

DEMONS 691

Chapter 691 I Actually Did use RNG

Kat's eyes opened back up after the flash to find she was now strapped to a chair facing the stage. Next to her was what looked to be all the remaining contestants. There was one of everyone now, except for Gareth and Dwarf One who were missing completely. They seemed to be similarly restrained and taking a closer look Kat noticed everyone was missing their weapons as well. Just as a test Kat summoned a fan to her hand and was shocked at the lack of resistance. She quickly dismissed it as she glanced around.

Before anyone could make a comment, the ground started to rumble and the area in front of them split open to reveal the head of Thyme as they slowly rose out of the ground on a small stage. Thyme was positioned off to the side with an odd hairdo, hunched over a cane and shaking like an old man. Thyme's skin was paler than normal, looking dry and brittle edging more towards grey than the standard green. On top of Thyme's head was a thin smattering of hair that had been combed over to, poorly, pretend they had more hair and weren't mostly bald. A strange look for a shapeshifting dryad that could grow hair on a whim.

When Thyme started to speak it was with raspy wheezing force, like that of someone on their last breath desperately trying to convey a final message and the shaking helped reinforce the notion Thyme could fall over at any point. "Hello hello. Welcome everyone to this wonderful occasion. The end of the round is upon us and yet there are still those of you who are fakes. I appreciate the effort it took to get here, where all shall be revealed one way or another.

"One by one, you will proceed up to the stand. The person called will be able to, if they so wish, say a little more in their defence if they believe it is necessary, before everyone will be called to vote. All votes, for once, will count. The vote will be for Fake, or Real, yet in this instance even the fakes will be able to vote. Yes that's right, in the previous rounds, should a fake vote, it would count for nothing.

"Each of you has 2 points worth of votes at the moment. If you come to the stage and are voted to be 'Real' your vote count will double to 4 and the truth of your nature will be revealed. If you are voted as Fake, once again the truth will be revealed, but your votes will then be worth nothing, real or not. If any of the voters choose to abstain... they will in truth be casting their vote for 'Real' as the individual was clearly convincing enough for you to hesitate calling them false." Thyme let out a light cough, "For those of you that are real...

"It should be your hope to gather enough votes to get that 'reality' confirmed. Your final score will be based on the number of correctly identified individuals, real or not. For Fakes, they want to force as many people as possible to be mislabelled and be falsely selected as 'real'. Oh, and on the subjects of voting. The person called to the stand cannot vote for or against themselves. They will be declared based on the whims of their peers,

"For the sake of the competitors, I can only hope you have enough 'real' people left to secure the vote, as it can spiral quite quickly. For the fakes, you now have knowledge of who is real or not, may you use that knowledge as best you can to sneak in a win if necessary. Oh, and no violence in this final round. We can be civilised and I expect you all to act like it," once Thyme finished firmly laying out the rules they descended into a coughing fit leaving the room in something akin to silence.

.....

Kat bit her lips, glancing around at everyone. She was confident Green and Kress were the real deal, though slightly less about Kress. She had no idea for Nixilei, as she hadn't been able to spot the bloodied dagger on the fake, or the clean one of the real. The dwarves... well Kat once again had no idea. Three seemed trustworthy, pointing out two other fakes... assuming those two were actually fakes. That had never been confirmed.

The coughing from Thyme suddenly stopped, and transitioned into a softer clearing of the throat that gathered the stray bits of attention to everyone. "Now, seeing as you have had some time to think, I will begin the selection. The selection is completely random, and I will not have any replacements is that clear?"

Everyone nodded and Thyme summoned a giant Tophat at the back of the stage. They then managed to pull a full sized step ladder out of their pocket before placing it down and shakily climbing the stairs to reach into the hat. Thyme pulled themselves out with great difficulty alongside a large piece of paper. Unfolding it, showed in large capital letters, KAT.

The restraints on her chair dropped off and Kat hopped up onto the stage ignoring the small staircase off to the side. Kat moved to the centre of the stage and shrugged, "You all saw me in the first round. I don't burn like my fake and my blood is black. We were able to prove I was real pretty easily."

Thyme nodded and called for the votes. Little buttons popped up under left and right hands, saying 'real' and 'fake' respectively. Kat held in her breath, hoping they had enough people to mark her as 'real'. When every hand pressed down on the 'real' button she let it out. A green spotlight shone down on Kat. "You have all guessed correctly, you've got one real girl marked out. Congratulations."

Kat hopped back off the stairs and Thyme pulled another name from the hat. Well, instead of a name it was just a big 3. Dwarf Three waddled off to the side taking the neglected staircase and approaching the front. "I'm the Dwarf that pointed out the fake One and Two. I think the truth is clear,"

Kat felt the buttons rise up below her hands. *I mean, true he did do that and fought the fake five... supposedly. Is there any reason to believe it though? Then again... is there any reason to doubt.* Kat pulled her hand back and refrained from voting. She knew it would be considered 4 votes for 'Real' but Kat felt it was also somewhat symbolic. Green and the dwarves all pushed 'Real' but Nixilei noticed Kat's refusal to vote and did the same.

"I see... two abstaining and the rest vote Real... so in truth another full sweep for 'Real'..." said Thyme slowly, "but I must sadly inform those of you who are real. That you are WRONG." A red light flashed overhead and the dwarves' eyes all went wide. Dwarf Three grinned and saluted the group before shuffling off down to his seat.

"With a fake in the midst... it seems you all might want to be sneaky with your votes..." as Thyme said that a black box started to surround the clamped down hands of the competitors. "Perhaps this will make things more interesting?"

Kat swallowed. *Shit. 3 was a fake? Now they have 4 votes as well. Shit. How many others are fake? Clearly they just went with it for the first round.* Thyme dived back into the hat, this time they pulled

out a 2. Dwarf Two awkwardly walked up to the stage wringing their hands. "Now, I know how this looks, but Three was telling the truth despite being a fake. I swear I'm real as well,"

I don't know what to believe. Is it likely Three was telling the truth? Hmm... I think... I think it might have been. Fake Green said they didn't know and Thyme said that knowledge was granted to them for this final round. Perhaps... yes. I think they must be real.

Kat made her choice known as did everyone else. Thyme waited a few moments before saying, "Hmm... interesting interesting. Six votes for real... and the rest for fake. I wonder who voted for what? Those six... I am sorry but you were correct. This dwarf is the real one... but alas..." a red spotlight shone down, "the vote was that they are fake. Thank you Two but... your vote is now worth nothing.

SHIT. Dammit. Only two more votes on my side. I wonder who else voted real?

Kat opened her mouth to say as much but black cloth came and filled it. "I'm afraid, voters do not have a chance to speak dear Kat," said Thyme shakily as they reached back into the hat for the next number.

Curse Thyme. Do we have another fake? Three managed to essentially sneak 2 past us. Both himself and making us think one was real while the other was fake. Wait. The fact that a Nixilei was voted out means that at least one Dwarf is real otherwise the votes would never have counted. I think. Everyone from my team voted for Kress... right? No. Nixilei could have voted for the other her. Shit...

Chapter 692 The RNG is real

Kat pursed her lips, well she tried to. The cloth stopping her from speaking was still in place so the motion didn't really carry. She was waiting for the next person to be called up, but with Two being declared a Fake despite being real... well things weren't looking the best. Kat was certain everyone on her team was in fact real, and that amounted to ten votes total. Two from Nixilei, Green, and Kress, and double that for Kat after being confirmed as real.

On the other hand, Dwarf Three managed to trick everyone and now had double the voting power, making it so that the 'fakes' had at least, four votes, Dwarf Two lost their right to vote after being falsely declared fake, and Dwarf Four and Five were unknowns. *Really... I think we could force a vote through... but we're close to the tipping point. Wait... no, say Kress is called up. That's eight votes from us... and potentially eight votes from the others. What happens in the case of a tie? Thyme didn't say... this could be bad.*

"Well, onwards to the next pick. It'll... be..." Thyme said in their shaky old person voice as they reached over the edge of the Tophat, resting their weight on the brim as they dug for another oversized piece of paper. After a few moments of rustling paper Thyme surfaced again and unfolded the ticket to reveal a large number Four. "Dwarf Four. It seems you'll be up next," *Novelnext.com*

Can we use any strategy here?

