

DEMONS 701

Chapter 701 Sharing Tales of Friendship

While Blue was trying to deal with Kat's seemingly casual self mutilation, Kat was able to work her arms around to the front and then start pushing the wires around her off carefully. Kat was trying to widen them as much as possible. Unlike the one around her neck, which had been removed, the cables didn't have any burs preventing her from carefully loosening them all around her. With hands free this was a simple, if time consuming task. Kat was making progress, and part of her wondered if focusing on one cable at a time would be better but this was working. "So can I ask you another question now?" asked Kat

Blue moaned as she leant heavily against the wall, "You know what Kat. I don't remember whose turn it is, but I feel like after that nonsense you just put me through I deserve the next question regardless,"

Kat did in fact know whose turn it was to ask a question. It was in fact her. The last question had been about Lily... but Kat also wasn't going to complain. She could see how cutting someone's hands off, even when asked, was a traumatic experience, so she answered with, "Sure."

Blue nodded against the wall, not quite willing to get up and not really having a question ready either. Blue did feel like she deserved some answers, but she wasn't sure about the questions. Part of her just wanted to ask 'what the fuck Kat' but Blue wasn't sure she wanted to know what the answer actually was or of this was a normal demon thing. Blue wasn't sure her mind could survive learning Kat's behaviour was considered normal or acceptable in any way.

Blue let the possibility of a question hang in the air. The only saw the slight grinding off metal on metal as Kat shifted in place slowly increasing the space she had to work with, making larger movements as time went on though they were still quite contained. Blue was still somewhat stumped for questions and decided to throw something basic out, "So what's your favourite food?"

Kat couldn't help but let out a snort at the question. After all the waiting she'd expected something a bit more spectacular. Still, she could answer that, "Probably that Soup of the Sun Thyme served me at dinner just before. Well, that and I'm partial to pears but that's not a great meal as it is. Nice to snack on and now I'm thinking of it... it's been a while since I have one. The Soup though is a special treat. I don't know what the ingredients are or how Thyme prepares it so I enjoy it while I can,"

Blue grimaced at the answer, "That flaming thing? I could feel myself sweating even after the barrier went up. I have no idea how you can even get near that dish let alone swallow it. Doesn't that like burn your insides?"

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Does this count as asking an extra question? Especially considering she got an extra question already. Still, whatever, "Fire resistance is very common amongst demons, though that's mostly because of their demonic flames," *which now I think about it... I neglected to mention my odd fire and frost resistance. It's weird I have both,* "so while I enjoy it, it's not really an odd thing amongst demons for me to be able to eat it,"

“Wait does that mean you were able to just walk through all the fire in the first challenge?” asked Blue with a bitter tone to her voice... though that might have just been the lingering taste souring her tongue still.

“Well, Blue, that’s three questions in a row now,” Blue let out a light cough at that, “but I suppose I can indulge. I will be asking my question next though,” Kat waited a moment and heard no argument, “but the answer is yes. The fire wasn’t even hot. I didn’t feel it at all.”

“I’m feeling somewhat underprepared for this tournament now,” said Blue.

“Well that’s something I can ask you about. What exactly do you want from the Tournament?” asked Kat now most of the way to freeing herself... for the most part. The wire around her head hadn’t really moved, or the ones on her legs but the stuff covering her chest and arms was certainly wide enough to move... but maybe not get around her horns just yet and Kat thought it better to be safe than sorry.

“Same as most people, I guess. I’m looking for a mentor at the end because of the family trials, the ones that got me into adventuring in the first place. I don’t know who exactly I’d want to ask... but I want someone to teach me a lot of things. Magic, estate management, maybe some martial combat or at least a good exercise routine. Nothing fancy,” explained Blue.

Kat nodded and managed to lift up the largest mass of cables that were all settled around her midsection. They got around her horns with room to spare and Kat let out a rather lewd moan of pleasure as she felt her wings being released. She hadn’t realised quite how much their improper confinement had bothered her. Now that they were free to move again Kat felt so much better. Blue was polite enough not to comment.

