I couldn't just tell Kat that straight away until I knew she'd be ok with it. Then I got a crush on her and it would have been basically as good as a confession to tell her about my redheaded childhood friend I fell in love with. What else was I supposed to do?"

Evaline nodded, "Well, seeing as it was part of your confession, I suppose I have to agree with you." Evaline took a deep breath after those words before continuing. "Now, I want you to know that I'm happy for you... but I also want you to know I'm still worried. Are you sure Kat isn't taking advantage of you? I know you've been practically joined at the hip before you both started dating, but that doesn't mean she wasn't before or she won't start now that you are."

Oh god. I don't know if this is better or worse then before when she simply disliked Kat? How do I tell her I not only know Kat wouldn't betray me but that she can't lie about it and gave me a way to learn magic? This really isn't something that should be part of this conversation... shit. How do I answer this without sounding like a completely lovestruck idiot and answering with 'I just know' or 'I trust her' or 'She'd never do that to me' which while all true pale in the face of what I do know.

Chapter 580: Lily's Morning isn't Over Yet

Now. What would Kat do if she found out I told my mother she was asexual. Damn, who am I kidding Kat would tell Mum in a heartbeat with practically zero prodding despite all the bad will between them. Having me release the information because my mother actually cares about me isn't something Kat would ever be mad at me for. Damn there goes my excuse to just avoid talking about it.

Lily sucked in a deep breath. *Now how to explain this to Mum... maybe I make her answer the question instead?* "Why do you think she'd take advantage of me? And in what way?" asked Lily.

Evaline sighed shoulder drooping as she realised her daughter was trying to make this difficult for her. Not for the reasons she assumed, for she was thinking this to be punishment for insulting Kat, when it was actually just to avoid answering the questions. Lily couldn't hate her mother, she hardly hated the bullies despite their torment of her. Granted if they'd actually caused Kat any sort of real inconvenience, she might have mustered up some, but Kat found some of it laughable, few a slight inconvenience and most pitiable.

So Evaline steeled herself to answer her daughter's question in the bluntest way possible. "I don't want her forcing you into sex before you're ready" Lily's breath caught in her throat and she half choked at the answer, "as for why, she seems like she's good with people and fairly popular. Even if the sex wasn't a concern, how do you know she isn't just stringing you along? I often wonder if Stella knew the whole time and just waited for an audience so you could admit it and it wasn't just her word against yours"

Lily frowned. *That first part, somewhat expected. The second... not at all. Still that's focus on that. It gets me away from talking about Kat being asexual for at least a bit. I still have no idea how to bring that up properly. I could just tell her... nope avoidance is the name of the game. Future Lily can handle it.* "What do you mean she has a way with people? I've been her only friend for years." Lily paused for a moment then continued, "Actually I guess now that we're dating, if I use the same logic as before neither of us have any friends anymore. That... hmm. I'd like to say that's kinda depressing but I don't really care."

Though Kat is making friends on her adventures. I wonder if I'll get along with them. I think it'll probably be fine? Wait... did I just accidentally lie to Mum? Damn this might be the only lie I ever get away with because I only realised after the fact. This tactic requires consideration in the future.

"What about the other kids from the orphanage?" asked Evaline with confusion.

"That's all they are Mum" said Lily slightly exasperated, "Kat's older then basically all of them by quite a few years. I think the next oldest is thirteen. Maybe. Kat's been the oldest teen there for years. She's been there the longest, she's been the oldest for four or five years, she's been practically second in command for the place since around the time she was ten I think. She's never really been friends with them because of that, or at least, not for a long time"

"Oh" said Evaline. And that really is all she could say. She'd watched Kat and the older woman knew the girl carried herself with grace. The sort of attitude that only popular kids could cultivate. That knowledge that people turned to them for a multitude of things. Apparently not though, as if her daughter was to believed it was a role, she took upon herself to look after other children.

