

DEMONS 661

[Chapter 661 - 661 Bearing Yourself](#)

"So what's it like having a demon on your team?" asked Nell.

Reflexively, Nixilei jumped in with, "She does have a name you know. We introduced everyone" While working on Ellenell's leg.

"Yeees..." said Nell hesitantly, "But I'm not asking Kat what it's like to be on a the team, I want to know what it's like having a demon on the team... actually, first I'd like to know WHY you summoned a demon for your team? Surely the training time you'd miss out on would be quite significant and valuable. Unless you can afford to keep her around I suppose... but that seems wasteful in other ways."

Nixilei looked suitably abashed but didn't say anything more, not quite willing to apologise for the action while healing someone else. Gareth sighed and stepped up to answer. "We've had exceptionally bad luck keeping our fifth team members. Both expected and unexpected departures from a large number of people caused us to really think about how to find a permanent fifth member. The demon summoning industry was also just getting accepted by law and it seemed like a good idea at the time... so we went through with it. Because well... someone bound magically to be here will show up properly."

"I can understand that," said Nell as she shifted to face Gareth. "Not sure I'd do the same... but I can understand it. Has it been worth it? And I will apologise for sort of talking like you aren't here Kat but..." Nell shrugged giving a 'what can you do' look which seemed to be universal.

"It's fine," said Kat well used to students talking about her nearby... or more commonly orphanage kids talking about her while she was in the room.

"I think so," said Gareth smoothly, "Kat has gone above and beyond her contract truth be told. Perhaps we could have opted for something stricter the first time, but we wanted to keep costs down if possible, and more importantly, we didn't want any resentment. The payment is one thing, but what we really wanted to avoid was a demon willing to sabotage our attempts for some reason. If we had one straining against the tightly wound Contract we might have offered instead... it would be a disaster. Co-operation over strength is what we strove for."

Nell nodded in understanding, twisting her arms so that her chin was resting on the large gauntlets she wore, before glancing down and realising she still had them on. Taking a quick moment to remove them, Nell returned to her position, this time letting her palms be the resting point. "That does sound like a good idea. And it's panned out? No issues?"

Gareth made a deliberate glance at Kress, not overly long, and certainly short enough that Kress, who wasn't really watching the conversation missed it but clear enough for Nell to see. Green sitting down after grabbing some more water around the same time helped further obfuscate the action. "Kat has been quite accommodating and I think her strength makes up for the lack of practice together..."

"But in saying that, do remember our issues keeping that last member around. Unlike you guys, or well I'm just assuming here, but I do assume you've worked together for more than just this tournament so trying to add in a demon would be an issue. For us, we worked mostly as a close knit group of four with

a fifth person that came and went for years before Kat joined up. Not to disparage her at all, but we're sort of working as a group of four plus demon rather than a group of five.

"I do want to be clear, this isn't because Kat doesn't work with us... but it's hard without the years of practice. We don't know how she fights as well as we do each other, and I assume the same in the reverse. It's hard to get into the flow state worrying about what she might do. We're working on it of course... but it's a thing I'm not really sure we can overcome, or should devote the time to overcoming anyway. It's not like Kat will be a permanent addition to the team once this is all over, so..." Gareth ended what he was saying with a shrug.

Nell returned with a wince, and said, "Yes... I suppose it is a bit different if your fifth member is so regularly changing. Did you intend to keep Kat as your fifth member the whole time or just whatever demon you could summon?"

Gareth shrugged in return. "Don't rightfully know if I'm honest. It was more of a test run than anything else. We didn't really have to think about it in the end. We had a way to summon Kat again, she was a great help in the first round and that was really all there was to it."

"I suppose some things can have a way of working themselves out," said Nell with a wry smile as she glanced at the now healed Elf. "I suppose now I will address you Kat. Is this normal for a demon like yourself?"

Kat glanced over somewhat shocked at being addressed. "Um... I suppose it depends on what you mean by normal? I don't get summoned for tournaments on the regular, but it also doesn't feel all that strange."

"I guess I don't know... what IS normal for a demon summoning?" asked Nell.

Kat grinned and said, "Nothing really. There is normal for given demons, but because of how everything is set up on our ends, rarely will we be summoned for a job we aren't interested in doing. It happens of course, and sometimes we'll agree if the payment is enough, but if done right you'll normally get someone willing to do the job. I'm... not exactly sure what I'd call normal for me, but I'm a succubus with no interest at all in seduction missions, just as an example of things I suppose."

"Why is that?" asked Nell, "I'd assume... and I mean... correct me if this is over the line... but wouldn't a succubus be practically designed for something like that? Or... evolved to be I guess? I know bear beastkin such as myself tend to gain dense muscle much easier than other beastkin and making myself flexible is much harder despite how thin I might look." Nell gestured to herself as she finished.

Kat made a 'so-so' gesture. "Some Succubi are like that. I'm also pretty sure most seduction missions are taken by Succubi, or at least I'd suspect that. I personally know someone who really enjoys those kinds of missions and a few others who don't. Still, there is some truth to what you're saying. Succubi tend to get abilities that push them in that direction... but being asexual myself a lot of them won't develop or will develop strangely. Pheromones for example, only work on people the Succubus finds sexually attractive and for that's... nobody."

"Never thought you'd say that," said Nell as she breathed out a long puff of air, "then again I didn't exactly think I'd be just chatting with a demon either. Anything else interesting you could mention? I'm genuinely curious now."

Kat glanced down at the sleeping Memphis in her arms. Well... the strangest thing would certainly be my currently cat-like girlfriend... which isn't really about being a demon... but I feel the odd urge to share anyway. "Well my girlfriend is a stuck as a Memphis, a type of cat for the foreseeable future. So... that's a thing," said Kat indicating to Lily.

Nell's eyes bugged out slightly. "Girlfriend? Is she a beastkin? What happened to get her stuck like that? I didn't think a curse would be able to cause such a thing... but perhaps something older..." Nell actually looked slightly worried as she rattled off possibilities.

Kat jumped back in before Nell could spiral too far. "No no, it's not quite like that. She is a beastkin, but not a normal one. Currently she's like this for her soul to stabilise... though I am getting concerned about how long she's slept. Would you know anything about that?"

"Oh..." said Nell suddenly calming down. It was still weird, but seemingly much less terrifying than a curse that could lock her as a bear would be. "Um... hmm... how long has she been asleep?"

Kat thought back, "Um... since a bit after breakfast?"

Nell just nodded as if that made perfect sense. "Yup that seems fine. I don't know exactly what a Memphis is... but just based on size alone she has to be a small cat. Those tend to sleep quite a lot, especially when younger. The more time she spends in that form, the more her instincts will start to press in on her. Sleeping helps relieve that tension just like giving into them would... better in fact for a feline beastkin because sleeping regularly is ALSO one of their instincts.

"I mean... I don't like to think about it... but if I was in bear form for like a month leading up to winter and it was cold enough I would have to either turn back to human form for a bit or hibernate. I wouldn't be worried for her... annoyed at sleeping too long perhaps, but not worried."

"Thanks, that's a weight off my mind," said Kat cheerily.

[Chapter 662 - 662 The Bear Truth](#)

"So Nell... if you don't mind my asking... what made you to decide to join the tournament?" asked Kat curiously.

"It's quite the long story," said Nell with a sigh, "especially because you are a demon. I'm sure the others could pick up what happened with a simpler explanation. I don't mind per say, because I do want this story told, the story of my mother... but at the same time... well yeah it'll take time."

"That's fine I think," said Kat looking at the others for confirmation. When nobody seemed to object she continued, "Well, seeing as nobody else has a problem I'd love to hear it."

Nell, nodded. "So, first things first, I'm the eldest sibling if that wasn't clear, and while we are siblings, in truth we only share a father. You see, the beastkin are made up of tribes mostly based around the same or similar beastkin. So wolf and dog beastkin tend to get along, the various feline beastkin, a few independent tribes like the bear tribe and the elephant tribe. We don't really war anymore but we do have quite a few... mostly friendly competitions like a smaller scale version of this tournament.

"We cover everything. Food, fighting, crafts. Not really magic but sometimes it happens. Anyway, the tribes... the tensions aren't high anymore and haven't been for longer than my father has been alive...

but a lot of the elder generation does remember. We only really teamed up to fight the other races as dumb as that might sound and after that all ended... we just... sorta went back to fighting like idiots because it's just what we did. Now, our battles were never quite as brutal as some of the other races. We didn't exactly cry if people died in those small clan wars, but we weren't explicitly going for kills and the beastkin as a whole are quite tough so normally we'd survive, scarred at best or crippled at worst.