Thought Kat as she watched Dwarf Four head for the stairs. *In an ideal world, would it be better to vote Real or Fake for this dwarf? Hmm... it might be best just to vote fake, make sure that they can't build anymore points up on fake side... but wait. Thyme said we are being judged on correct guesses.*

*So, we don't want to tank our score by voting incorrectly. I forgot about that part for a moment, or overlooked it I suppose. That means that it doesn't really matter if they're real or fake. What's most important is guessing CORRECTLY. We don't want to accidentally misidentify anyone regardless of how

this changes things later. In fact, guessing correctly is only good for us. Much better then trying to game the system, even if it is a bit of a gamble. I mean, theoretically, we could... no wait, never mind. Doesn't matter if we control the vote or not if we're still guessing the wrong thing.*

Dwarf Four finally got to the podium and stood in the very centre. Four looked around eyeing every member of the crowd slowly making sure to meet everyone's eyes for a few seconds. Once it was clear he had everyone's attention... Four just shrugged, "I got nothin' if you haven't figured it out already I can't help you,"

Kat's jaw dropped and the binding on her mouth retracted. *What the heck was that?* Kat felt the boxes go around her hands but she was shocked enough to ignore that little fact. *No seriously... what sort of a speech is that? Does he mean if we haven't figured out he's a fake we'll never know? Or that if we don't know which he is at this point a few words won't change things? What the heck should I vote?*

.....

Kat stared at the boxes covering her hands. Once again, she was tempted to just... not vote. She had no clues. Four seemed legit, but so did Three. Kat's fingers twitched over the button once again before pressing, 'Real'. *I don't really have a reason for this. But... I think I'll choose to believe. I'll believe this time. Hopefully I'm right. If I'm not... well I'm not totally sure Nixilei is real so this could be a sign.*

The votes came in and Thyme sucked in a shaky breath, "Ok, we have ten votes for 'Real', and six votes for 'Fake'" Thyme's voice shuddered, "In the end... those who voted 'Fake'..." the light flashed green, "are jumping at shadows. Dwarf Four is Real as they come and most of you recognised that."

Kat couldn't help but let out a sigh of relief... and her sensitive ears picked up several other similar sighs. Kat wasn't looking properly so she couldn't be sure of the exact number of sighs but she was hopeful. There was at least two, and she was willing to bet they were Green and Kress. She was still on the fence about Nixilei. While Kat was relaxing Dwarf Four bowed and said, "Thank you for your belief,"

As Dwarf Four stepped down Thyme pulled out the next piece of paper to reveal 'Nixilei' written on it. The shackles binding her to the chair released and Nixilei glanced around at everyone for a moment before walking up to the stage. When she reached the centre Nixilei tapped her dagger twice, "As the dwarves know the other me claimed to have thrown her dagger during the challenge round. She had a bloody dagger on her waist, while mine was clean. This is how I proved my 'Real' status to the dwarves,"

Kat met Nixilei's eyes and didn't feel like she was lying. Then again, as a spy, Kat presumed the Nixilei copy could manage that pretty well. She was missing the fact that the fake Nixilei had revealed herself long before the dagger incident. It didn't really matter though as the real dwarf was willing to put down 4 votes for 'Real' cancelling out Three's false vote. That meant that assuming there was no other fakes, just one person needed to vote, or, if Kat voted, there could even be a fake and she'd still be fine.

Kat pressed on the 'Real' button willing to take the gamble, and a moment later Thyme said, "Excellent, excellent. I have 4 votes for Fake and the rest for Real. Perhaps it is no surprise... but Nixilei here is REAL" the spotlight turned green and shone down on Nixilei who simply jumped off the stage afterwards.

Another vote down and Thyme pulled out the next ticket to reveal Kress' name. He kicked off the ground and managed to barely make it up onto the stage in a single jump, twirling in place to face the crowd. "We already established who was who last round so I won't say anymore," and Kress was right, this was an easy round. The votes were cast and it was the same result as Nixilei, just 4 votes on fake. Kress smirked as if the conclusion had already been forgone and hopped off the stage back into the chair.

Thyme went back to the hat for another go and pulled Green, the last of Kat's teammates and the second last name in the hat. She used a burst of mana to get herself up onto the stage, landing softly with a second load of mana before turning to face the crowd with a grin. "With Kat proven real, Kat proved me real as well, in the second round. I'm a bit annoyed Gareth didn't end up here but I understand why you and the other Kress chose to risk things. I am a little annoyed with him though. No offence Kress but I'd have expected him to win that fight,"

Kress couldn't really shrug considering the chair was pinning his arms so he settled for a glare. Once more, votes cast, with four votes for 'Fake' clearly from Three. *Hmm, so is that then? Three was the only fake? We've just got Dwarf Five left... and we don't really have confirmation for him... but the votes seem to indicate he's not a fake... then again... there were at least a few votes that tried to mess with things.*

To nobodies surprise the next and final name was a big Five. The dwarf took the stairs, like the others, and headed up onto the stage. "Well urr..." mumbled Five, "I don't really know what you all want me to say? I think I've proven myself so far, but I didn't have any obvious moments of 'Oh look that guys definitely 'Real' I can point out either. So... get to the vote I suppose?"

Kat bit her lip and let her hand rest over the 'Real' button. Kat's tail flicked around in annoyance, not really knowing what to do with this final dwarf. After a few real seconds past, and much longer internally, nothing was decided and Kat once again refrained from voting.

Perhaps, in her heart she did know and wasn't willing to commit properly. Perhaps she wanted to abstain from the last vote because she was unsure. Whatever the case, Thyme nodded a couple times with an odd head bob, and said, "Hmm hmm, quite the mixed one here. Out of a total 24 votes we have... 10 for 'Fake' and 14 for 'Real'. It's a close one, with a single set of votes as the deciding factor... and I am pleased or afraid to announce..."

The light turned red, Thyme's eyes glowed blue, "Five was the second of only two Fakes. It seems you guys are rather poor when it comes to spotting them!"

Chapter 693 Dinner for Twenty?

With that declaration the fakes were caught in a bright flash of light before disappearing and leaving only the scent of ozone behind. Thyme was hit by a similar light and came out of it looking mostly normal. They had a green suit and tie combination, clear boobs and long flowing hair but a sharp chin. When they spoke it was with a soft, androgynous voice that carried non the less. "Congratulations I suppose. You managed to get through the round relatively intact without losing too many of your real members along the way. It's all time for dinner so we'll be meeting up,"

Thyme clapped twice and the light surrounded everyone again, Kat felt the pull of teleportation alongside some bile rising up in her throat. The rapid fire teleportation had finally reached a critical mass and while she could push the feeling down it still wasn't a good one. *I thought Thyme had improved the teleporting by so much more than this. Why does it keep getting worse? Is it a threshold thing? I wish I understood what the problem actually was because then I could STAB IT.*

Before Kat could get too annoyed though she was dropped gently onto a nice chair. Looking around she was at a fancy dining table with everyone else. The room actually had two tables, Kat's team were on the same side as her, and she was on the edge with Green next to her, Gareth after that, and then Kress and finally Nixilei. Across the table was 'The Wild Ones' team. Kat was across from Nell, the bear beastkin girl with the wolf siblings next to her, then Blue and finally their elf Ellenell.

The other table in the room had the remaining teams, with the dwarves all lined up in order and the guys with the crazy hats positioned based on which had the tallest hat by the looks of things. The tables themselves were finely decorated with silver cutlery lined with gold. There was two candelabras burning on each table and a bouquet of blue roses in the middle of Kat's table, and green roses on the other.

noVelnext.com

The walls were a soft white that had the slightest pink tinge to it and the ceiling depicted a... 'great battle'... well, if you could call a food fight a 'great battle'. It contained at least a hundred variant Thymes all fighting over a large cake that came out of the picture and acted like a chandelier for the room. All the troops were 'armed' with various dishes, from chicken leg nunchakus to pie slings and throwing star pancakes. The uniforms all looked like they were painted on with icing and had various candies as adornments and the two generals of both armies had a baguette carved into a sceptre and a hat made out of whipped cream shaped into a cone. There was a river of chocolate separating the two sides but connected by a bridge made of cookies in the south and a zipline made of liquorice in the north.

It was a rather silly looking scene, painted in an overly serious manner despite the fight being about food of all things. Kat felt like the longer she looked the more hidden details she found, like the two Thymes from opposite teams kissing in once corner, or the small childlike Thyme that wasn't even trying to fight and was eating their uniform. *I wonder if Thyme painted this themselves or they commissioned it. This is really impressive. The scale is massive and the details are so clear. When I really look I can see individual brush strokes so this isn't just an image Thyme made using magic this is a real painting.*

Kat's attention was called away from the ceiling when a loud pop sounded out. Whipping her head around Kat saw Thyme appear in a burst of confetti. It was the same appearance as before, with the same androgynous voice. "Welcome welcome. I'm here to catch everyone up on where you all stand in the competition after the first two rounds. Those of you on top, don't relax just yet, and for those of you behind, well there's still game left to be played. Let me explain the scoring system. Each round has it's own scoring system to help determine which team or teams, is in front. First place in a round nets you 4 points, second nets you 3 points, and both 3rd and 4th net you 2 points for both... for the solo rounds.