“So you’ve mentioned your girlfriend already. Do you have any other friends? You seemed to imply the answer to that WAS none but might be at least one more now?” asked Blue tentatively. She certainly didn’t want to know the answer if Kat actually had no more friends.

“I do actually. Well, I have a friend and a good acquaintance, I guess. Or well, a friend, her family, and an acquaintance. Depending on definitions Kamiko, that’s her name, is probably my best friend now I’m dating Lily. She shares both a lot of traits and almost none with Lily. Quite lonely, somewhat shy, but also... stronger than I think Lily was when I met her.

“Kamiko seemed to always be looking for a friend and she had a big family to support her. She’s a surprisingly bubbly girl now that I know her a bit better and just spending a week in her company, she was ready to declare me her best friend even if I couldn’t reciprocate that at the time, I hadn’t been asked out yet.

“Hmm... she’s the second youngest in a family of 6 plus parents. Quite good at fighting with a naginata, and she has adorable little buns that hide her horns for the most part and bright bubble gum pink hair,” Blue smiled at the picture. Kamiko did sound like a sweet girl.

Kat continued on, “On the other hand, while Kamiko and her family are genetically Succubi, it doesn’t seem that way based on how they act all that often. Just the number of kids really. Then there is Sue. Sue is every stereotype, good and bad, you might think of for a Succubus. She’s got boobs and ass for days, wears clothing that might as well be considered lingerie, and spent the whole time teasing Kamiko and I. She can back it up as well, happily talking about people she’s slept with. Her skin is dark purple

and her hair is silver. Spent a day cleaning out a mine with her and Kamiko was so excited to have another friend,”

Blue smiled, “Seems nice. It can be tough making friends sometimes,”

Kat thought about taking the obvious question and decided to go with it, somewhat. “Oh yeah? How did you meet your team members?” asked Kat as she started working on pulling the cabling off from around her head. It was pretty easy and it came off with a good tug.

Blue licked her lips reflexively before grimacing and summoning a bit off water to wash her mouth out and wipe her face. After that was done Kat was working on her feet, “Well I already knew Ellenell. His family is are elven trading partners, though he isn’t in line for succession I don’t think he cares. So hearing he was looking for a team got us paired up. Then we sort of got our pick of the best after that. Healers are hard to find. It’s a common enough affinity and in a pinch some others like nature and water can substitute...

“But not so common that every team who wants a healer has one. Two magic users together made us a pretty enticing grab for a lot of teams. So we just looked around a bit and stumbled into the siblings. They actually weren’t one of the teams we were thinking of joining. They just stumbled into the local adventurers guild one day with a massive carcass over their shoulders... I don’t remember what monster it was.

“But we saw that. What they could do with just the three of them... and well, we asked if they’d have us. I was a bit surprised they said yes but I’m glad they did,” Blue finished just as Kat stood up. Granted Kat waited a bit to time things properly but Kat took a step forward away from the chair. They were both free. Now they just had to deal with the rest of the mansion.

Chapter 702 Welcome to the Funhouse

“I’ll go first,” said Kat as she headed for the door. Blue nodded, and shook off the last remnants of disgust she still felt to follow behind Kat to get out of the room. The metal door was locked but the wall beside it was just normal stone so instead of bothering with the door, Kat just kicked through the wall. It gave way easily enough. If there were any guards to speak of when she poked her head through the hole, they’d have been alerted but the corridor seemed deserted at first glance.

The walls in the hallway were the same stone she’d just kicked through. Dotted with various other metal doors that might even have just been basic steel, Kat didn’t bother to check. Kat tried listening in to see if she could hear anyone else but unless there was warding on the cells nobody else was around.

Kat stepped through confidently and walked over to the nearest cell door to peak in. It was a perfect match to the one she’d just left absent the blood, the ropes, though the chairs were in place. Kat bit her lip wondering what exactly that said about things but she wasn’t all too sure. Kat checked another two doors leading to identical results. “Hmmm... I guess we’re on our own for now,” mumbled Kat with a frown. Blue didn’t comment, she just kept her eyes on the surroundings.