"Tribes were also a lot less 'single animal' tribes back then as well. It was all about bringing in as many strong warriors as they could... but we also were a bit racist, thinking our own tribe, mostly made up of one or two beastkin types, were the best. So it was varied, but not as varied as it could have been.

"Now, with that ancient history out of the way, you should understand that we come from a wolf tribe. My father was the third in line for the chief position. It's sort of hereditary sort of elected. We have the chief, and the elders. The elders are simply every clan member past a certain age. It differs between clans, but for us it's 150 years. Now, with that being said, the elders advise the chiefs, and the chiefs have the final say, except for who the current chief is.

"A vote from ninety percent of elders can force a chief out of office never to return to it. Oh, also you cannot be both an elder and the chief. Once a chief reaches 150, if they haven't already retired, will be forced to do so and become an elder. The chief picks their replacement first before elder input, and traditionally that is the first born of the tribe. Some tribes accept only women as their heads, some accept only men. We do accept both... but we are the wolf tribe. So you might be able to see where the issue comes in.

"Now, my father was the third child of the clan. He wasn't mistreated or anything, but it was a very widely held belief that he wasn't going to ever become chief. It was quite reasonable as well. My grandfather is a strong man, and the 150-year age limit is what forced his hand. Then there was my aunt and uncle. So, Dad didn't really have a chance... normally. *novElnext.com*

"My aunt decided to marry into another clan to solidify our ties somewhat. It wasn't a complete joining... more like a very strong alliance. It was all her choice as well, she married for love. I could tell you the details but this story is long enough as it is. Let's just say she married another chief and entered that clan fully, leaving just my uncle.

"Problem is... Uncle was a little crazy. He was always testing strange ideas. One of the few great alchemists our tribe has ever seen. So while he's off finding new herbs and testing different concoctions, Dad is falling in love. He meets my mother at the fighter's tournament and they hit things off. Things are a little shaky because now he's the second in line, but Uncle was healthy enough and they were a good match.

"Five years after being married though... and Uncle managed to poison himself. It was a freak accident, nothing could have been done. One of the potions he was making exploded and the poison got into his bloodstream. He was dead before he was found an hour later. Suddenly, my father is first in line for the chief position, and Grandfather is going to be forced to retire in a few years.

"There is some grumbling about the heir to the clan being married to a bear, but that's not a big issue really. Not ideal certainly, but people didn't really have grounds to stand on. I'll speed up a bit now. A couple decades pass, my parents still very much interested in fighting instead of having kids, eventually are forced to settle down now that Grandfather is coming up on 150.

"He trains Dad to replace him, Dad trains Mum to lead the warriors, something he'd been doing for the most part up till now, and once again, things go alright. Power is transferred, the elders grumble but don't even vote on anything, and everyone is happy... until Mum gets pregnant."

Nell sucked in a deep breath. Her two siblings shuffled their chairs over and gave her a hug. "I'm fine. It's... I'm used to it. I don't even remember after all... Mummy Belna raised me just like you both, and it's fine."

"We know it's not fine," said Nabras and Bonas together.

Nell pursed her lips but continued with the history lesson. "Now..." Nell said with a slightly shaky voice, "nothing was wrong with that. I'm not sure if you know, but beastkin can have children with other beastkin. We don't mix it'll be one or the other. The other thing is that our tribe has always been led by a wolf. We've been conquered and broke a way a few times, but only by other wolf tribes that have since fallen. We are now THE wolf tribe.

"So of course, the fact I was born a bear was a massive shock to a lot of people. Now, it really shouldn't have been. The mistaken belief that the 'stronger' bloodline will be the one the child inherits is a joke and hasn't really been believed in over a century... but the elders are old enough to remember those times so they freaked out. Said I can't be in line for succession because I'm a bear and started to pressure Dad to pick up a second wolf beastkin wife. Which... is really silly because if Mum and Dad had more kids eventually one would be a wolf...

"In the end it didn't matter though. The clan was attacked by a terribly strong monster. It was a giant beast of unbreakable spines, sharp teeth... and honestly rather tiny claws. It just sort of... walked up to town and we couldn't stop it, or so I've been told. Once it started fighting it was much faster than its appearance would have had you believe. In the end, my parents were both fighting against it, and Mum pushed Dad out of the way of a fatal blow. Dad was still crippled, he lost an eye and an arm, though the arm was later regrown... and Mum died..."

Nell shivered but couldn't quite manage to continue the story. She clearly wanted to but Bonas picked things up in her stead. "Once that happened the elders acted. They weren't terribly happy their chief had a bear for a wife, and they gave him a choice. Marry a wolf, or be forced to retire. Dad was actually quite willing to retire... but the replacement they had lined up for him was... not a good man. He was... 'killed mysteriously' later on at least... but in the end Dad did remarry."

Nabras took over once his sister stopped speaking, "Mummy was a saint. She was actually the healer that gave Dad his arm back and they got together as a bit of a compromise for both of them. He was complaining about being forced to marry, and Mummy was being pressured by her parents to find someone... which... she was quite old at the time. In fact, she's only five years younger than Dad, and pretty much everyone from their generation had long since married. So they were both feeling the pressure and decided to get together.

"Dad likes to say they already loved each other when they married, but Mummy says they were just friends and the love came later for them both. Which is true... well... the weird thing is that while they will each spout off their own version of events when they're alone... if they're together they'll just smile knowing each other and say 'yes'"

Chapter 663 - 663 Men With Hats.

"So... cool story and all, and I'm sure Kat can appreciate the history lesson... but that didn't really answer the WHY of things. I've got a few guesses, and I'm sure Nix has a few more, but that's just the basics" said Green as she leaned backwards over her chair to 'face' the chatting group.

Nell smiled slightly, as she picked herself back up. The story affected her somewhat, but it was mostly just her siblings being overprotective. A few hugs and a bit of gumption was enough to get her through it. "A few of those guesses would probably be right. We've got a couple reasons I suppose. The first and most obvious is basically to give the elders a big middle finger. Nobody in our clan has ever won the big tournament, and because I'm taking the lead position that's another bit of proof.

"On top of that, I hope to use the potential access to the worlds top information brokers to find out if my mother's death was truly an accident," shocked gasps came from Green and Gareth as Nell spoke, while Kat was able to at least see that coming, and Nixilei and Kress were completely unsurprised. "I don't really have any evidence either way. I was too young to remember the attack, and while it was a little strange for such a powerful monster to attack our clan, this isn't the first time it's happened.

"Normally we get roaming bands of monsters rather than a single much stronger one, but truthfully I have no reason to suspect foul play. It... it just seems like the sort of thing that would be attempted in the situation we found ourselves in and it's not like our clan is free from consequences." Nell tapped a few errant fingers along the table, "I do think Grandpa would have told us about the plot had he been in on it... but he took a very hands off approach to if Dad should be replaced as chief or not."

"That seems kinda irresponsible," said Kat. "Why not support your father in his choices? Or at the very least push the issue down the road until he has more kids... or even just letting you become chief for like a day before replacing you, or even replacing you before you become chief... or just forcing you not to be the heir. I can see a lot of ways you Grandpa could have helped here without causing problems. Those are just a couple ideas off the top of my head."

Nell winced and made a 'so-so' gesture. "Grandpa... Grandpa really is a 'my clan is my family' kind of person. He really did see the whole clan, which is a few thousand people, as his family. Grandpa decided that he was too close to the issue. It was like... for him, even though he clearly had a 'favourite son' and no I'm not talking about my aunt or uncle I'm being more metaphorical. So he had that 'son' and Grandpa thought it was the best for the clan or else Dad wouldn't have been made chief after he retired... but Grandpa also decided he was too close to the issue and abstained through most of it.

"I'll admit," Nell grit her teeth and clenched her fists for a moment before letting them go, "that I think he took the easy way out by saying it wasn't his problem basically and leaving it to everyone else. Then again, I don't really see the whole clan as my family, just my blood family... and I guess the guy Auntie married. He's alright I suppose. That's not the point though, point is the Wolf Tribe isn't family, it's my clan or tribe. Similar but different."