.....

“For the double rounds, you’ll either earn 3 points, or 1 lonely point depending on if you placed first or second with the chance to earn bonus points if you’re paying attention. Now, onto the scores. In the first round it was actually quite close between all our teams. You all managed to score above eighty, even if The Numbers only managed 81. Still a very respectable score and as such they have 1 point.

“Next we have 85, The Wild Ones. A good showing, but only enough for third place. Demon and the Misfits managed to just barely get second place with 87. That means, in first place, with a total of 91... is the Men With Hats, give them a hand,” Thyme waited for the applause, when it took a couple of seconds Thyme pointedly stared at people who weren’t clapping yet, “yes that’s great.”

“Now the second round, it was an interesting affair, and very close. In the end though, The Wild Ones and Men With Hats managed to guess one more correct in the final round while having the same number of people, making them the clear winners. This means that we have Men With Hats in first place with 6 points, really pulling ahead there. That’s two more than the next highest team, Demon and the Misfits and there 4 points. Finally, we have a tie for third place with both The Wild Ones and The Numbers.”

Thyme smiled and gave a small clap while trying to look cute, “Wonderful wonderful. I’m quite happy to have that out of the way... though, I’m a little sad nobody gave me a chance to bring out the special prize for the team that eliminated their rivals,” said Thyme with a pout. *Oh yeah there was something about that...*

While Thyme was pouting, they reached down into their suit and pulled out something from between their boobs, or more likely, used the action to disguise a teleport. When Thyme’s hand became visible once again they were holding a pair of jet black handcuffs, then with another flick of the wrist, Thyme was holding a set of five, “We didn’t get to play with these at all... top of the line deep iron handcuffs. Weighing in at 200kg for each hand and another 50 for the chain, all enchanted to absorb mana!”

The teams all paled drastically, even Kat felt a shiver down her spine despite not using mana. *I am so glad we ended up with an even number of people. I mean, I mostly forgot about that little detail but I am so glad either through luck or intentions from the others we don’t have to deal with that.*

“Remember all, this is the TEAMWORK Tournament. A little punishment for naughty boys and girls that aren’t willing to work together. Fabulous, fabulous. Still, it warms my cold rooty heart to see everyone getting along.”

Thyme gave another clap and the handcuffs vanished, “Well, with that I suppose I should leave you all to your meals. Wouldn’t want you to get any funny ideas about other things you could eat. Have a good meal everyone!” Thyme gave a sly grin as they finished speaking and spun around once more heading for the exit.

As they did so Kat glanced around the room once again and frowned. *Hey Thyme? Is Lily not here? I thought we were on break?*

As Thyme walked past Kat’s section of the table their eyes locked, the question clear in Kat’s... and in Thyme’s there was nothing but mischief. Their smile even widened as they walked past as they gave the slightest shake of their head. Kat felt another chill run down her spine, her tail wrapping itself around the surprisingly sturdy chair leg as she attempted to crush it.

This isn't a break. This 'peaceful dinner' is likely going to be anything but... Kat pursed her lips. *I guess it's actually a good thing she isn't here. I'd have let me guard down and she might have been hurt... *

Kat didn't make any other moves as Thyme slipped out of the door letting it close softly behind them. Nixilei and Nell noticed Kat's rapid change in demeanour and started to scan the room more closely but they couldn't find anything strange. Unlike Kat, they were missing the biggest clue, and hadn't met Thyme's eyes. They had no idea what was in store for them... and really... neither did Kat.

Chapter 694: Eat Up

Kat wasn't able to properly relax now she knew something strange was inevitably going to happen. Because of this, when the doors suddenly burst open Kat leapt up in her seat, everyone else was getting ready to react but when they saw it was just a number of Thyms either in butler outfits or maid uniforms, not necessarily with sexual characteristics matching their attire, they all relaxed again and Kat sat down awkwardly.

The serving staff walking in sync like a marching army. They even synced up so that those with wildly different stride lengths would be able to stay together, with those who had longer legs taking 'smaller' steps and the smallest Thyms skipping slightly to keep up. They all placed a cover meal down in front of their respective adventurers before waiting just a moment and lifting the cloche to reveal a very fancy looking salad.

The bowl was designed in such a way to look somewhat like a vase and all the food inside was arranged to look like flowers. Purple lettuce had been cut up and folded to look like roses, cauliflower was left mostly untouched, though the stems were hidden. A strange mix of a carrot for the stem, green cabbage for the leaves and cherry tomatoes for the stamen, the part of the flower that contained the bulk of the pollen. There was a light drizzling of some kind of dressing that settled across the whole dish making it look like a rain shower had recently come through the area.

All in all it looked fantastic but Kat saw that it was a fairly basic dish in terms of ingredients. Nothing she couldn't find on Earth and after taking a bite, Kat found it wasn't even any better than Callisto's cooking. Perhaps an unreasonable standard, but as Kat had partaken in Thyme's cooking in the first round, she knew they could do a lot better especially with unique ingredients. So all in all she wasn't very satisfied.

Kat still ate what she considered a reasonable amount of food so as not to seem impolite. Once she was done and started looking around though she noticed everyone was smiling and really seemed to enjoy their meals. Green and Nell had even finished theirs completely. *Odd. Is it just that I'm used to these ingredients? Perhaps they are actually a rare thing here... I mean, with mana surely the plants all mutate somewhat so really to see them so similar to home... perhaps this is some great delicacy that I'm just missing out on.*

Kat looked around for someone to chat with but everyone seemed fully absorbed in their food. Kat reached out instinctively for a drink just to pass the time... but noticed there wasn't anything in her glass. *Huh... odd... I guess I just sort of expected there to be some...* Kat frowned and looked around for something to do but found nothing to occupy her hands that wouldn't be overly rude. In the end, Kat took to staring at the painting on the ceiling again, looking for more interesting things. She managed to spot a few, like the soldier who hid a rock in their pie and the Thyme sneaking in a sip from the river.

Eventually the doors opened up again and Kat wasn't high strung enough to jump this time. The wait staff marched in again, and swapped out the plate for a new cloche hiding the food. A few more moments, for suspense, or so Kat was assuming, and the meal was revealed. This time they seemed to be customised somewhat. Gareth and Kress had a steak of some kind, from the colour it wasn't normal cow meat. Green and Blue had multiple tiny burgers cut into the shape of jasmine flowers. There were a few more dishes but Kat instead focused on her own.

.....

She smiled at the sight, it looked to be the same spicy dish she'd had last time. Kat could see the people closest to her backing away slightly from the heat alone. Kat just licked her lips, barely noticing the Thymes pulling a jug from under the cloche they'd just picked up, something that shouldn't be possible without some kind of trick, and poured a glass of red liquid into her cup. Kat smiled down at the 'Soup of the Sun' as it'd been renamed by Thyme. Instead of three lilies like last time it now had five.

Kat dove into the meal happily, knowing that you weren't meant to eat the lilies till later she attacked the other things floating in the soup, quickly spooning them out and sucking up the liquid at the same time. The familiar burst of warmth and savoury taste like nothing else filled her mouth. *I take back every complaint I had about the ordinary salad.* While Kat was enjoying herself, she didn't notice the slight shimmer in the air signalling a barrier was surrounding her. It wasn't anything malicious, it was simply to prevent anyone overheating.

A good thing too because once Kat ate the final extra ingredient the lilies melted into the soup and the glow doubled. It was now putting off so much heat Kat could feel her eyes watering ever so slightly. With a smile, and not an ounce of grace Kat picked up the bowl itself and happily drank the contents with no regard for how it looked. The tasty liquid found its way straight to her stomach before Kat carefully put it down and leaned back in her chair with a big smile on her face.

Nell, who was directly across from Kat had a rather pinched look before she went back to eating, simply trying to put that nonsense out of her mind. Nobody else in the room would have been able to sit in Kat's place let alone eat the dish. That was certainly the reason for the barrier around Kat. While Kat was relaxing and savouring the taste, she missed the round of yawns traveling around the table. Nothing unusual for Green, especially when she finished up all but one of her burgers and decided Gareth, even in plate armour, was a good enough pillow.