I expected to at least find some evidence of other people here. It seems that won’t be the case though. A little annoying but Blue and I can probably make a decent team. She’s got the backline covered... though how much do I need to watch her? If she misses something coming up behind her I’ve got no way to heal her from that.

"So, left or right?" asked Kat.

"Might as well continue left," responded Blue.

Kat nodded and headed down the hallway the way they had been going. "So... you said you knew Ellenell. How well?" asked Kat to make conversation.

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Blue let the silence stretch for a good ten seconds, thinking on if she wanted to keep going with the questions, especially considering it was her turn to ask a question. Still, Blue didn't overly mind and she didn't want to admit the atmosphere was getting to her a little and she was still rattled. "Not well honestly.

"Slightly better acquaintance than Green, but I probably know less about him when we decided to start adventuring together. It really was just our parents who knew each other and it was all down to the timing. A week either side and I'm certain we wouldn't have bothered teaming up. Sure I count him as a friend now, but at the time not at all. As for my question... how is it a Succubus can be asexual?" responded Blue.

Kat shrugged and answered simply, "No grand reason as far as I know. I just am,"

"Come on, surely you can give me a bit more than that? That's a weak answer," said Blue.

Kat didn't necessarily agree but didn't mind sharing a bit more, "Well that really is all there is to it," Kat could feel the pout Blue was directing her way. Kat rolled her eyes, she was planning to continue anyway no need for that. "I guess if I had anything else to add... it's that the pheromone ability that's decently common among Succubi is something I probably won't get, and if I did get it wouldn't ever work properly."

Kat let that answer hang there for a while, as she could feel the 'Why' being drilled into her back by Blue's eyes. Kat let out a small laugh, enjoying the slight song and dance she was engaging in. "Fine fine. The reason is because it's based on attraction. A gay Succubus would only attract women, a Bi Succubus can do both. If they're really crazy animals might show up. That sort of thing,"

Blue's face twisted in disgust. "I know some monsters can be somewhat intelligent... but that's disgusting," spat Blue.

Kat nodded confirming Blue's thoughts. "Yes, yes it is Blue. Then again, some demons look pretty horrific and they're completely sentient. I never said demons were all right in the head. In case you haven't noticed, I think we're all a little crazy. I thought cutting off my hands was an acceptable way to escape a rope in a tournament, not even a life and death situation."

Blue didn't really know what to say to that, so they continued in silence for about a minute until Kat noticed a corner. Speeding up to get closer revealed it was not in fact a corner, but actually staircase. Kat looked back and saw Blue was keeping up... but she was breathing a little heavy. Slowing down Kat apologised. "Sorry about that Blue. I can see a staircase nearby,"

Blue just waved Kat off and followed behind. The stairs were a basic set of stone steps that the pair climbed easily. Nothing seemed off about them till they reached the landing which revealed another

identical corridor. Kat frowned as she looked around for any sign of difference but the wall they'd made a hole in was too far away to spot. "Hmm... is this a new floor?" asked Kat.

"I mean... I think so right?" said Blue.

Kat frowned and glanced down the staircase but it seemed normal. The exit at the bottom looked fine. Shrugging Kat headed left once again. They walked for a while, making small talk about the weather. It was just to fill the silence, but neither wanted to bring up a real question because the more they walked the more they got the sense that they were on the floor they'd just left. The open door they found after five minutes seemed to confirm this. "That's my blood," said Kat pointing to the black stains on the ground surrounded by cables.

Blue nodded, matching frown on her face, "Yes it looks like it. Nobody on my team bleeds black like that... and I don't know anything else that does either."

They didn't say anything else after that, simply continuing down the corridor once again and finding the staircase once again. Kat stopped and tore a chunk from the wall before she headed upstairs. To neither's surprise they were once again a similar landing, no chunk taken out of the wall. The pair, seeing this headed back downstairs only to come to a similar, but distinctly different hallway. This one was tinted blue and the chunk that should have been missing was restored. "Oh joy. We're in a funhouse and I have no idea how to leave," grumbled Kat.