**I still think Nell's grandad is kind of a wimp. Just man up and own your decisions. Even if you're 'too close to the issue' the man ran the clan for at least a decade, probably closer to a century based on that story. Just own your decisions like the ex-clan chief you are. It almost feels like he spent too long making decisions and doesn't trust himself to do it anymore... which is dumb. 150 isn't that old for beasktin... I*

think... and he was the chief so probably somewhat powerful increasing his lifespan. I doubt he was going senile so why did he just let a bunch of elders walk all over him once he was one?

Hmmm... do I have unrealistically high expectations of grandfather figures because of Gramps? Maybe? He's more of a father figure if anything despite the name though... do I just have high expectations for male role models then? Hmm... I never really felt like my teachers were doing a poor job... bears more thinking about. Perhaps I'll talk to Lily about it IF SHE WAKES UP.?*

Sadly, Kat's mental shout did nothing at all to wake up her sleeping partner so she was left to give an answer without any advice. "No offense... but I kinda feel like that's a weak excuse. I mean, maybe I can't really talk considering I grew up in an orphanage and was helping run it before I left... but yeah it sort of just sounds like you grandad should have stood by his decisions, or just... taken a stance of some kind even if it was replacing your Dad. Like does he even want the position?"

Nell opened her mouth to answer with an affirmative before slamming her mouth shut. A few more moments past before a soft, "I... I don't know... I don't know? I... I never asked..."

Before Kat could comment on that particular startling revelation the sound of rustling fabric was heard again. Turning, Kat watched as the largest man she'd ever seen outside of the demon realm walked inside, ducking to actually get through the doorway. The large hat he had on didn't help things at all.

The man in question looked to be a crocodile beastkin with a thick scaly tail trailing behind him. He was built like a brick shithouse with half plate armour protecting sensitive areas but mostly leaving his tree trunks he called arms free to interact with the world. In fact, Kat was almost certain that if you ignored her wings, just one of the man's arms were nearly larger than Kat, mostly just losing out due to her height. He stood at a staggering 250cm's (8'2) tall and had a light dusting of scales on his face that made him look like he had sideburns. It did help the fact that it seemed the croc man was bald, but really he hat stole the show.

And what a hat it was. Easily another 50cm's tall, though it did shrink down automatically as the man walked into the building. The hat itself depicted a swampy marshland with various terrace layers and what looked like real water flowing down between them. There were little mangrove trees, dots that flew around acting like insects and shadows in the water to indicate fish living there as well. How much was real and how much was fake was essentially impossible to discern even for Kat. She knew at the very least it wasn't an illusion... but more than that... it was just impressive regardless. **Novelnext.Com**

After all that, his weapons seemed rather disappointing. He held a tower shield, that really seemed more like a medium sized kite shield in his massive hands with a club on his side. It was a fairly basic looking metal club with no spikes on it... then again when it was sized for a 250cm giant then did it really need anything else to be deadly?

The crazy train continued as behind him walked two humans with a set of matching crazy hats. They both had half of a stone arch on their heads, and based on the fact that when they leaned into each other the pieces all lined up and clicked into place, Kat guessed they were either a couple or siblings. She was leaning towards couple based on the fact they looked nothing like each other. The hat itself was a lovingly carved archway that looked less like someone sheared the pieces in half and more like two halves reaching out for each other with long fingers of stone. There were a few moving details in the

stonework to enhance it above simply a hat. One such picture was a lady pouring liquid from a goblet onto another person's head.

Kat moved on from the tiny stonework lest she get lost in the details. For clothing they both had on simple but fine-looking navy-blue robes. They had plain looking faces, though of different kinds. The leftmost man had a sharp chin and a bit of stubble on his face and nice black hair that was cut short. The rightmost man had thin sandy hair that looked like it really needed a wash and a rather pretty boy face that was spoiled by the dark bags under his eyes making it look like sleep was less of a constant companion and more of a fickle dalliance to be had on occasion.

Kat was already sure this whole group was crazy.. She hadn't even seen the final two yet.

[Chapter 664 - 664 More Men With Hats](#)

Kat couldn't have made any guesses as to what the next person to walk into the tent would look like. She did have a reasonable suspicion the crazy hats would continue, but beyond that she was at a loss. So when a dwarf in green robes walked in behind everyone, the biggest surprise was that she could see him behind his much taller companions.

Having three wizards in the party was certainly notable, but what everyone was focused on was the next strange hat. This one depicted a 'large' mountain that was nearly as tall as the dwarf wearing it was. The mountainside had a tiny miniature train with matching tracks that ran up the mountain, occasionally dipping into tunnels that were lit by tiny dots of yellow light. The train even had it's own light that while small was large for its size. Kat was actually a little impressed when it flicked on the first time it entered the tunnel. The train looked to be about the same size as her fingernail and looked a bit like a determined ant making its way up a hill.

The dwarf's beard was... actually a little disappointing. It was rather singed and only came up to about the height of his shoulders... and considering the fact his neck was nearly non-existent so was his beard. The slight charring at the ends was really the only thing indicating this might not be preference... but with hats like those perhaps burning the ends of his beard was just how he rolled. Kat certainly wasn't going to ask, though some of the other dwarves were certainly tempted.

Instead of what Kat was now thinking of as 'the usual staff' healers other than Nixilei tended to use he had a wooden club with a gemstone set into it where it was at its widest. Kat wasn't sure it made for the most structurally sound choice, but it looked nice at least. The club was sized appropriately for the dwarf's hands and rested on his back. He also had a book with a blank leather cover strapped to his side. It was rather scuffed and might have had more on it once upon a time but whatever it was previously has been worn away.

Finally, in came the last member of their team. It was an elven man with what could only be described as a snow globe on his head. Before getting to that though, Kat took in the plain looking spear he carried in hand. It was made out of a pure white wood with a black metal tip. He held it loosely pointing mostly upwards as he walked, flexing a considerable amount with each step. Something Kat was fairly sure you didn't want in a spear. His clothing was rather similar to Kress' attire. Simple but sturdy leather covering the entire body with thick boots that might have been steel toed. That part was somewhat unclear.

The hat he wore was actually Kat's favourite. It was a snow globe with a constant supply of fresh snow depicting a town straight out of a winter wonderland. It had little houses all over the place in a somewhat slapdash manner, a town square with a water fountain that looked to be frozen, not a fake plastic model but real frozen water, or something that looked close enough Kat couldn't tell the difference. Each house had a few lights on display, though they weren't currently turned on. There was a variety of 'effort' on display for each house and even the now somewhat common 'ditto' sign next to a particularly impressive display.

Inside the town was also a number of people, though unlike the rest of the hats these were obviously fake. If the visible joints weren't obvious enough for most to see, though they were to Kat, the large metal rod connecting each figure to the tracks that propelled them around the village certainly would. The figures moved around town, met up with each other, and eventually returned to their homes. Still no lights though. Kat wondered if they'd actually change when night came.

Before the group could properly settle themselves in or give introductions, a moderately loud bang sounded. Everyone turned to face the source of the noise to find 'Ted' had returned though currently he was twice the size. "Welcome everyone, currently I am speaking to you as Thyme, the judge for this round of the tournament. Now that everyone is here I can go over things in more detail."

"Excuse me," said the crocodile beastkin in a surprisingly smooth voice that sounded more like Morgan Freeman than it had any right to. "How can that be when there are only four teams here? Did the fifth team arrive and depart without our knowledge?"

Thyme shook their head sadly. "I am afraid the fifth team were experts in explosives. Apparently that didn't mean they had any common sense. They threw no less than TWELVE sticks of dynamite at the first enemy they encountered. The fact that not a single one of them thought using so much explosives underground could possibly be a bad idea baffles me and is one of the reasons they were removed from this round.

"The other is that their 'Ted' technically was killed in the falling rubble and I had to save them on top of that. Perhaps if just one or two at most had thrown those dynamite sticks I would have been a bit more forgiving and deducted a large amount of points for requiring my personal intervention... but considering it was a situation they caused themselves endangering their own lives, and potentially the other teams if I hadn't taken steps to limit the damage... I simply could not in good conscience leave them in.

"I had a few issues in the previous round with their tactics truth be told... but while it did cause a number of injuries they did not every number amongst them leading me to believe they actually knew what they were doing... now I'm not sure what was going on. It was the same five, so unless they were cursed they either got really lucky or all the gunpowder they work with went to their heads."