Kat stayed relaxed until the doors opened once again. The Thymes came in and replaced the food once again, though the one grabbing Kat's did have their uniform come alight. It was simply patted down with a hand as if it was no big deal. When the cloche came off it revealed a wide variety of desserts for everyone, even Green who really didn't seem to be interested in whatever it might be. Kat could see cupcakes, slices of cakes. *Why both?* What looked to be a large square of fruit crumble, possibly apple and a few other things besides. Kat however, was the only one who got a bowl of ice cream, and the barrier went up.

Kat could see the mist rolling off her bowl and impacted the barrier this time, and realised it was to stop the cold spreading to anyone else. She had three scoops, one was white, the other green, and the last one brown. Vanilla, chocolate, and... mint perhaps? Kat, having not touched her drink, didn't even

notice it freezing over. Kat scooped up a helping of all three together where they met in the middle and took a bite. Frankly she was disappointed.

It was freezing, and chilled her mouth and body, but it wasn't really a nice chill, or all that powerful. Unlike the soup, the flavour was in no way enhanced by the temperature. It was just really cold chocolate, vanilla, and pear ice cream. She appreciated the odd choice for the third flavour but there was nothing truly spectacular on display here. Still, ice cream was ice cream and Kat shrugged, eating it all quickly with a smile on her face. It's not like she was going to let it go to waste.

As she eat, vision obscured largely by the fog, the other tournament contestants started to drop. It was slow at first, but before Kat was a third of the way done everyone had fallen asleep on the table. The only reasons Kat missed it was the building mist obscuring her sight. The barrier also prevented anyone sound from getting inside. noVelnExt.com

So it wasn't until the barrier came down and the mist rushed out, falling to the floor that Kat realised what was happening. She stared out at the sea of unconscious bodies. Kat was about to react when a plate slammed into the back of her head, making a dull ringing sound like the striking of a gong. Kat turned around and raised a confused eyebrow at the Thyme waitress who'd hit her that looked just as shocked that hadn't worked. Another nearby Thyme slammed a second plate into her head, forcing it forward but not really dealing any damage. "What the heck was that for?" asked Kat annoyed, not realising that everyone, including her had been eating food laced with a powerful sleeping agent. Her regeneration was more than good enough to fight it off though. Well, the parts of it that wasn't simply burned away in her stomach.

Chapter 695: That's Right I do know Maid-Fu

Another strike came for Kat's head, but she was expecting this, raising an arm to intercept Kat took the strike with her forearm as she was standing up. The Thyme that had been repeatedly hitting her took a step back before settling into a fighting stance and making a 'come at me' gesture. Kat wasn't so easily baited, and instead took in the scene around her. There was a good number of servant Thyms all looking at her battle but they weren't doing anything else other than watching for the moment.

Kat stared back at the maid that had been trying to smack her over the head and got into her own combat stance, tail flicking around behind her, just as ready to strike as any of her arms. Kat also summoned her fans to her hands and got ready for the fight. After seeing Kat just get ready instead of rushing her the buttle dashed forward trying to interrupt Kat's, of course, her weapons could just be summoned to her hands so the chance to 'interrupt' a potential weapon draw was completely lost.

The maid kept the plate in front like a shield to try and catch the majority of Kat's attacks. Kat however, was more than willing to turn to tried and true methods with so many unconscious people around her. Kat didn't make a single attack on the maid as they approached. Closer and closer until they were within Kat's guard. The maid looked shocked, like they didn't actually think they'd get so far.

Improvising the best they could, the maid raised the plate up to slam into Kat's chin. A slight tilting of the head so that the plate only clipped her face rather than slamming into her jaw reduced the effectiveness majorly and opened the maid up for retaliation. With the maid in so close Kat wrapped the maid up in her arms, pulling them in close and locking them in place. The maid struggled but this kind of strength wasn't limited by the bracelet at all. Kat's vice like grip held onto the struggling maid easily.

Kat was thinking about her options when she felt another Thyme approaching her from behind. She let her tail lash out instinctively but based on the ringing sound it was caught on a plate. Still, Kat felt the Thyme get shoved backwards and heard a small thump afterwards. *Hopefully that knocked them out or something. I mean, it's probably just them hitting the floor but I can dream.* Kat looked over at the other Thymes but not a single other one had moved so she focused once again on the Thyme maid in her arms.

Kat bit her lip. *Chocking them out seems like the best idea but I don't know if I want to risk letting go of them for that long. Currently I'm pinning their arms and legs with how I've positioned myself... but if I start going for the throat, literally, I'm not sure I can keep them contained.* That was when the maid decided trying to bit Kat was a good idea. They clamped down on her chest and Kat winced, surprised by the lack of pain. "Ok, first off, rude and indecent. Second off, that doesn't even hurt that much," said Kat somewhat hoping to discourage further attempts of the same. It didn't hurt sure but it was awkward.

noVelηExt.coM

The maid looked up at Kat, staring for a few seconds as if trying to determine the validity of the statement. Of course the fact Kat could say it at all meant it was true... but how true was it and for how long. In the end, it turned out the maid wasn't actually looking for anything in Kat's eyes except perhaps a way to distract her. This was proven to be the case when Kat felt another plate slam into her head and because of the awkward angle her feet had been at to keep the maid locked in place Kat stumbled slightly releasing her grip on the maid allowing for them to slip out of her arms.

.....

Kat grit her teeth and dashed forward making use of her supernatural balance with a bit of help from her tail to recover much faster than the maid could managed. Before the maid could properly right themselves and face her Kat used all of her strength to backhand the maid into the wall hoping either the flat of her fan would be enough to do some damage or the impact with the wall would break a few bones... if dryads even had bones.

The maid flew into and then through the wall, plasterboard following in the Thyme's wake. Seeing that they were out of the fight, at least for now, Kat turned around to face the Thyme that had hit her before. This one was a butler but with a feminine figure and short bob hair. Kat didn't really find that to be an issue and tried for a second backhand. This Thyme managed to bring the plate up in time and dig into the ground, taking the impact and only being shoved to the side slightly. What Kat wasn't expecting was the form of the smallest Thyme dashing out from behind the butler and jamming a knife into her leg.

Kat bit back a curse kicking at the small Thyme as they dashed under the table. Kat grimaced as the weight from the kick settled onto her injured leg. She could feel the muscles moving around the knife, digging into it slightly. It wasn't a serious wound but it was a rather painful and certainly uncomfortable one. Kat lashed out with her tail, forcing the butler Thyme to block as she bent down and wrenched the knife from her leg, dropping her fan in the process. Ignoring the teeth on it that dealt her a bit more damage as it came out Kat stumbled backwards as she felt the wound heal.

The small Thyme had been expecting this and pushed a chair into her path, causing Kat to almost stumble but her tail curved down, wrapping itself around the chair leg and using that as leverage to push

her back to a standing position, if a slightly awkward one. Kat kicked the chair away, hoping to get the small Thyme with the act, but instead of a any sound she might have wanted to hear, she heard the clacking of two wooden chairs hitting each other, reminder Kat that other people were in the room, even if they were unconscious.

Shit, I have to be more careful. I don't want to injure anyone, especially not while the healers are asleep. Kat moved off to the side, making space between her and the table, hoping to move the combat away from the downed individuals. She didn't even notice the fact that behind her, the serving Thymes had picked up the second table's team members and were leaving through the back doors. With the blood pumping in her ears and the narrow focus she didn't hear them moving and they were careful to shut the doors without making any real noise.

Kat kept her eyes on the butler Thyme but her focus on the table. Now that she was further away from the table the smallest Thyme couldn't use it for cover without exposing themselves somewhat, but they were still what Kat considered the biggest threat at the moment. They were the only one to get a good strike on Kat and the chair idea would have worked had she not had her trusty tail.

Kat summoned her dropped fan back to her hand while she stared at the butler Thyme. Neither willing to make the first move, Kat because she didn't want to miss another Thyme and the butler Thyme because the stalemate was perfectly acceptable for the moment. Until the other two teams had been removed from the area they was happy to keep Kat's attention solely on them. Seconds past without a movement before Kat decided to disrupt things.