"Don't you have True Sight? Surely you could see through whatever illusions Thyme is using to keep this all running right?" asked Blue as she looked around.

"I think Thyme's messing with space. They know about my eyes and probably took that into account. It wouldn't be much of a challenge if I could just spot the illusion and walk straight out. Hmm... I wonder if my eyes count dreams as illusions?" said Kat with slight annoyance.

Hmm. If I tried to 'leave' a dream, assuming this one isn't one, would my fog form drop the dumb bracelet? Hmm... I've never tried with something that wasn't part of my attire. Best not to risk trying.

"I feel like that's too many abilities even for Thyme. Space, Nature, I think Earth and probably Time as well, because why else would they take the name? I doubt dreams or fog or something is also an affinity of Thyme's." said Blue.

"You can add Time to the list. They used it to test something out with me nearby in the first round," answered Kat offhandedly.

"Ok, so I think we can safely say Thyme doesn't have dream manipulation. Plus, do you think they'd go to the trouble of making a fake version of your partner? We just did that. I think whatever this is, it's real," deduced Blue.

Yeah that makes sense. Thyme wouldn't want to reuse anything. Considering this round has been so different from the first one. "Makes sense," said Kat.

The pair continued walking, occasionally checking the doors but nothing interesting popped up. After a few minutes Kat asked, "Blue want my to carry you?"

"Kat, I'm a mage not unfit," said Blue with slight venom in her voice.

"I know that Blue but I AM faster and I don't really tire either. I can carry you with no trouble at all. It'd speed things up," explained Kat.

"Yeah but what happens if we get caught in a fight? Bet you want me ready then," said Blue confidently. Kat wasn't particular convinced but the determination in Blue's voice was something Kat did recognise. She knew it'd be pointless to try and argue the point on this one. So even if it was slower Kat was willing to put up with it. This was probably another weird teamwork test and if listening to Blue's request to walk was part of that, well, Kat wasn't all that bothered. The ceiling was a bit low for Blue to sit on her shoulders anyway.

Chapter 703 Chess Anyone?

After some more walking the two managed to find the staircase. They also found that section of wall Kat had smashed, yet the staircase was heading down instead of up. "Honestly I don't know what to make of this," said Kat staring at the missing chunk of wall.

"Should we turn around?" asked Blue, "I mean, when we did the same thing with the staircase we ended up somewhere else. Maybe we do that again but with the hallway?"

Kat shrugged, "It's as good idea as anything else. I just don't know if I'd rather test going down these steps or your idea. I'll let you decide I guess. I don't have experience with this sort of thing."

"Do you think this is common or something?" Blue said with a touch of faux annoyance, "It's not like I've been in anything like this before. I don't even know if the missing chunk of wall means this place is mirrored somehow or if Thyme just tied some walls together magically to mess with us," Blue tapped her foot against the wall a few times, "I guess we'll take the stairs. It's a major change and it's best to check out the obvious first because even if it doesn't work out we'll remember we checked it,"

Kat nodded, deciding that was as good a reason as any other. Kat didn't bother walking down the staircase and just jumped over the banister straight to the lower floor, finding herself in a familiar, blue tinted hallway once again. Kat growled at that and waited for Blue to get down the stairs. "Shall we get to the staircase before turning around or just head right?"

"I... hmm..." Blue paused for a few moments to look down the hallway left and right, "I think we should go left first,"

Kat nodded and got to walking. "So what sort of training do you do on the regular?" asked Kat

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"I'll tell you if you tell me. I do believe I'm the one owed a question," replied Blue.

Kat nodded, "Well I don't have any major routines. I believe I mentioned demons just sort of get more powerful as we age in stages," Kat ignored the fake coughed 'bullshit' from Blue, "though we do have to make sure we use our demonic energy occasionally. Apparently, it causes issues if you don't. In terms of skill... well I just recently got through a crash course on my fans, but I haven't really incorporated that into my routine you know? It's a brand new thing."