Croc dude just stared open mouthed at time as if he couldn't believe what he'd just been told. As he looked around the room for confirmation he wasn't the only one hearing it he noticed everyone wearing similar faces except for Lily and the dwarves. Lily wasn't in his line of site, and the dwarves looked like they were ready to start a crusade. Finally Dwarf 1 spoke up and unleashed a number of dwarvish swear words that will not be translated to maintain a teen rating on this story.

Once that was over, Dwarf 2 took up the charge, adding in another layer. Kat was wishing for worse ears, though that likely wouldn't have helped, or perhaps a way to forget things. Kat considered dwarvish swearing of this level to be a special kind of mental attack. When Dwarf 3 looked to pick up the torch and continue their work, Thyme stepped in. "Yes thank you. I understand as dwarves you feel strongly about this but I think that's enough.

The rest of the dwarves sniffed at the insinuation it could possibly have been enough but didn't argue with the extremely powerful tree person. "Now that we've all calmed down, I will tell you about the plan for this round of the tournament. It even has a lovely theme. Teamwork."

Kat raised a confused eyebrow. **Isn't that the whole point?** Looking around most shared her confusion but Nixilei, and Dwarf 4 seemed to have an idea about what was going to happen. Thyme gave the moment a few more seconds to breathe before saying, "Seems two of you caught it. This won't just be teamwork amongst yourselves, but the other teams as well. You will work with each other team at least once. If things are tied up you may be required to perform additional tasks together to break that tie. I won't be revealing the exact nature of the tasks just yet, but I wanted to let you all know this will be a test of skill and co-operation. Special measures will be put in place to ensure this. Good luck, and happy chatting!"

With a light pop Thyme vanished from sight leaving the four teams stunned. **Well... this is... interesting I suppose. I have no idea what Thyme could have meant when he said 'special measures will be taken'. Does that mean we'll be limited in some way? Myself specifically? Or perhaps whatever task we are undertaking will scale to the power of its combatants? Maybe it's not a combat test at all... can intellect scale? I doubt it... but I guess it could happen? I wonder if the fact I can speed up my mind would count against my alongside my increased strength.. What about Lily? Now that I'm here... I'm not quite sure if I'll be taking her along or what... I need to figure out a way to carry her as well... hmm... this has gotten more complicated.**

[Chapter 665 - 665 To Be Bound Or Not To Be?](#)

Thyme clapped their hands together once more just to get everyone's attention. They took a few extra moments to make sure they had every eye in the room before continuing. "The first task will take place in two hours. You have until then to prepare yourselves. Only the things you are carrying currently can be taken out of the tent. You cannot grab the extra supplies from here. Once your task has started you may use and hold onto anything you desire. Oh, and I need to speak with each team individually for a few minutes just to make sure there are no misunderstandings. I'll start with 'Hats our Life', then 'The Numbers' before talking with 'The Wild Ones' and finally 'Demon and the Misfits'. Yes I gave you all new names, deal with it."

And with that Thyme popped out away again. Kat was really started to wonder what exactly that was. **It doesn't seem like teleportation. Perhaps the clone was on a timer?** Before she could think on it too much though a green glow surrounded the 'Hats our Life' team and they vanished as well. Seeing this, Kat wasn't really sure what to do. Nixilei however, was already speaking. "Right I suppose that was fast. Do you have any suggestions for when it comes time for us to work together?"

"Not really..." said Nell, "I suppose we could go over our skills... but I'm not quite sure I'm willing to trust you with that sort of information without knowing when we'll work together. We could end up fighting a 2v2 and I'd hate to give you that sort of thing then end up on the other team..."

Nixilei nodded in understanding and looked prepared to drop the issue but Gareth spoke up. "Perhaps, but what if we go over our main skills? The sort of thing that you can get after a few moments of combat but could waste a few minutes speaking about if we had to explain it all before things started. No real details, all generalities."

Nel looked a little torn for a few seconds before nodding and beginning the explanation. She was obviously the tank using her gauntlets in place of both a sword and shield while Ellenell was their healer. The two wolf siblings were focused on synchronising up their attacks and working together. Technically Bonas was their scout but she rarely actually filled that role. In turn, Gareth spoke of their team and the basic roles they filled, with Kat at the end as 'really whatever she wants to be' which got a few chuckles.

Kat felt the desire to point out that she couldn't in fact fill any role... before realising that with her flight, speed, strength and regeneration... the only thing she couldn't do was heal the team. Before the discussion could continue 'Hats our Life' were returned and 'The Numbers' were taken in their place.
**Still not a fan of that name. I get it's supposed to be a bit of a pun but it just feels clunky. Maybe it works better in whatever language everyone is actually saying.*?*

Realising that their turn would be coming up shortly, T.W.O excused themselves to fill themselves with more water and food, knowing now that whatever they didn't eat would be left here, they tried to make the most of it. Eating what they could now before resting as best they could before the challenge started. Kress and Gareth grabbed some extra food as well, while the two Fae just grabbed some more water. Kat decided that was a good enough idea and grabbed some water of her own. Eventually the next team was taken away and everyone sat in silence for a while until it was finally Kat's turn.

The Thyme that summoned them had a long beard and a walking stick, blacksmith overalls filled with various tools and a set of tongs on a nearby table. "Welcome. For the others, I spoke to determine a few things. For you, I have an offer instead. The challenges ahead of you all are based on your combined power averaged out. Normally this would be fine, allowing for your skill to carry you... but with Kat on your team the power scale is heavily skewed. She brings the average up quite significantly.

"I can give you two options for this. Option one is that I do nothing. You can take that information as it is and know it will mean the challenges are likely more difficult for your group. Kat will find her jobs quite easy, while you all will find them quite taxing. Some parts may actually require Kat to complete because the challenge would be too much for someone else."

Kat could already tell this likely wouldn't be the option they took. Kress looked practically murderous at the idea she was making things harder for them, and only held his tongue because time clearly had a second option. Gareth didn't look terribly pleased about it either, though he had slightly more thoughtfulness in his gaze, there was still a frown on his face. Green seemed unconcerned and Nixilei was nodding along, seemingly ok with the idea for some reason.

"The second option is to make a band for Kat. Because she's a demon I can't really seal her abilities as I could someone else's... but this will limit her strength. She will almost certainly still be the strongest of the group, but it will no longer be by such a large margin. Additionally, I'd ask that you refrain from using

demonic fire. I can't stop you, well, not easily, but a promise to not use it and a penalty for breaking your word would be acceptable. It would make things... perhaps not even but close enough. Kat would be limited to purely physical abilities that have been reduced, and not having a mana equivalent is enough of a drawback to offset the still rather impressive physical strength and the regeneration."

Kat could already see Kress getting ready to accept, but she had to ask, "What about my True Sight and ability to enter dreams? One I can't really turn off, the other I can of course."

Old man Thyme shrugged at the question, "They are of little consequence. None of the trials that are coming up have any illusions in them. Anything that might require them will be using... alternative options, because I knew about your True Sight ahead of time and didn't want it to be too big of an bonus for you. Balance remember. Teamwork and skill is what counts here..."

"As for the dream thing... while it isn't something I've made allowances for, I don't think it has any applications in these tests. Still, I will accept the same, 'promise to refrain and penalty for using' like with your demonic fire. Feel free to talk amongst yourselves"

Before Kat could really think on it too much, Gareth turned to her, "Do you mind being restrained? Before we even speak on the merits of either choice we need to know if both are acceptable."
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Before Kat could answer Kress jumped in with, "Does it matter? Obviously the second option is better. We don't need her causing more problems for us,"

Gareth winced at Kress' attitude but didn't correct him. Despite the crude words, Gareth did feel like the second option was the better one. Green decided to check out of the conversation and was looking around the room. Kat hadn't really done so, but there was a number of tools and a fake forge. Well, likely fake as the bellows weren't actually connected to the fire pit.

It doesn't sound... pleasant exactly... and with Lily the way she is... actually I suppose I should ask about that. "Before I say yes or no... what exactly will Lily be doing? Am I keeping her with me? Should you watch over her...?" Kat asked unsure.

Thyme glanced at the Memphis in question and tapped a 'withered' finger to their chin. "Well... no offence meant when I say she seems about as much a positive as a negative. I do not doubt she can be useful in some ways, but her clear need for sleep and lack of proper training means that her inclusion won't really effect your teams average score. As she is magically, or at least bound by some higher energy if not mana, she counts as part of Kat's... I do not wish to say tools for even bound beast companions should never be considered that... still it means she would be allowed to participate alongside you all without counting as an additional member."