Evaline looked back over her interactions with Kat and tried to look at them with fresh eyes. It didn't help as much as she was hoping though. Kat always seemed sure of herself in her memories. The only

time she was shocked was the first time Evaline had let her displeasure with the girl known. That had been the only slip she noticed though. She did also notice that Kat was a rare sight after that, likely not to antagonise her.

Still... there was one more thing. "Are you sure she's gay?" asked Evaline 'suddenly'

"What?!" said Lily shocked.

Her face must have betrayed something because Evaline looked at her with a smug smile now. "Well, I was just going over my interactions with the girl and noticed she never looked at me with any wondering eyes"

"MUM!" shouted Lily, "HOW... WHY? Why would you ask that? How is this a thing you feel is appropriate to point out?!"

Evaline shrugged and took a sip from her cup before grimacing. Her drink had gone cold, but it was what it was. Straightening her face out she said, "Lily, it wasn't hard to see you were smitten with the girl but I saw nothing to indicate she was ever interested in you or me. Considering I am in fact your mother and we look somewhat similar because of it, even if you seem to have taken pains to distance yourself from my image, if she finds you attractive, she should have at least glanced at me once or twice"

I can't believe this. My mother is trying to catch me out because Kat didn't lust after her enough. Past me, you suck. Why did I need to have the image of Kat trying to flirt with my Mum burned into my mind? I should have just told her the truth at the start. Why did I avoid this? Not to Future Future self, don't avoid questions from Mum. It ends badly.

"Right... um... Kat is asexual" said Lily just wanted this to be over.

Of course, with that as her answer it couldn't be. "Oh? I suppose that does make sense..." mumbled Evaline. "Why would she want to date anyone though?"

"Not aromantic asexual..." mumbled Lily in return.

Evaline looked over at her daughter and sighed, before saying, "You've chosen a hard road you know. I'm not saying this won't work out for you but... sex is a big part of healthy relationships. Even if I didn't want you jumping into that, because it can also destroy a fragile one, it does help if you know you both enjoy having nightly activities together.

"Still, I suppose that would be just your luck with red heads. Picking the straight girl the first time meant the only way it could be weirder would be to pick the asexual. Are you sure this is what you want Lily? Would it not be better to try and find a nice girl that was a lesbian at least? Or bisexual if you have to."

"Why did you say it like that? What's wrong with Bi people?" asked Lily confused

Evaline rolled her eyes and said, "Nothing is wrong with them but they would certainly be more prone to wondering eyes. I suppose that's at least something that will never worry you with Kat. Anyway, it's not like I have any personal issue with them, it's just that... well, they tend to be adventurous types and even if they can find both sexes attractive, you are lacking certain equipment for the standard act."

"MUM!" growled Lily.

Evaline just shrugged again at her daughter. "What? You're the lesbian here not me. You should be fully aware of your body and your tastes."

This wording of course forced her to image dicks for a split second and gag. "Gross Mum."

"You're the carpet muncher not me. I think that's worse" said Evaline with a smile.

"MUM! CAN YOU NOT!" shouted Lily.

"Well it's not like Kat is going to take up the role of embarrassing you with sexual comments." Said Evaline snidely, though internally somewhat glad. This was perhaps the realist conversation she'd had with her daughter in nearly twelve months. It wasn't what she'd wanted to talk about wither daughter either but if she could share the suffering a bit... well... she knew she was a bit of a sadist at heart. Her husband never minded.

Lily groaned and let her head 'rest' loudly on the table. "Is there anything else you want from me Mother?" said Lily into that same table.

"Oh Lily dear I still have plenty of questions... let's start with if you actually did talk about things properly with Kat. How will you take care of your more... carnal needs later on in your relationship? I doubt she'd be happy to see you go see other people to take care of that..."

Lily felt like she was dying. "Mum" she said weekly having already used up her quota of yelling for this conversation. "Kat... ok I don't even know where to start. OR if I should tell you. I mean what kind of mother asks about her kids sex lives?"

"You have a sex life already and didn't tell me?" said Evaline with false shock. Lily lifted her head up slightly... just to slam it into the table again.