Blue a puff of air out at that, "So bullshit. Fine whatever, fair is fair, even if demons aren't. For a mage like myself it's mainly training to get my mana up to faster and faster speeds and trying to shape it

correctly out of my body. Studying new sigils sometimes but... they aren't too bad it's drawing them that's always the problem.

"I also do some basic jogging to keep myself fit but no weapon drills. Though... I am now thinking about picking a few up. For the reaction speed and combat awareness if nothing else," explained Blue.

Kat nodded and by that time they reached the staircase. Kat did an about face and headed back the way she came. It didn't take long for things to change because not thirty seconds later a door raced up to meet them. As in the door and the wall it was attached to flew down the corridor stopping just a few centimetres from Kat's face. If her eyesight was a bit worse or her balance less stable, she'd have slammed face first into the door, but as it stood Kat was able to stop not only herself but Blue as well.

Kat opened the door slowly. Inside was a large room set down into the floor. The door itself was on a raised dais with a knee height barrier. Down on the floor itself was a nice marble floor with a checkboard patterns and a full set of chess pieces looking particularly lifelike.

The two sides, black and white, seemed to be separated into humanoid races and monsters. The monster pawns were a bunch of goblins dressed with unique makeshift weapons and similar leather outfits on the verge of falling apart. With Kat's eyes she could even see a bit of 'rusting' on the weapons sketched in despite being all the same colour. The rooks looked to be a troll. They were naked except for a shockingly small loincloth considering their relative body size. Apparently being a male troll was quite a sad life. They had big clubs in their hands to compensate though.

The knight pieces were some kind of giant wolf with two sets of teeth both above and below, ready to take a good chomp out of any other piece disrespecting them. The bishops were coiled snake monsters that looked like they were sleeping and the queen piece was a nesting harpy. Wings spread and talons ready to protect the nest she was sitting on. The final piece, the king, was a dragon that somehow looked bored even while asleep.

On the humanoid side the pawn pieces were farmers of all the various races. Two dwarves, two beastkin, wolf beastkin in fact, two elves, two humans and two fae. They all had different farming implements, well except the dwarves, the dwarves had pickaxes. The humans had fishing rods, the beastkin had two buckets resting across their shoulders on a stick and the elves had a pair of garden scissors, finally, the last were the fae who had a watering can each.

The rooks were dwarves with tower shields larger than their bodies held in front of them decked out in full plate armour. The knights were beastkin, elephant beastkin this time, riding elephants. Kat wasn't quite sure how to take that particular set of pieces. The bishop was an elf on one side and a fae on the other, both in long flowing robes. The Queen piece was a familiar face. It was Thyme dressed up in a puffy princess outfit, 3ft tall, and standing on top of a whole bunch of skulls all while trying to look cute.

The final king space had a base, but no piece on it and Kat realised this room was clearly intended for the contestants to take place in a giant life size chess match. Frankly, Kat wasn't having it. She slammed the door closed and turned around. "Welp, that's clearly the wrong way,"

Blue paused for a moment looking at Kat, then back at the door, then back at Kat. "You know what Kat. I think you're right,"

The pair walked away from the chess door, choosing to continue being lost in the funhouse maze rather than attempt anything that had to do with the chess game. They headed to the staircase with the chunk missing from the wall and walked downstairs.

When Kat came face to face with a door she peaked inside before slamming it shut again. It was the chess room. "Not that one either," said Kat heading back up stairs only to start growling when she chanced upon another, very familiar door. One the pair had really hoped to avoid.

"Well now what?" asked Kat grumpily.

Blue bit the nail on her thumb, with a frown on her face. "I... hmmm. On the one hand, Thyme clearly really wants us to participate in this chess game of theirs. On the OTHER hand, I don't think Thyme would find this as amusing if there wasn't a way to avoid it. I don't know where exactly the alternate path is, but there MUST be one,"

Yes that does sound very much like Thyme. As fun as it might be to force us into a chess game. It is much MORE fun to make us think we're being forced into a chess game we have a way to avoid. Especially if the chess match in question really does need to be beaten or if it would take a particularly long time to pass. Heck, you might have needed not to win but to play your king piece over to the other side of the board.