Kat glanced at everyone else, "I... I think I'd like to leave Lily with Thyme if that's ok. If I do... I don't mind being bound. I wouldn't be comfortable with it if she was around though.. I can't imagine trying to do anything other than use everything to protect her... and I would feel extremely stifled if I had to care for her while bound in whatever way Thyme is going to suggest."

[Chapter 666 - 666 We Didn't Start The Fire](#)

"I think that's probably for the best," said Gareth softly. Despite not wanting to push Kat into a decision, her suggestion was certainly the one he was most comfortable with. This would get Lily off the field and allow Kat to completely focus on whatever was ahead of her while also making sure that the rest of the team wasn't likely to just be completely overwhelmed. The round of nods he received from everyone other than Kat solidified his stance.

Kat brushed her tongue across her lips trying to remove the dry feeling in her throat. **Why is this so much tougher now that we're in agreement? I know it's not the thought of being restricted, that's something I can deal with... but even knowing it's the best idea I can't be completely comfortable just leaving Lily with time. Dammit. I trust Thyme with my life, why can't I trust them with hers as well.*?*

"Ok. Do it," said Kat with as determined look as she could manage while holding Lily out towards Thyme.

Thyme saw this and nodded, first carefully taking Lily before conjuring up a pillow made of leaves for her to sleep on. It was wrapped nicely and compressed quite significantly as Lily sunk into the pillow. Lily shifted a bit, moving around to find a comfortable place though giving off a sense of slight disappointment somehow. Still, the fact the pillow was currently floating off to the side made it look fancier than it was, but it was comfortable enough. Once that was done Thyme pulled out a thick band and held it towards Kat. "Either hand will work. The band will shrink to fit your arm as well. It's quite sturdy, though not immune to your demonic fire. Just a warning, if you break your promise and use it, you will be penalized, and if you use it specifically to destroy that bracelet, not that I think you will, the cost will be coming out of your winnings."

Kat nodded and slipped the band onto her right arm. The band constricted in place to the point where she could feel it ever so slightly digging into her skin. Not enough to restrict blood flow or cause any damage... but certainly noticeable and not all that comfortable. "I can agree to that... how careful do I need to be though? I can take some pretty decent hits and I'd hate to break it if I used my arm to block."

Thyme waved off Kat's concern. "Demonic fire is simply a very dangerous thing, especially for delicate enchanted work of this level. Even though it's enchanted against damage, demonic fire disrupts a lot of mana constructs. I could use my full strength to slam it into a rock or something and the rock would break first. It's really no concern. I don't think anything other than your fire has the potential to damage it in this tournament." Thyme then shrugged before continuing to speak, "it's fine anyway. As long as the damage isn't intentional on your part I don't mind."

"Thanks" said Kat.

"Indeed, thank you time for this option," said Gareth.

"Indeed, well I have one more thing to inform you of before sending you back. Because 'The Numbers' have a number of potions instead of a healer, I need to inform you that if they lend you any of them, they'll be retrieved before the next round. Even if they trade you a potion for something you will not be able to keep them. It is simply part of the rules for this round. Is that clear?" said Thyme.

Thyme got a round of nods which seemed to satisfy them because with a wave they were engulfed in green light for a few seconds before being dumped back in the tent. Kat instantly looked around for Lily, but found the floating pillow Thyme had conjured for her was actually on the table. **Ok. I should not have been so panicked about that. Lily is safe with Thyme... still it's nice she's here.** nOve**l**nExt.COm

Some time later, Thyme returned to announce the start of the round. Before anyone could even say anything against it, they disappeared in a blink. Kat frowned in that moment when she noticed the teleportation felt nothing at all like Thyme's usual affair, but it was over so quickly she wasn't certain of that.

When the light vanished, Kat found herself alongside the rest of the group on a hill. There was a door in the side of it and standing nearby was a new Thyme kitted out in old style fireman's gear. They had a thick coat on with a massive belt around the waist. Thick pants and a metal hat painted red. They also had a walrus moustache. This Thyme spoke in a gravelly voice like the smoked regularly... based on the outfit it might be a different kind of smoke though. "Listen up newbies. The town just over this hill has been set ablaze. We suspect arson, but that remains unconfirmed at this time. I don't rightly care how true it is. We've got one job to do. Put the damned things out and save the town. You'll be judged based on how many buildings are left standing at the end and how many civilian lives have been saved.

"I've called in some backup as well. When they arrive, I'll be expecting one of you lot to take charge. As the first responders you'll have a better idea of what's going on. When they arrive you'll have one earth mage, and two water mages as well as another eight fire crew. They can take instruction well, but the mages ain't that powerful and the other eight are thicker than a sack of bricks. They can follow simple instructions well enough but I hardly trust them to think for themselves. I don't want to hear about any of them getting hurt either. Just because they ain't civilians doesn't mean I won't hold it over your head if they end up hurt.

"Now" Thyme shooed them away, "Get the hell out of here. You're wasting time and the fire's a burning!"

The group looked at each other with confusion but signalled Green to climb ahead. The rest of the group ran up the hill in her wake. When they were about halfway up, they could hear Green's panicked gasp. Kat sped up and dashed the rest of the way up the small hill. As she sped up, she felt her limbs grow heavy, as if the gravity had doubled. Shit the bracelet. There wasn't anything to be done though. Kat reached the top of the hill and suddenly she was hit by a wave of sound and the smell of burning.

**There has to be some shenanigans going on. I didn't smell even a hint of smoke before and I KNOW I should have been able to hear this. My ears are more than good enough to hear the screaming. There's way too much noise for that little hill to prevent it all. I wonder why Thyme bothered putting up a sound barrier? If that's even what he did.*?*

The hill they were on was quite small so she couldn't even see over the roof of a two story house. What she could see was the sight of rising smoke somewhere deeper in the village, and quite a few people running away from the fire, streaming out from between houses. "Kat!" shouted Nixlei as she climbed up, "Can you fly me up? I need to start planning this out and for that I need a proper idea of what's going on,"

Kat nodded, grabbing Nixlei easily and kicking off the ground... forgetting the bracelet. She hadn't put all of her effort into the jump and was severely punished for that. She hardly got any height from it with Nixlei on top of the bracelet. Cringing she let herself fall back down quickly taking the full impact on her

legs and sinking into the nearby dirt. Stepping away from the hole she'd made, "Sorry" was all that was said before Kat kicked off the ground, this time with all her might.

The ground cracked as she pushed off but that was fine, she was flying high, certainly not as high as she'd like, but perhaps it was enough. Kat beat her wings and felt the band kick in again, her wings straining against the weight. **Dammit! I can still fly but I'm not sure if I can actually ascend with Nixilei as well.** Kat flapped her wings as hard as she could, causing a sharp jab of pain that her regeneration took care of between each wingbeat. Sadly it wasn't enough. "Dammit. This is as high as I can go while carrying you. The bracelet is restraining me too much."

Nixilei frowned at that, but shook it off. She'd have to make do. "Frankly the angle is horrible but I'll do what I can.. I might get you to fly up just by yourself afterwards... I'm not sure if we'll have time. Now... let's see what we're working with..."

[Chapter 667 - 667 I Fell Into, A Burning Ring Of Fire](#)

The angle wasn't great but she could make do. Nixilei's eyes took in all the information she could even as her mind was already trying to work out a plan. The first and most obvious thing was not the fire, but the river off to the side. It would be an important feature... if it wasn't for the fact that it seemed to be the one area of the city that wasn't currently on fire. Still, it would be worth keeping in mind once the water mage showed up. Nixilei's eyes then moved to the fires. There were three distinct sections she could see burning.