Kat threw the fan in her right hand at the Thyme as fast as possible towards the butler's head, as the plate moved to block it and cover the butler's vision Kat dashed forward bringing her leg around and landing a solid kick to their side hoping to hit a second Thyme through the wall. If only Kat could be so lucky. Kat kept an eye on the Thyme as they flew, cracking the wall... and the support beam behind it. Kat heard the whole room starting to creak and grown causing her to freeze up. Of course there is no place for that on the battlefield, and Kat's surprise gave the perfect opportunity for the smallest Thyme to throw a steel rope lasso around Kat's body pulling it tight around Kat's neck. Kat coughed as the metal dug into her throat, making it hard to breath. So Kat stopped breathing for the moment, and tried to think. *How can I get out of this one?*

Chapter 696 Wrapped Up and Ready to Go

Kat clenched her teeth as she dropped the fans in her arms, wrapping the newly freed appendages around the cable Kat yanked the end as hard as she could hoping to catch the smallest Thyme off guard. Sadly for Kat they simply let go of the cable letting it fall behind Kat after she was finished with it. Kat kept her eye on the nearby area, making sure nobody was approaching her as she tried to undo the cable restricting her breathing.

The cable itself was already digging deeply into her flesh and Kat couldn't find a spot to slide her fingers between the metal and her neck without simply ripping into it. While that was technically an option, Kat didn't want to risk the chance that they'd tighten the noose further causing all sorts of issues with her regeneration. Kat tried simply sliding it back but felt the cable catching. Running her fingers around the effected area revealed slightly staggered fraying that prevented her from just pulling the cable off that way.

Kat growled and tried to push the hole open wider by feeding it more rope but the metal was a tough one and she didn't really have the space to use her full strength on the small circle, especially with no room to really manoeuvre. The lack of air wasn't really getting to her yet but Kat wasn't sure how she was going to get this thing off.

Hmm... a tough choice I have here. I might have to try and take out the Thymes first. If I can get the space I might be able to pry up or push down those loose threads. I can't believe I didn't notice that shit when the lasso was thrown at me.

Kat dashed forward, cutting her thoughts short when she heard something moving nearby. Taking no chances Kat just charged at the Thyme she could see. A good thing too, as another lasso had been thrown towards her previous location. Growling and the indignity felt rather worthwhile even as it reduced her available oxygen, Kat kept up her charge kicking the Thyme that appeared in the previous one's place. This was her third Thyme trying to remove a Thyme from the room. She was just about to finish her kick when she remembered the last time she'd nearly destroyed the support.

Quickly changing her plan Kat bent her leg at the knee and shifted slightly to kick them forward into the back wall instead of the side. The Thyme made use of this change and managed to get a plate in front of Kat's foot. What Kat wasn't prepared for was that as her leg made contact with the plate, instead of holding up as the others did it bent around her foot, trapping it slightly, just long enough for another bundle of that damned cabling to get wrapped around her foot. Kat yanked her leg backwards causing the Thyme to stumble but some damage was already done. Her foot was now layered in metal and wrapped up slightly, unbalancing her.

Sadly for Kat, it seemed the other Thymes, now with their charges outside, were prepared to gang up on her. Kat's tail reacted to an attack behind her trying to slap the Thyme away... only to get captured by another lasso behind. Kat looked over her shoulder just as three more sets of cables were thrown towards her. Kat tried to dash out of the way but her metal covered foot couldn't find proper purchase on the ground, slipping and causing her to stumble. One lasso managed to wrap itself around her windmilling arm while the other wrapped itself around her horns, jerking her head to the side.

.....

Time wasn't passing all that quickly but she was burning energy and oxygen. The tight grip on her neck and lack of breathing was starting to catch up to her. Thoughts were growing less distinct and the desire to burn everything with her demonic fire was bubbling up within her breast. What stayed Kat's hand was more the fact that her team members were nearby and the room was made of flammable material than Thyme's request not to use it at this point. Though Kat did spend a split-second wondering if that mattered considering her fire burned cold.

Kat strained against the bindings trying to thrash around but the strength of multiple Thymes seemed to be enough. How much of that was the additional bodies, the lack of oxygen, the limiter bracelet, or just plain escalation on Thyme's behalf, Kat didn't know as soon more lassos managed to make their way over Kat. Binding her arms to her sides properly before a veritable wave of cabling started to cover her from toe to head, completely eliminating her movement. The wrapping continued until it covered her completely, so completely she couldn't move at all nor could she see outside. Kat let out an annoyed hiss as she was picked up and felt a slight tug on the lasso that was around her neck.

Kat strained to fight back, doing anything she could, even biting into the cables that ended up in her mouth. Alas, her jaw strength was not sufficient for the task. Kat couldn't tell where she was being carried as her thoughts got fuzzier and fuzzier. Kat knew she could hold on to herself for a bit longer, and if she started to really circulate her demonic energy around her lungs, perhaps her issues could be staved off for longer. Alas, Kat wasn't really in the right mind to think about it at all... and perhaps some of the drugs lingered, for she decided it was a good idea to sleep...

Kat awoke with a start trying to move and finding that she was still the only wire that had been removed was the one around her neck. Kat breathed in deeply, basking in the glorious oxygen. She knew, intellectually it must have been removed some time ago, but that was immaterial. She was awake now and the oxygen was glorious.

Now the only question remains. Where am I and can I escape somehow? Kat could tell she'd be bound into a sitting position, her tail tied to the back of what felt like a basic wooden chair. Her legs had been tied around the two front legs and her arms were tied together behind her back. Her wings had been compressed down at uncomfortable angles because her torso was tied tightly to the chair back and the cabling left no proper allowances for her wings. Kat tried to shift her hands at all but found that they were bound extra tightly with a few extra wires both to each other, the chair back, and perhaps even the back legs. Her hands weren't going anywhere.

That was when Kat heard a groan coming from behind her, "Did anyone get the name of the manticores that hit me? I think I need to return the favour..." grumbled a voice she recognised as Blue's.

Kat shifted her mouth the best she could, feeling the skin pinch as the cables dug in trying to stay in place. Luckily there was enough slack to move her jaw but Kat knew it'd take a good deal of strength and some careful articulation to not sound funny. "The food was poisoned," adds Kat 'helpfully'

"Ugh, dumb mistake. I didn't realise we were actually still IN a round. I thought Thyme really had given us a break," grumbled Blue.

"Yeah sorry, I maybe should have mentioned that," said Kat awkwardly, both not quite wanting to admit she'd sort of known something was going to happen and because it was physically uncomfortable to speak with all the cables digging into her face.

"How did you figure it out?" asked Blue between grunts. Kat was guessing, based on the shifting and huffing coming from behind her Blue was similarly, if less extensively bound behind her.

"Lily, my... girlfriend? Familiar? Look we have a magical bond and I didn't want to bring her into the tournament, let alone while she was sleeping so I asked Thyme to look after her. The fact that Lily wasn't returned to me while I ate..." Kat trails off as a way to avoid further speaking. **ηOveLNext.com**

"Yeah, that's annoying. Not that I blame you, the food was good and the room was distracting I completely let me guard down. Though... how do you know it everything was drugged?" asked Blue while continuing her attempt at escape.

"It didn't work on me, either because of my demonic physique being different enough to the other races of this world, or perhaps my regeneration as able to negate the effects? I've not really been poisoned

yet actually. Experienced a lot of pain, but not all that much poison. Perhaps something to look into,” said Kat.

“Hmm...” mumbles Blue, “Well, what is the most painful thing you’ve regenerated from?”

Kat thinks back and shivers at one of her earlier demonic memories, “Well, there are some things that are more immediately painful... but falling face first onto gravel and having it cut into me as I rolled and then experiencing my body healing as it slowly pushed little pieces of gravel out of my body... yeah that’s got to be the worst one. Just basic pain is so much easier to ignore,”

“Regen seems a lot less cool now,” said Blue with a grimace. Kat disagreed, it was still very cool.

Chapter 697 On the Ropes

“What do you think your chances of getting out are? I’m bound up so tightly with metal cables that I don’t think I can free myself without help. I’m not even sure I can free myself WITH help. I’ve only got a few somewhat... iffy ideas that might or might not be possible,” said Kat after a few seconds of silence from Blue.

Blue let out a sigh, “I’m bound by what looks like normal rope. It can’t be that because while my strength is fairly low, I could slip out of a normal bit of rope. It seems to want to stick to my hands. I might have to use magic to get out... but I don’t really have the control or the spells to do that behind my back. I might not be in a much better situations then you. I can see that I’m a lot less tightly bound.

“I’ve got... I think one rope wrapped a few times in a few different ways around my hands, keeping them together and unable to move properly. Both legs tied using one rope to the chair but I think I could squeeze out of that pretty easily, and then the one around my chest that keeps me pinned to the chair. I can even look over at you, sort of. We’re tied back to back and you have a LOT of metal around you,” explained Blue, “What did you do, piss Thyme off or something?”