Kat carefully headed back down the stairs so that she was at the landings between floors. Looking up and looking down she could easily see the same door in both places. Kat tapped her foot in annoyance as she looked around for some sort of clue. In the end her gaze landed on the wall at the back of the landing. There was nothing odd about the wall. It looked very much like a normal spot of wall. It was appropriately tinted blue. It was basic stone with a bit of mortar. Kat kicked it down and the stone caved in. There was a secret passage.

"Frankly. I didn't really believe that would work..." mumbled Kat as she stared at the hole she'd just made. It was dark, pitch black. Something that really shouldn't be possible without magic of some kind. Perhaps darkness magic. Her eyes might work in low light but perhaps there was more ways to block her sight than black cloth.

"Honestly I'm not sure what I expected either and I can't tell if this is a more or less surprising result then it not working," replied Blue.

Chapter 704 Making Stephen King Proud!

Kat and Blue stepped forward together, Kat ducking to avoid catching her horns on the low hanging wall. A few steps in the ground started to shake. Blue was about to fall, when Kat's tail snaked out and wrapped around the shorter girl's waist keeping her on her feet. The door behind them sealed itself up, preventing passage backwards before the dark closed in.

But only for a moment. Bright colours of all kinds exploded around them. Reds, blues greens, and everything in between. She was in an ever changing kaleidoscope and it felt almost as if the world was opening up to them. It was largely reminiscent of D.E.M.O.N.S. teleportation but Kat's feet remained firmly on the ground. It was not her that was moving but the rest of the world.

The joy was cut short though when a creepy laugh rang through the halls. Kat wasn't one to get scared easily but there was something strange about this laugh. She didn't just feel it in her ears, she felt it in her muscles and bones. She felt it in her heart, and most strangely... she felt it in her energy. Her demonic energy normally so immune to outside forces seemed to shudder a bit at the sound before a sharp crack startled Kat out of her confusion.

The rapidly shifting colours now had a crack running through them in the top right, as if there was a glass ceiling slowly breaking apart above them. Yet between these cracks Kat could feel her eyes itching. She could feel that there was some Truth hidden not by illusion but by her own lacking perception. Her eyes were trying, and she could feel tears running down her face that were not truly tears at all but tracks of black blood.

Before it could get any worse though, the cracks spread over the sky, breaking apart and falling behind the horizon leaving only the blackness once again. Kat felt herself shudder from the experience, eyes rapidly healing unnoticed by Kat herself. Blue didn't have anything to protect her from the sight, yet she also lacked anything to give her the slight glimpse either so she felt drained but healthy still.

Kat heard the harsh click of a light as a stage light shone down on a chair in the distance. Kat could see a collapsed figure hanging limply over the chair. They were a tattered dress that looked worn and frayed on the edges with large patches missing from the dress section revealing legs that looked like they'd had the water sucked out of them, all chapped and grey. The dress might have once been white but now it was covered in various stains of all kinds, many looked like blood stains while others were dirt and grim.

The figure had long purple hair that was closer to black than blue, that covered her face and pooled at the floor. Despite the figure was rather smile, looking more like a young teen or an old child rather than an adult. She had no chest to speak of and while her arms looked healthier at first glance they had two long cuts right up the centre of them that had scarred over.

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Kat felt her mouth dry as she stared at the scene, tail tightening around Blue protectively without her notice. Blue wasn't faring much better. She couldn't see all the details but things weren't looking great. "You didn't want to play with meee," said a soft echoey voice that bounced around the cavern.

"I swear if this is about the fucking chess set!" growled Blue and it took a second to work out what she was talking about. *Oh my god. That'd be right. Thyme would definitely take the chance to set up this creepy fucking alternative route to this puzzle if people didn't want to take the time and effort to play chess. I'm already starting to regret not just going with the chess match.*

In the end though, the only verbal response was another round of laughter before the spotlight flashed out. Kat released her hold on Blue and pulled out her fans while scanning the area. All she could see was black and it was really not ideal. Kat's ears strained for the slightest indication of her opponent before she managed to just barely catch the sound of rushing win to the side of Blue. Without thinking Kat practically teleported around Blue, using her full speed energy included pushing back against her bracelets restrictions as much as she possibly could.