The first was a small fire closest to them and off to the left. It wasn't large right now but because of the densely packed houses she could see, it likely wouldn't remain that way. **I'll probably need to send Kat over there... or maybe Gareth? Summon a bunch of earth to try and smother the fire without causing too much damage... hmm... I don't know if Gareth has the mana for that... even for such a small fire... and if he does he'll be out of the fight afterwards for quite a while. Hmm... I don't know who to send... maybe them both?**

While Nixilei was formulating that plan she looked over at the other two fires. The second was right behind the first though some distance away. She couldn't really get a good look at it with the smoke from the first in the way and the lacking angle. All she could really tell was that there was a second fire behind the first and not much more. **Guess I'll have to send Green over that way. Get her to do some reconnaissance and report back. Or maybe send Kat? Dammit Kat's flight ability is useful but her strength and speed might be more so... part of me also wonders how well her demonic fire would work against regular fire but we promised not to use that. Hmm...**

Finally the third fire was obviously the largest. Once again, it was hard to see from the angle but from what Nixilei could make it out seemed to be in the industrial area of the town. Somewhat close to the river by the looks of it, but just far enough away to be annoying. **Hmm... the fire there is already quite large but if the town is built by anyone with half a brain the industrial area should keep the fire somewhat contained either by a wall surrounding it or just the big roads needed to cart the supplies. In terms of fire damage it's the safest to leave... but if they have volatile stuff over there the risk could be high. Hmm... that might be a reason to just leave that one for now. Focus on dealing with the two that seem to actually be in town.**

Then again... do I trust this backup whatever it is? Maybe... with two water mages I really want to just flood the industrial fire and hope for the best... but if it gets into oil or something... dammit. Such a pain. It's not like I'm an expert in fighting fires. Still... that is the closest to the river. I guess I'll just have to hope for the best.?*

"Kat take us down, we have things to discuss with the others!" said Nixilei firmly, though she did have to suppress a wince at how loud the request turned out to be. Kat didn't seem to mind though, dropping her wings and letting herself drop. Nixilei felt her stomach revolting against the treatment but pushed it down easily, a reaction long since ingrained into her. The landing was soft as always. **I really do wonder how she manages to take so much of the impact from landing. It should be at least a little jarring. Aw well, perhaps I can investigate it later.*?*

Nixilei didn't bother leaving Kat's arms. She was much slower than Kat and knew that the demon would have no trouble carrying her around the place. "Ok listen up. We've got three fires and frankly I already hate this. Kress. I want you to head off to the industrial area. It's towards the back right of the town near part of the docks. I'm not sure if you'll be able to contain the blaze at all. It's the largest of the three, but what I want you to focus on is evacuation. We don't have the resources to tackle it right now, so I'm trusting you to get everyone else out. Depending on when the reinforcements arrive, I might be heading your way as well, so be aware of that."

Kress nodded and headed off, understanding that time was of the essence. Next, Nixilei turned to face Gareth as gracefully as she could manage while being princess carried by a demon. "Gareth, I want you heading towards the closest fire. That's where Kat and I will be heading shortly. If possible I want you to smother it with rock walls but I don't know if you'll have the mana for it. If you get there before us and can tell you want have the mana, do what you can and start evacuating the people as best you can."

"Green, I want you to head off towards that back fire. With the restrictor band on Kat she can't fly high enough with me in hand to find out anything about it. Save people if they're in immediate danger but what I really need if for you to scout the area and then wait for us to get there. Hopefully between the three of us we can take out the first, smallest fire, but it might take us some time."

The two nodded and headed off to work. Gareth had in fact already left, though Green sped off and quickly overtook him. "Well, now it's just us two Kat. What I want to know is... are you faster in the air or on the ground?"

Nixilei watched a thoughtful expression come over Kat for a few moments before a response came. "Truthfully I'm not sure Nixilei. In normal circumstances I think flying would be better but with the bracelet and you together... I can't fly smoothly at all and I can't raise in height so I'd be locked into however high I could climb. I think running would be better for us."

Nixilei nodded. "Ok that's fine. What I want is for us to follow the main roads, help people as we go and ask them about the wells in the city. I don't really know if they'll be any help but just knowing where we can find water for the mages later on will be a big help."

Kat nodded and they were off. Nixilei felt Kat accelerate smoothly before reaching a soft limit. The demon's steps stuttered slightly as Kat seemed to be pushing through something before their speed started to smoothly increase again, not as quickly as before but still noticeably. Nixilei kept her eyes on

the surroundings, looking for people truly in need of healing but the nearby crowd were all just running away. Nobody was being left behind due to injury... but it would likely get worse.

The main street they were following was starting to diverge away from the first fire as well. They'd seen a water fountain a bit back but it was all dried up. **Can't even keep their basics together. I hope we don't waste time looking for wells only to find them all empty.** Nixilei glanced around and saw a turn coming up. It wasn't as large as the main street but seeing their current trajectory Nixilei felt she had no choice, "Take that left Kat. Let's start heading for the fire."

Kat easily managed the turn, flaring her wings slightly to glide around the corner rather than rely on her feet changing the direction. Nixilei kept her eyes out for anything strange or any wells but wasn't seeing anything useful. The most interesting thing so far was a blacksmiths shop that had been shuttered but they weren't likely to have any useful tools.

A few sharp turns later though and Nixilei found herself staring at the first fire. It looked like the nearby bakery had exploded. Perhaps someone drop a sack of open flour near the fireplace? Regardless, the result was a set of two flaming streets. The fire had exploded out from the bakery catching the nearby houses, the houses behind the bakery, and one house on the street over. Gareth hadn't arrived yet, Kat's speed vastly eclipsing him.

I hope Gareth can get here soon. If he can crush that lone house before the fire spreads we might be able to contain this without trouble. I can have Kat demolish the houses towards the ends of the row and try to contain it to just this small section of buildings.. Should I get her working on that? Or get her to investigate the buildings currently burning for anybody inside. She's fire proof, right? I feel like I remember that from the first time around...

[Chapter 668 - 668 Girl On Fire](#)

Back with Kat

"Kat are you fireproof?" asked Nixilei. Kat wanted to say the question was out of the blue, but considering the burning buildings they were surrounded by Kat felt it was a very valid question, even if the answer was obvious in her mind.

"Yes, certainly against fire at this level," answered Kat.

"Ok. Ok good I want you to go for that lone house. Check everywhere for people before Gareth arrives. I want him to try and crush it with an earth wall. It'll take a lot out of him but it should be doable. It's at least two stories, maybe two with an attic... wait what about smoke inhalation? Can you deal with that as well?" asked Nixilei.

**That... that's a good question. Hmm... I suppose... it depends? I'd heal from the damage certainly... but the lack of oxygen could be a problem... would it be better for me to just hold my breath? I can almost certainly manage to do that for long enough to check out the house... but this seems like important information... shit.*?*

"I don't really know Nixilei... I've never really tested it. It really depends how well my regeneration works. I know I can hold my breath long enough so I CAN do this job without any real risk but... I'd also

like to figure out if I can breathe through smoke? My regeneration would fix the damage from it but I'm not sure I'd get enough oxygen for it to be worth it," explained Kat.

Nixilei tapped her glasses impatiently in time with her foot. "Damn that would be good information to have... but not right now. Can you start going through that house? I need to figure out exactly where to summon this wall from, probably the road but I'll be looking into. We just don't have time to test something like that. If you can hold your breath, do it. We can test this later... maybe after the tournament later. Honestly I'm not sure when we'd get the chance. Wait, GO why are we still talking," Nixilei said with more than a hint of annoyance towards the end.

Kat felt a little bad about wasting that sort of time while the buildings were burning nearby and dashed to the loan building on fire. It wasn't blazing yet but based on the smashed window a flaming piece of the bakery had been launched into it and the ground floor was starting to burn. Kat turned the handle, happy to find it unlocked and pushed... only to realise the door was stuck. The cheap hinges had fused together from the heat already. Gritting her teeth Kat kicked the door open with all her strength and it went flying.

Woops. Guess I'm not quite as weak as I might have thought. Deciding not to dwell on that Kat ignored the new hole in the wall that she'd caused when the door ploughed its way into the kitchen at the back. She was mostly thankful the stairs didn't get taken out but they were already somewhat on fire and not in the best condition.

Ok where do I start? Upstairs or downstairs? I need to get upstairs before the fire causing the building to collapse and people get hurt dammit. I guess I'm going upstairs. Kat dashed up the staircase, an action that proved to have been made in haste. Not even halfway up the stairs the burning wood that made up the steps cracked under Kat's footfalls sending her into a short freefall. Her wings brought themselves out and she pulled herself out of the remnants of the broken wood. Cursing herself for not just flying up earlier Kat beat her wings to reach the second floor landing, and tried not to feel uncomfortable about the growing flames that seemed to delight in the fresh oxygen her wingbeats provide. How that worked she didn't have the mind to bother about.

Looking around the top floor, she found three closed doors and one open door leading to what looked like a bathroom. A quick glance in there seemed to confirm nobody present and she didn't want to waste time looking around. Letting her ears do the work, Kat tried to locate anything by sound... except she couldn't. Her ears were good and the sound of the flames wasn't causing as many issues as it would were she not a demon... but they were certainly drowning out any breathing or heartbeats she might have sensed.