Kat shrugged the best she could manage, “I don’t know. Well, I imagine it wasn’t any true personal grudge. Perhaps this is a handicap for the others? I know I’m strong enough even with the stupid bracelet to rip myself out of basic rope without any troubles. I wonder how the scenario is set up though... am I actually like this because it’d be too easy otherwise, or is this the result of not getting taken out by the sleeping drugs?”

“We can think about that later. Do you have any possible way of getting us out of here? Anything to cut the ropes around me?” asked Blue.

Kat thought for a moment and came up with a few easy answers, “A couple actually. The first thing I could do is keep my fingers straight. My hands can’t move much but my nails are still open to the air. They are sharp and strong enough to cut rope. Alternatively, I think I could summon my fans back to me. The problem is I have no way to hold them, they’ll just fall to the ground. If you can pick them up somehow the fan edge is sharp, easily sharp enough for some rope, and maybe even this metal... though I’m not sure about the second one,”

Blue thought on this, attempting to move the chair she was on and found it wasn’t stuck down or overly heavy after a few moments. Gritting her teeth Blue started to tug on her feet, shifting them from being pinned at the front of the chair the middle. The way they had been wrapped was a with a single rope

criss-crossing from side to side. This meant even though it was tight against her, the robes Blue wore provided enough protection and slippage to get away from it. Once her legs were in the larger space provided Blue got to work pushing her boots off. It was a little difficult because of the slack already in the rope, but with a bit of effort she managed it.

.....

Feet free from their shoes, it was a simple matter to extract them from the rope completely causing it to go slack. Blue tried to stand up with the chair still attached to her and found it WAS possible but very awkward. Blue was mostly just glad that the two chairs belonging to Kat and Blue hadn't both been tied together. "Ok, I'm able to move. I... I don't think I could really get a good angle on holding anything either so... I guess I'll use your nails? Is that... that fine?" asked Blue hesitantly. *noVeLnext.cOM*

"Go for it," said Kat, "My finger will almost certainly bend before my nails will break. Honestly that'll be the hardest part. Hmm... is there anything you could do to keep it relatively straight? I'm strong but even then there's only so much of that strength I can use in just a finger."

"What about your wrist? From where I'm... awkwardly standing, it seems like you could probably force your fingers together and use them that way," explained Blue.

"Hmm..." mumbled Kat. *The cable makes it a little hard to do properly... but I suppose keeping my whole hand straight and trying to make it more about the wrist... I might be able to managed it.* "Might be doable. I guess... set up whatever you want to free and try the best. I can't really move my hands much from where they are so... I'll leave it to you?"

Blue nodded, though Kat couldn't see that and started to get into position. It was just a closer version of they the pair were already assembled. Blue took care to line up the middle section of her hands where the rope was with Kat's outstretched fingers as best she could. Once in place, Blue started using that edge to saw at the rope. Minutes passed as the pair continued their work. For Blue it was mostly in the elbows, getting what movement she could out of them rather than trying anything with her feet. For Kat, it was a constant strain on her wrist and finger joints. She suspected that had she not had regeneration the process would have caused at least a sprain.

When the first snap of rope was heard Kat's heart soared, only to be crushed by Blue's next word, "One down, at least two more to go,".

Kat didn't want to complain though, so she started to strike up conversation, "So... Blue... um... anything interesting you want to chat about?" asked Kat

"Anything interesting says the demon. From my perspective everything about YOU is potentially interesting. I just live a relatively normal life... but we got time. This isn't exactly riveting work and I think I've got the motions down. So... I guess I'll trade you question for question. You can start," offered Blue.

"Hmm... why did you decide to become an adventurer?" asked Kat.

"Oh... lots of reasons," said Blue with a sigh. "I'm the second daughter of a noble Fae house. Normally this means I'd get nothing, but my family takes a different approach. We have a competency test instead. After two hundred years, or when the current head of the family retires due to health issues, a series of tests will be set up. Now not all of these will be combat related, in fact most aren't..

“But my family has never once had a head of house that failed to win the combat portion. This is in large part due to the fact that the other tests happen after the combat section. If you’re knocked unconscious, or in a few cases, killed, then it doesn’t matter how smart you are, you can’t take the test. There was a rather famous example of a third son in my family that was considered an unrivalled genius. They could answer any question presented to them and they were ready for the tests... except they hadn’t done any combat training. Their elder sister knock him out in one blow. He was asleep for four days and failed to show up to the next test,

“So... that’s probably the biggest reason. I have others but... I feel like that’s enough from me for now. I want to know what it’s like being a demon? Hmm... perhaps that’s a bit broad. What do you normally DO as a demon? Is it all contracts and plots?”

“Not really,” said Kat, “Some contracts are longer than others and depending on the timings you might not get long to rest... but you can honestly look at it like an adventurer. Well, I’d guess anyway. I’ve never been a real adventurer. You get called up by the contract holder, asked to do a thing, you either accept or decline and then get to it. The main difference is I travel between worlds to do it instead of regions,”

“I’m not really sure what I was expecting but that makes a shocking amount of sense now that you’ve pointed that out. I guess demons are just regular people too,” mumbled Blue.

“Yeah pretty much. The biggest difference might be our power level. It can climb quite high, but I believe everyone has the chance to get there as well. Hmm... though we don’t really have to work for it. Skill of course comes with practice but I can gain a good jump in power just by existing,” explained Kat.

“That feels a lot like cheating,” complained Blue.

“It is what it is,” said Kat not quite wanting to reveal she hadn’t always been a demon and could empathise properly.

Chapter 698 A Saw Spot

Kat pondered her next question as she heard another rope snap. Blue grinned at the progress and tried to flex her hands, finding she had a bit of extra movement now, “I might be able to swap over to your fans soon. That could speed things up... just one or two more I think,” explained Blue with a smile Kat could hear.

“That’s good,” said Kat slowly, still pondering her question, “Hmm... do you know Green at all, as in outside of the tournament at the moment obviously you’ve seen her now,”

“Eeeh... know is a bit of stretch but I suppose the answer is yes,” said Blue as she adjusted the chairs position slightly, finding she was reaching a bit to keep sawing away at the ropes after the most recent one gave way, “we’re both nobles, and of the same age so for the really big formal functions she was there as well but we’re in different political factions and haven’t really talked much. Green also has a bad habit of finding someone willing to put up with her sleeping on them and just getting dragged around quite literally.

“So I suppose she’s somewhat infamous in that regard, and of the many noble heirs that I’m not friends with I know her the best. Which is somewhat odd now that I think about it aloud. Still, I’ve never really

talked to her so I don't know much," Blue trailed off somewhat at the end, as she started to consider how poor of her it was to not even know the details of fellow Fae nobles. Perhaps some studying was in order once she got home.

"What political factions are there, could you expand more on that?" asked Kat with significant curiosity.

"Kat, I do believe it is my turn to ask a question?" said Blue, and Kat felt herself blush slightly.

"Woops, sorry. Please go ahead I was just interested," explained Kat.

.....

"It's fine," said Blue, "I understand the feeling" she didn't really but unlike Kat was able to lie about that fact, "so it's no trouble really. I suppose seeing as you want to know about nobles... I'll ask are you anyone special in the demon hierarchy?"

Kat was about to answer 'no' but stopped to really consider that answer. While her parents were just random humans and she wasn't high up in the hierarchy or something, her abilities were somewhat weird and the Lust faction leader spent a good deal of time convincing Kat their faction was the right one for her. "Probably not," was Kat's answer in the end.

"Probably not? How can you only probably not be important or a noble? Surely you'd know either way?" asked Blue with no shortage of confusion.

"Well... maybe it's simple for you but there isn't really a noble class when it comes to demons. Everyone gets their position more like a job interview though I'll admit the truly strong demons seemed to get assigned to important places like the Faction leader. There are a few reasons I don't really know.

"The first is that while I'm almost certain my parents were normal, I'm an orphan. I do know how my parents died and that they weren't really anything overly special," *certainly not in supernatural terms. Just plain old humans,* "but I don't know anything about my extended family perhaps a few generations back I AM important somehow," *because really with how long demons live I wouldn't be surprised if my many greats grandparents still exist but we'll see...* "and demons do live for a while so that could come up. There's also the fact I Ranked up rather quickly and to top it off... I seem to be getting rare abilities quite frequently. Most demons would have one or two of mine at most when they are stronger, I have 2 rare abilities and a rare variant on a common ability which isn't normal."