Even then, all Kat could do was barely get an arm in the way. Sharp teeth latched on as the decrepit figure seemed to leap out of the darkness. Kat swiped at it with her other arm but the girl, monster,

whatever it was just ripped the flesh and muscle from her arm before disappearing back into the blackness. Kat bit her cheek to keep from screaming, ignoring the blood now filling her mouth. Kat backed up slowly even as her skin and muscle knitted themselves back together.

Kat partially wrapped her tail around Blue. Not truly touching but close enough she could finish the hold if necessary and pull Blue out of the way. Kat wasn't really sure what to do against this thing or what the point of this room was. *At least the chess room was straight forward enough. Beat the chess game. Not whatever nightmarish task this is. Do we need to kill the thing? Avoid it? Just survive for a while?*

Kat was about to voice her questions when she heard the sound of wind once again. Kat moved around Blue and intercepted the figure with an open fan this time. The thing bit down on Kat's fan the sound of screeching metal on metal rang out, causing Kat to flinch, making her unprepared for the follow up swipe against her arm. Luckily for Kat it seemed most of the creature's strength was in its jaws because all it managed was a shallow cut that barely pierced her skin before the creature screamed and fled in frustration.

"Got any plans Blue?" asked Kat as she backed up once again.

"I... I'm sorry Kat... I'm not fast enough for whatever this freakish thing is. Even if I had the spell prepped I... I don't think I can catch it... I don't even know if I can dodge it by myself..." Blue's voice was shaking slightly but her body was taught and ready. She was much more afraid than Kat but she had faith in her temporary partner and wasn't simply going to break down crying. She could do that later.

Kat waited for the tell tale sound of the creature, that split second of rushing wind as it exited the shadows, and was completely ready this time. She pulled her fan out, keeping it closed. When the face appeared from the darkness Kat shoved her fan sideways into its mouth, preventing it from closing. She then took her other fan and slashed into its neck.

Now, Kat expected a little resistance from this. Perhaps it had slightly tough skin, or bones that could withstand the force. If not that then at least a last ditch attack of some kind. Instead the fan slid straight through the creature's body sending its lower section collapsing to the floor. The strong jaws still locked around Kat's fan.

Well... that was a bit easier than I thought. Kat's early celebration ended when the body melted into the floor and the head melted into a pile of rotting flesh, sinking down past her hand and into the floor as well. Kat was so shocked she nearly missed the next audio queue. Kat's tail yanked downwards sending Blue sprawling as Kat didn't think she had time to run around the fae. The creature was willing to make Kat pay for that inattention.

It came from behind and latched onto her wing joint, crushing everything it could, breaking the ligaments, shredding muscles and skin, and cracking the bone. It made to tear Kat's left wing clean off but she managed to elbow it in the face, popping it like an annoying zit causing blood to fly everywhere. Kat growled to cover up the pain as her wing pulled itself together. She felt like her back was on fire and she wanted nothing more than to beat the creepy little thing into the ground. Multiple times if necessary.

Kat yanked Blue back to her feet trying not to be annoyed she couldn't use her tail to strike back during the creature's attack because it was trapped on the ground with Blue. Kat didn't regret that choice but it

was also clearly limiting her somewhat. Kat wished she had some better way of protecting Blue then with just her body but nothing was coming to mind. The room was nothing but a thick expanse of shadows and the creature seemed to come from everywhere.

If Kat didn't have any restrictions, she'd have just put Blue on her shoulders and summoned up a whole lot of fire to coat the floors and walls and try and destroy whatever trap this was. Sadly, she did have those limitations. Still, Kat could dream

Chapter 705 The Unseen Path

So. What do I know? Bigger all really. How do you kill something that survives getting its head cut off? If it regenerated that would make some sense but it first disintegrated before coming back. Does the damage even mean anything to it? I know it costs me demonic energy to regenerate but in a prolonged fight, as long as the damage isn't too bad I can just keep going.