Deciding she'd spent enough time standing still Kat got to the first door and tried to wrench it open. The door handle was the winner in this three way engagement, coming free in Kat's hand even as she growled at the delay. Part of her wanted to just kick the door in again but that was dangerous and if anyone was hit by the projectile she'd feel horrible even if they were just Thyme copies and not real people. Mai had taught her to think better.

Ok how to get through this door? The hinges have fused just like the front. I don't want to break up the walls too much because that could bring the house down before we're ready, or at least the internals.

*Can't kick the door down... hmm... can I use the whole and maybe make another and pull the door? Yes... yes I think so.**

Kat flattened her hand and 'punched' fingers first breaking the wood easily under her power, after which she used both hands to rip the door off its hinges and into the hallway. The wall protested slightly but the screws in the door were weak enough that it came free without completely removing the structural integrity of the wall. Kat gently put the door down at her side as quickly as she could before stepping into the room.

It was an office, with a large bookcase and desk with a nice view overlooking the street. A shame it wouldn't last all that long. Kat quickly ran around the desk to check underneath and found nothing. The filing cabinets were too small to hide anyone and there was no closet so she ducked out into the hall and was about to repeat her performance with the next door when she heard something. Turning to the final door, Kat once again ripped the handle off and glanced inside. She found a coughing 'teen' version of Thyme that had been banging on the door. "Stand back and get to the side!" shouted Kat over the raging flames.

She waited a few moments not really able to hear if she was being listened to. Shrugging it off Kat stabbed her fingers through the side of the door and wrenched it off again. Kat found Thyme coughing in the corner, and noticed that the back of the room where a closet must have been had fallen through the floorboards and the smoke was rapidly filling the room. Kat simply grabbed up the teen Thyme and booked it for the staircase in the hall... only to find it very much on fire. Shit. Kat turned to the wall she knew led to the street and got ready to charge through it until, "Wait! Have you found my Grandma?"

**Oh god damn it. There had to be someone else here. Shit... what do I do? Hmm... I can deal with this a while longer, I don't even feel a little burning in my lungs and I had to yell out... so I think I'm good on oxygen for at least a bit longer... but the kid might not be. I don't really know how accurately Thyme can simulate something like that for all these people.*?*

And I don't know if the wall is safe enough to charge through... wait I can go through the glass! "I'll get her next, do you know where she was?" said Kat loudly, hoping it was enough to be heard as she dashed to the office. Kat didn't wait for a response as she pulled out a fan and flicked it out before slamming it into the glass shattering it and sending shards flying onto the streets below. Luckily there didn't seem to be many there.

Teen Thyme tried to answer Kat before she jumped but ended up coughing instead. The smoke clearly wasn't doing them any favours and Kat couldn't sit around waiting for an answer they may not be able to provide. Kat jump from the building, smoke billowing around her as it tried to escape into the fresh air. Kat hit the cobblestones and glanced around, spotting Nixilei and jogged over. "Nix, got a kid!" said Kat hoping the Fae could except the shortened name in this situation.

Nixilei responded with a sharp, "Is there anyone else inside?"

"I don't know, the kid tried to tell me about their Grandma, but they just asked where she is. I don't know if she's in the house somewhere else, or what.. Tried to get answer but they keep coughing," The Thyme let out a large hacking cough that required a glob of black spit to be spat out, "yeah like that when I ask. Here, look after them I'll go and check!"

[Chapter 669 - 669 Beds Are Burning](#)

Kat dashed back down the road and launched herself into the window... or that was the attempt. It seemed relying purely on her instincts for such things was not a great idea at the moment. Something she should have already learned. Kat tried to fan out her wings but didn't quite make it in time to prevent slamming through the wooden walls and tumbling into the desk. Kat stood up as quickly as she could, leading to the floorboards breaking.

Curse it. This place is already falling apart! For Kat it wasn't so bad, but there was smoke everywhere and the fire had spread upstairs now, taking over the landing and most of the office she was currently in. Kat ran through the flames, not feeling any of them and quickly using her now standard technique to pull the door off. What she found was an old lady Thyme with a hand clutched over her chest, frozen in the middle of a heart attack. Kat felt the world slow.

**Ok shit. I have no idea what the procedure is for this? I mean... it's just a Thyme copy, I don't feel bad about this... but how does this effect scoring? Like... do I bring the body? Is it a waste of time? Would it be better or worse for the kid? Hmm... you know what. Let's take... her? It? When does a body become an it? Whatever let's ask Nixilei.*?*

Kat walked over to the body and pulled it into her arms. When it didn't mould as expected into her arms like a normal, or how she assumed a recently dead would, Kat frowned. **Well now what. How do I get what is now essentially a plank of wood out of here... hmm...** Kat glanced at the wall of the burning house and decided it was a bad idea... that was until she glanced out of the doorway and saw the flames already coming in. Wall it is.

Kat ran at the wall and kicked it in, wood crumbling easily under her kick... perhaps a bit too easily as bits of wood shot out onto the street. Kat ignored it for the most part and pushed through, making sure to check the 'body' wouldn't catch on anything as she ran out. There was some slight manoeuvring necessary but it wasn't too difficult for Kat to get back out onto the street. The kid was looking at Kat before their face quickly fell.

Kat carefully put the 'body' down and turned to face Nixilei and Gareth who had shown up at some point. "So... um... not really sure what to do about," Kat gestured towards the two Thyme's as she spoke. "It's a little weird... and I don't know how it effects our score?" Kat could hear sobbing the background, "So just like... in the future...?"

Nixilei frowned at the question. "Gareth can you get started on the wall? I'll have a look at this... person... I suppose," Nixilei saw Gareth's nod and stalked over to the crying teen to summon up her magic. A green circle appeared for a few moments before glitching out and shattering. "Hmm... seems animate... a little strange but truthfully not unexpected..."

"What do you mean?" asked Kat, "Aren't all corpses inanimate?"

Nixilei shook her head, "No not quite, or not when it comes to healing magic. I don't have time to explain it all, but people can be healed shortly after death. It usually won't bring them back, but the body can be fixed. What you brought however," Nixilei waved at the granny Thyme, "gives me the same feedback a table would."

Kat nodded and Nixilei continued, "Ok... I don't quite know what I want you to do about fake corpses in the future... there really is nothing to be done, and even in a real world scenario it's not usually worth taking the body as well... but if it's not too hard I suppose you should do it anyway, keep the people from charging back in or something. I can't do anything with them healing wise though. So I leave it up to you,"

Kat gave a solid nod to indicate understanding as she heard a rumbling sound. Kat turned to watch Gareth slam his shield into the ground causing a thick wall of rock to rise up, wide enough to cover 3 houses. "Um Nixilei?" asked Kat worriedly.

"Only way to make sure the fire won't spread when we crush it. Debris flying out of the sides could become a real issues so I'm just making sure..." the wall split into three sections and dropped. The middle wall fell slightly before the others crushing the house and throwing some flaming debris but the other two walls fell catching the fire and smothering it once again, "the fire is completely contained. Now, Kat can you go check the rest of the houses on this street? Gareth and I will be making sure no stray flames cross the roads."

Kat nodded and dashed into the nearby houses that were on fire. She instantly wrote off the bakery and the five closest houses, one to the left right, back and diagonally the same as the first two, they had been completely burnt down. She also wrote off the next closest as well as while they hadn't collapsed yet the chance of survival was extremely low. So Kat start by just bursting straight through the door and looking around in the next house. It was only a single story and after checking all the rooms, instead of exiting normally, bust through the back wall into the house behind the one she was currently in.

Kat searched this house as well before taking out the wall to the left and continuing her investigation. Kat moved through the houses this way, checking every room available before knocking down the wall connecting it to another house. A couple buildings fell after this, but it was no real consequence. The first thing of note was a Thyme she found, but quickly passed over. One of the support beams from the ceiling had cracked and fallen on them, crushing their head completely. Kat quickly decided it wasn't worth the time extracting them would cost.

A few more houses went by before she finished everything in that half of the street. Kat burst out onto the road, and sucked in a deep beautiful breath of fresh air as the ash and soot slid off her body before steeling herself and heading back in. Kat ignored another four houses that had collapsed in the time she took to check, and found Nixilei was holding onto a large rag from somewhere and smothering any fire that attempted to cross the street. Gareth was presumably doing the same thing on the other side.