"I see," said Blue just as the next rope snapped. Blue flexed her fingers, now completely free. Her wrist also had a good deal of movement now. Blue started twisting her hands around, trying to get her right palm facing the back of her left hand. Gritting her teeth and ignoring the slight rope burn Blue managed to wrench her hand around. "Can you summon your fan into my hand?"

"Maybe?" Kat pulled on her fans letting them appear near where she thought Blue's hands were. Which was in fact... not all that close at all and the fan went clattering to the ground. "That'd be a no then I suppose," Kat sighed, she'd tried picturing the fan appearing just above Blue's hand when she summoned that fan, but considering she heard it clatter to the ground it didn't work at all. "So, can you tell me about the factions you guys have?"

Blue glared at the fan on the floor and debated just how hard it would be to grab. Blue instantly decided reaching down for it was off the table... but perhaps with her feet? Blue got to work grasping the fan

between her feet and pulling it up. Shifting herself Blue managed to get the fan onto the chair... which really wasn't anywhere near her hands. Blue frowned at the fan sitting there innocently. "So we have two big ones I suppose. They have proper names, but the slang term for them is the Joiner faction and the Split faction.

"There are arguments for both, or so I've been told. Truthfully, I don't really understand either side all that much. The Joiner faction argue for more control stemming from the crown. Getting regions to work together as big super regions and solidifying subsidised trade routes to encourage growth. Allegedly it'll make everyone more money in the long term, with some losses in the short term.

"The Split party though, argue for more power to the towns and cities they rule over. It's all about elevating mayors to the equivalent of first-generation nobility, barons and the like. They argue that less oversight, and the right people in the right places, would drastically increase the productivity of the region, once again, making more money for everyone in the long term, with some short term losses.

"Which... I guess they can both be right, but one of them has to be MORE correct. The big sticking points with the Joiner factions is that there isn't a great consensus on HOW to join things together. They say nothing will really change nobility wise, but that's not true. Somebody will have to become somebody else's puppet or just stop being relevant losing a lot of their holdings. They do however, get a lot of support from the Barons because well... it's really not that different for them, and most of them see the Split party as taking away their power instead of spreading it out more.

"The problem with the Split party is that while it sounds good on paper, most villages don't have a competent mayor, or even a mayor at all. How could they start giving more responsibility to people who can't bear the weight or simply don't exist? The argument is that they'd train people for the position... but of course where do they get the people with the skills for it? And how many? Does every village with just ten families need a mayor? Historically outside mayors coming in and replacing village officials that sort of get elected turns out quite bad,"

Blue shrugged as she once again put the fan between her feet. Now she was trying to send the fan underneath the chair with her feet and grab it on the other side with her hands... but she wasn't quite able to reach. "There are other policies they argue over of course, but that's the main gist of things. My family are part of the Joiner faction, but not one of the core supporters. We're mostly there to have a voting block around us, not because we agree. Or so I've been told by my parents."

Blue grit her teeth and prayed her next action would work. Letting her feet fall a bit Blue steady herself for a few seconds before launching the fan up towards her hands. Blue felt the fan hit the bottom side of her hand before it clattered back to the floor. She just sat there with a pinched expression on her face while Kat said nothing, despite being knowing quite clearly about the failure. Blue just glared as best she could in the fan's general direction behind her before shuffling the chair back to Kat's finger and once again beginning to saw at the ropes. "So tell me about your abilities I guess. Wait... no um... hmm... I'd like you to share, but this is a question I'll let you skip. I don't want you feeling like I've forced you to reveal what you can do so I get a leg up in the Tournament in future rounds. I genuinely am interested. I can't say I won't use this information against you either... but I'd like to know if you'll tell me."

Kat had no issue at all sharing the specifics of her abilities and said as much before going on to explain them all in detail, "and that about sums up everything I think,"

Blue smiled as another section of rope snapped, just two more and she could finally get back the full movement of her hands. Her arms were still trapped against her side, but she was sure with her hands free she could slip out of that or cut them. "That's actually really interesting now you've gone over your skills. I still don't have a good idea of how rare they all are but True Sight seems really useful. How does it work though? If it works on illusions as well as like... light projections how does it work?"

Kat opened her mouth to respond before closing it sharply. *How... how does that work? I... I have no idea at all how. It must have some sort of intention component surely.* "I have no idea now you bring it up. Like... like those displays from the first round of the tournament. I was able to watch them perfectly fine without my eyes interfering. Hmm... weird..."

Blue shrugged, then, realising Kat could see her replied with, "Yeah but some of those things just are that way. Why, I bet you'll be able to see lies or something ridiculous as you get more powerful. It just seems like the natural progression for that ability considering how strong it is already," **NovElnext.cOM**

"I dunno," said Kat with some hesitation, "while that sounds cool, and follows a sort of logical progression is seeing lies and seeing through illusions really so similar?"

Blue sighed, "Yes and no. I mean, no obviously they aren't... but at the same time when you get to the real powerful stuff and start playing with concepts things get a bit weird. I mean, that's what I've heard anyway. The only one I know who might deal with concepts is Thyme and despite how strong they are... Thyme is a relatively unknown figure to us mere mortals. Well, not quite sure you count in that category,"

Kat smiled at joke, quite glad the mood was being lightened. She may still be in chains but it wasn't so bad. She had good conversation ready at hand and didn't need to be anywhere. There might be a loss of points but screw that she was bound in metal restraints. They could wait a bit if necessary. "Does that count as my question by the way?"

.....

Blue paused in the sawing letting the silence sit for a couple of seconds before speaking. "Huh... I mean... no, you know what, you gave me a LOT of information about your abilities that easily could have been a question each. I'll say that it doesn't count as your question, go ahead."

"Thanks Blue. Hmm... then I guess this one is for my girlfriend not for me. What's it like when you start to learn magic? Like... how do you go about it and how difficult is it?" asked Kat.

"Ooh, that's an interesting question. You know... I don't think I've ever been asked that. Most people either know, being mages themselves or attempted mages, or just don't care at all. Ok... um... hmm... so there's a couple things that make this a more complicated question than it seems. The first is that you can't, or at least shouldn't try and learn magic too young. It's very dangerous.

"The reason for this is that while a teen running out of mana completely is a bad thing, resulting in a week or so of bed rest, a young child running out of magic is usually a death sentence. Now, this isn't as scary as it seems because you really have to TRY to use magic outside of your body. It's not something

that can be accidentally done because of how hard it is. So, when someone says they started learning magic as a child, they aren't being truthful, or most of them aren't.

"What you start on is learning the sigils and what they all do. That's actually the other big issue is that learning your affinity can be annoying if it isn't any of the common ones. The main way of learning is to hand the person in question an elementally attuned item of some kind. Maybe an old sword or a staff or whatever and see if they can use their mana to charge it at all. Now, you can learn to charge and make use of other elemental enchantments later in life but that's another big time commitment.

"Once you know what your element is, you get started on manifesting your first ring. It's... it's exceptionally hard. I didn't try as hard as I should have and it took me... oh it was a good six months of effort I believe before I got my mana into a ring. How do I explain it... hmm... so mana. You first have to find it within yourself, which isn't too hard. A week of meditation and even an idiot can do that.

"The issue is pushing it out of your hands or wherever you want. Just pushing mana up against your hand and hoping for the best won't work... what... what you have to do is get your mana moving. Run it around your body, faster and faster, increasing the speed over and over until it manages to burst out of your body and form your first ring. That's actually one of the big limiters on ring magic. Sure you need more magic, but all the magic in the world won't save you if you can't get your magic up to speed.

"The complex part about it, is that as you start getting faster... your body starts to get a bit pickier in regards to how the mana travels. You need to start directing it around corners, perhaps into odd shapes, bend and break it into the right form to give you proper power. I'm not at that stage though, I'm still speeding my mana up at basic levels," explained Blue as the last rope snapped.

Hmm... that certainly sounds familiar. Well in some ways at least. I wonder if I'll need to start working how best to circulate my demonic energy. The only issue is that the speed doesn't seem to matter when it comes to generating my flames. The flames just want more more more.

While Kat was pondering over that Blue was shifting, trying to force her hands around to the front and not having the best luck if truth be told. That was mostly because she was being impatient and trying to do both at the same time. About a minute of these useless attempts later and Blue calmed down enough to realise the issue. Blushing she quickly thought of a question to distract Kat from her mistake. "You mentioned you had a girlfriend before. What made you fall for her? Was it the looks?"

Kat couldn't help but laugh at the question, and Blue gave Kat a weird look she could practically feel. Perhaps she could? Kat shook the feeling off, and answered, "Sorry, I mean... it's not really funny I guess... or maybe it is? Hmm... well to start with I'm asexual-"

"Wait how can you have a girlfriend if you're asexual?" asked Blue cutting Kat's explanation off.