The pair gave a matching nod at each other as they passed and Kat dove into the next home. She found very little for her efforts. Most had managed to escape their homes before the fires got to them, at least in this section of the city. **Probably because everyone heard the explosion and came to check it out before the fire really got going. Just based on debris from the bakery shell, I can guess it was heard all around.*?*

Just as Kat was about to leave the second last house, she noticed something amidst the smoke. This house wasn't quite on fire just yet... but she could see a red glow coming from underneath the floorboards. Kat looked around for a way to get down but wasn't seeing anything obvious to indicate a trapdoor. She was currently in the kitchen. There were no rugs, there was no walk in cupboard that

might hide one and the kitchen table was large but had no tablecloth and easily revealed the plain boards below it.

Shit... where do I go downstairs? Do I just bust my way down there? Waste time looking around? Kat bit her lip. **Should I check the other houses first? I only have one left... but...** Kat shook her head and charged for the neighbouring wall, deciding to investigate the strange glow later. She dashed all through the final house looking for any signs of remaining inhabitants and found nothing, so she turned around... only to find the wall she'd charged through had collapsed part of the kitchen.

Ah dammit. With the all the noise from the fire Kat had basically tuned out her hearing completely and missed the fact the side of the house had crumbled. **Now how am I supposed to get deal with this little problem... and is it worth trying at all? Curse it. I should have just bashed my way through the floorboards or pried a few of them up at least to check down there. Now I have a bunch of rubble in the way and a time limit... then again... I suppose I have checked all the other houses nearby.. If only there wasn't TWO MORE FIRES to deal with.*

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Kat glared at the rubble for a few more moments before a lightbulb went off in her mind. Gareth! Kat ducked out of the fallen house and looked for Gareth. It took a few moments but soon Kat was running over. "Gareth!" the man in question turned to face Kat and she continued, "Gareth I think there are some people trapped in a house. I'm not certain though. There was a glowing light under the floorboards but I left it for later not wanting to waste time then the wall collapsed. Can you move the rubble?"

Gareth frowned, "Not easily. I can only really cast the one spell with my shield... and I can't mess with it too much. I could lift the rubble I suppose but then you would still have a stone slab in the way. I don't really think I can help you."

Kat frowned. **Surely there is a way? I can't really believe that there's nothing to be done... then again, I suppose I don't know all that much.** "Ok, I guess... is it worth trying to dig through?" asked Kat.

Gareth just shrugged. Despite Kat's desire for answers, it's not as if Gareth was a firefighter. This scenario was just as foreign to him. Gritting her teeth Kat dashed back to the fallen rumble as she struggled to come up with a plan. More or less the entire kitchen was covered in loose bits of debris. Kat could certainly still see the light through the floor, but now the issue was clearing a large enough area to not only get down, but also to make sure the debris didn't just fall on down the hole after it was made.

Looking around the edges where the amount of debris was smallest Kat found there was no light. Clicking her tongue she moved over towards the centre and found the light was still there. Cursing she moved over to the corner where the wall had come down and found more light. **Just great. It had to be under the place where the most rubble is. Now how do I deal with it...**

Kat started to clear what rubble she could nearby but the other debris filled in the space nearby. **Dammit. Maybe start at the edge?** Kat moved over, once again starting. The debris wasn't piled too high and with Kat's speed and strength it was easy to get into a rhythm and starting clearing things away. Not even thirty seconds later Kat had a nice little area cleared out... but was it enough. Kat shrugged that concern off, and started to pry up the boards.

They were no match for Kat's strength and a few snaps later and Kat could just barely fit her head into the hole. The nearby rubble was a bit closer than she'd like, and her horns would be a bit of an issue, but that was fine. Craning her neck so that she could fit properly Kat poked her head into the area below and found a well lit room with a man crouched behind a shield with a sword shaking in his hand, and two children standing behind him. **Well do I feel like the bad guy all of a sudden.**

"Back foul demon, you will not invade our sanctuary," said the shaking older Thyme. **Ok now I really feel like the bad guy.**

"Right..." said Kat awkwardly "The thing is, there's a fire going on and I'd really like you guys to leave before your house burns down,"

"You dare threaten me? In my own home?" said 'Dad' with such conviction that if Kat couldn't see all the shaking she might actually believe they had some bite to that particular bark. They spoke as if she was a great evil to be slain instead of a head sticking into a basement asking them politely to leave.

"Um... no? I don't think I'm even trying to threaten you. The street is currently on fire and I've been looking for any survivors trapped inside... so... can you come with me?" asked Kat calmly.

"You shall not take us this day!" shouted 'Dad' "I am ready to defend myself and my family! Come, strike me at your own risk!"

Kat narrowed her eyes. "Look, I don't want to make this a fight. The fire is real, and it's dangerous to stay here."

"More dangerous then going outside and facing more explosions?" asked 'Dad'

Kat's eyes could not narrow any further lest they close. As she was currently just a head to them she really lacked other non verbal means to show just how unimpressed she was getting with this conversation. **The hole is large enough to get the kids out... not sure about the 'dad' but the more he talks the less and less I find that to be an issue.** "There was just one explosion in the bakery. The fire is the only concern now."

"Bakeries don't just explode. Why should I believe you?" asked 'Dad' somehow managing to sound slightly snobby with the question as if it was obvious already she was lying. Don't smash anything. **Don't smash anything. Even over the fire they can hear it. Don't smash anything so the idiots have a chance to complain.*?*

"While I'll admit it isn't a common thing, bakeries can explode. It's called a flour explosion and it occurs how you'd think," explained Kat exasperatedly.

"Don't be silly. Flour doesn't explode," said 'Dad' confidently.

If these were real people... would I feel more or less annoyed? At least I know this is all an act and Thyme isn't actually this dumb... but I can't shake the feeling that some people ARE this dumb. If I didn't have this limiter on, I'd dash in, knock him out and then grab the three of them regardless of what they want. The problem is I don't trust myself to get the strength right because of the limiter. Hmm... do I explain how flour explosions work? Nah.

"Right, whatever. Let's say it wasn't a flour explosion if you really want to believe that. What I want to know, is why you aren't willing to leave the basement? Currently you are at risk from the fire," explained Kat slowly.

"Well we're making sure not to get hit by the other explosions. I said that already ain't you listening?" retorted 'Dad'.

And now we're back here. "I just explained that there was one explosion, it set the fire. There will be no more. It's just a fire now, taking out all the houses on this block. Can you please start evacuating now?" asked Kat trying not to let the anger leak into her voice. *novelnext.COM*

"Now you listen hear missy. I know what I heard, and it was an explosion. I won't be swayed by your sweet lies. We need to stay down here while it's safe!" said 'Dad'.

At this point Kat thought it was pretty clear the idiot wasn't going to actually listen, so she turned her attention to the two smaller Thymes. They were both 'female' Thymes, or at least that was the guess. Never could tell with Thyme, but their main differentiating factor was the long ponytail on the taller one and the pigtails on the younger. "Well, seeing as your Dad doesn't want to listen, how about either of you girls? Just because he's been stubborn doesn't mean you have to stay here where it isn't safe," said Kat softly.

The younger girl simply slid behind her father not saying anything though the elder one looked somewhat interested. So of course, 'Dad' Thyme had to step in. "You won't be corrupting my daughter demon scum. They know better!"

Kat rolled her eyes. "Really? Scum? I'm trying to make sure you don't burn to death and you think I'm the scum? I feel like forcing your daughters into a locked room that's about to be overrun with fire is much worse behaviour," said Kat snidely.

Though that's actually a good question... Kat missed the evil eyed glare she received in return because she'd pulled her head out of the hole to look around. What she spotted wasn't ideal. The fire was just one house over now. "Come back here demon!" said 'Dad'

Oh NOW you want me back. Kat put her head back down the hole and said. "You called?"

"Fuck you," said 'Dad' Thyme.

"Ok, now you're just being rude. The fire is ONE house away. We can do this the easy way or the hard way. I'm happy to help you all out of this house and away from the fire. However, I will not have your deaths on my conscience," because you're just fakes but at least I'm able to say it, "so if you won't accept help, I'll knock you out first and THEN drag your ass out of the damned hole whether you like it or not!"

"You'll harm my daughters over my dead body," said 'Dad' Thyme while slapping his sword against his shield. **That's what I want to avoid you absolute moron!**