Kat huffed, "I was getting to that Blue," Blue looked suitably abashed at the interruption but Kat couldn't see that, "now, as I was saying, I'm asexual but Lily is my best friend, or was? I don't know how you classify things now I'm dating her. Anyway, she was my best and only friend for a long time. Somewhere along the line, and I'm not sure when exactly it happened, she became the most important person in my life by far.

"Looking back... I'm not really sure when she got so far ahead of basically everyone else. Gramps is still up there, and Sylvie isn't as far behind as I'm making out I love my little sister, adopted, to bits. Still, it's

not the same and Lily carved her own place in my heart. More recently... I think... I think some other people started to realise that I didn't LIKE her, I LOVED her despite the lack of sexual attraction.

"So I was sort of already half aware of these things and then all of a sudden Lily... well I don't quite want to get into the details but she confessed, and I confessed and admitting to not seeing her sexually at all, but also made it very clear that I really wanted to date her. I think... and maybe this sounds bad... but the idea of her ending up with someone else was one I couldn't stomach. Clearly jealousy, and something I'm not afraid to admit that. Still, things have been good so far. Lily seems to be of a similar sexually charged mind. She's a bit adorable though. Hardly willing to admit to her fantasies. Despite dating now, I'm more comfortable talking about sex or kissing. Perhaps it's because they don't have the same weight to me?

"As to what made me fall for her... Hmm... I suppose I can think of a few things in retrospect.

Chapter 700 A Green Lookin Blue

"It all started when I decided I wanted to protect her. She was so timid and alone. Growing up in the orphanage made it easy to recognise and I'd helped a lot of kids come into their own, so I saw her as another person in need of a lot of help. I know now why she looked so... fragile... back then. I won't speak too much on it but it was pretty bad. For her, it was world shattering. Nothing of her old life could help her except for a bit of an escape into her research of inane topics."

Kat paused and was about to fashion her face into the clearest expression of love she could before realising she'd somehow forgotten she was bound head to toe in metal with her face hidden. *Blue isn't even looking in my direction for crying out loud.* Kat shook her head to dismiss those thoughts, instead trying to inject the emotions into her voice. "I say inane with as much love as possible. It's one of the things I would have gotten to later, but I love how she can put her all into anything. Research anything. Let her mind be caught by anything. The passion she can just put into anything at the drop of a hat... it's so inspiring and lovely..."

"Anyway, I doubt you want to hear me gush too much... then again you did ask..." Kat had already forgotten Blue asked because she was struggling with getting both hands to the front at once. She'd stopped that and was making progress and even got both arms to the front. Now she just had to wiggle them out of the ropes. Blue wanted to drag them both up but her sleeves were staying caught even after the hands moved up a bit and it was causing new issues. Not that Kat was noticing at all, "back to where I was."

"I felt this desire to protect her, and when she finally let her in I realised she wasn't just someone who needed confidence. She needed someone who would be by her side forever. Now, I didn't think of that in a romantic way, but I did want to be her friend forever. I wanted to stand by her all through school and beyond. I also wanted a friend. One that would stick by me as well. The way Lily looked at me the first time I saved her from her bullies..."

"Well for a moment it looked like I was the only person in the world. I know now she was already crushing on me HARD but it still really touched me at the time. We didn't start hanging out straight away after that, there was a bit of wheedling but once we became friends, we were inseparable. She's also very huggable and that was before the cat form."

"Hmm... so that's how we started and I talked about her research... I also really admire her intelligence. She doesn't just absorb information; she really does look at it all properly. She makes her own conclusions and sometimes figures out really unique things," Kat let out a sigh as Blue gave up on the sleeves and managed to get one of her hands out through the neck hole of her robes. "The final nail in the proverbial coffin..."

Kat thought back to the moment Lily found out Kat was a demon. Most of the panic was about magic being real, and what the wider implications were. There was no hatred or dislike towards Kat for being different. When they found out what kind of demon she was, Lily only pondered what that meant FOR KAT. Sure Lily wasn't the most unbiased individuals when it came to Kat, but that faith was something Kat adored. How she was going to explain that without mentioning she wasn't always a demon... was not something she knew how to do. "Well, I think I'll leave that last one out actually,"

.....

Blue nodded, "That's fine," she said bending over, arm pressed against her face, bending over awkwardly because she was still tied to the chair and forced to remain mostly sitting as she picked up the fan. Blue moved her arm awkwardly, extending the fan so the bladed edge was accessible and taking a poor swipe at the ropes. Luckily, the fans were sharp and the rope was fairly standard. "BECAUSE I'M FREE"

Blue hopped up kicking the chair away as she spun around, ignoring the awkward angle of her hand for a few moments just to dance around and appreciate not being bound by that awful rope anymore. She also realised once her family heard about this they were going to run her through some escape drills and sobered up rather quickly before fixing her outfit.

Blue gave a light cough and turned to Kat, finally seeing how tightly bound the demon was. "Hoo boy you really pissed someone off. I can't believe I was even internally complaining about my restraints. What the heck Kat?"

Kat gave a shrug which really just looked like slight shifting to Blue because of the layers of metal. "I... I don't really know how to get started on breaking you out of that... um... is it alright if I try your fans?" asked Blue awkwardly.

"Go for it," said Kat.

Blue hopped over, spreading the fan edge out completely and looked around for a good place to start. The hands perhaps. Blue paused and started to bite her lip. "Should I like... bring this down on a knot or something and hope to cut through? Should I try and saw a way through? That'll dull these pretty badly though..."

"Nah they'll be fixed when I resummon them," insisted Kat, "I'd go for a big strike first. I'm not worried about you hurting me too much. In fact, if you can't get through the metal... I have another idea."

Blue frowned but didn't let it bother her, even as she had a sneaking suspicion regarding what Kat's idea was likely to be. Blue slammed the fan down, her wrist and arms taking the brunt of the impact as they bounced back having barely made a score in the metal. "Shit," said Blue glaring at the small cut.

"Hmm, shame. Ok, do you have any other ideas?" *Or shall I tell you to cut off my hands so I can slide the stumps out and reattach them?* Asked Kat with a self deprecating grin.

"Hmm... maybe I could make some fast moving water to slice through it... but my control for something like that wouldn't be the best... and I dunno. This seems pretty sturdy."

"Ok, go with the water idea... but cut off my hands instead," said Kat.

"WHAT!" screamed Blue.

"No, you're right that's dumb. Do them one at a time so I can use the other one to help me a bit," corrected Kat.

"You're insane," said Blue, eyes wide and hands shaking.

"No, I'm Kat. I thought that was pretty clear," joked the demon in question.

"This isn't the time for jokes," snapped Blue, "I am not cutting off your hands."

"Well no, you're just cutting the ONE hand for starters. We can re-negotiate after that one is free," replied Kat. *NOVELNext.com*

"No Kat. Not hand. Not handS. Neither. I am not cutting into you," retorted Blue.

"Well not with that attitude clearly," said Kat. "Don't be such a downer. It's a very temporary injury and you wouldn't want me trapped here forever," Kat wiggled a bit causing the metal binding her to clink against each other a bit.

Blue felt the bile rising in her throat. "Oh lords forgive me for this..." Blue swallowed and started to manipulate her water, summoning a small amount with spell before claiming it and getting it to spin. She focused on increasing the speed. The amount of water was tiny, pitiful, barely enough for a hand. But it was enough and as much as Blue wanted to look away... she didn't want to risk failing and seeing the aftermath.

Kat felt the water cut into her, clenching her teeth and refusing to scream. It was painful sure, pretty high up there as well, but she was expecting it and Blue didn't deserve that. The squelching of water and flesh continued as Blue tried to hold in her most recent meal. It wouldn't taste as nice coming out as it did going in...

Yet when Kat's hand dropped off Blue couldn't help it she stumbled away, and vomited. Letting the refuse fall into a corner in the floor. On Kat's end, it was actually somewhat difficult. Her regeneration was already trying to fix things, even while she was being slice up and she had to forcefully suppress that for a bit.

With a yank Kat managed to slide her handless arm from the bindings. As soon as that happened her hand had enough and she could feel a pull from the object in question. Blue seeing the twitching hand, got a hold of herself long enough to pick up Kat's hand and return it. The flesh and bone knitted together perfectly and Kat summoned her fan. She brought all the power she could in her bound state down on her other hand. That made two free, and Blue was looking a lot more green.