Kat moved to the sound of the wind once again, getting used to intercepting the monster. Kat decided to see what happened if she slashed at the thing's face. She wasn't prepared for the jaw to open wide, and then the cheeks to split open so it could keep going. Kat's fan cut through the back of the monster's throat as it clamped down on her arm. Unlike before, Kat felt it crunch through the bone, ripping half of her arm off as it fell to pieces.

Kat ignored the pain and moved swiftly, picking the discarded piece of her arm back up and letting join back to her body. It was mostly intact if you ignored the area it had been sheered off and Kat wasn't willing to risk the idea she couldn't regrow a missing hand. At Rank 1 she couldn't regen lost limbs, and at Rank 2 she hadn't asked again. Kat didn't want to find out how much of a limb needed to be missing to be considered 'lost' so this was the best option.

So. Don't stick your hand in the monster's mouth. Even if you can cut its head in half, it'll bite down on your arm first. Good to know. Really good to know. What would be better though is a way to defeat the damned creature, and I mean that in both the figurative and likely literal sense.

Kat heard another attack and went for the tried and true strategy of blocking the mouth with a sideways fan. It failed. Clearly the monster was ready, it simply opened its mouth wider, before clamping down on her fingers. Kat punched a hole straight through its chest in retaliation. Kat was about to pick up her missing digits but found them to already be quickly regrowing and decided to let that play out.

Perhaps a mistake because the monster came in for another attack. This time, Kat wasn't taking any chances. She waited for it to appear, attacking in the somewhat simplistic way it always did before stepping to the side and swiping her fan straight through its neck. This didn't stop the head flying towards Blue at all though. Kat grabbed the excess of flowing hair on the monster and hurled it back into the darkness letting it splat against the black wall and be reabsorbed. Kat glanced down at her hand.

Kat's ring finger had managed to completely recover, though it had only been sliced in half. The rest of her fingers were most of the way to being back, now existing up to the final join except for her thumb which had completely regenerated. Kat glanced at the floor where her fingers had fallen and noticed that her thumb seemed to be rotting into a pile of black blood.

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Before she could take that in properly the monster attacked again, this time coming from a downward angle and launching itself up, perhaps hoping Kat's legs were less agile than her hands. Sadly for it this was not the case and Kat simply sidestepped it and kicked the head straight off its body with a smile.

*Ok. So this thing isn't all that smart, or just doesn't know how to attack any other way. It's always in a perfectly straight line once it leaves the darkness and while it can manipulate its mouth quite a bit, that seems to be the limit to its advanced thoughts. It doesn't even try to use its arms or legs for anything. Then again, they aren't really all that tough.

What I want to know... is what's happening to my fingers. That thumb melting... is it because of the rot from the monster? Or because it destabilised after I got my finger back? Some method to prevent being cut in half or something and regrowing a whole extra Kat perhaps?*

The monster came in again, Kat had to rush around Blue this time, but it was no issue. The monster was aiming for Kat's midsection now and she raised her leg to deal with it. The monster tried to open its mouth wider to take out Kat's entire leg but it couldn't quite manage it. Sensing its failure the monster tried to tilt its head to the side and take a good chunk of Kat with it, she just moved in sync kneeing it straight on the nose and sending it flying back.

"Any ideas how to beat this thing Blue?" asked Kat to her fae friend.

"I'm working on it," said Blue in response. "I don't have any great guesses and no idea at all what this thing could possibly be but it has to have a weakness... I think," Kat had to move to intercept an attack once again and Blue flinched away from the gore instinctively. "We could try to run I suppose... but I don't know exactly how this darkness that surrounds us works..."

Kat dealt with another attack by putting an arm in the way only to follow up with a punch to the side of the monster's head causing it to basically explode from the force. Seeing a chance to test some things Kat summoned and threw her two fans to either side of the room only for them to run into something and clatter to the floor.

"Well that's out," grumbled Kat as she summoned them back to her hands.

"Wait, can you throw them that way?" asked Blue pointing somewhat to the front of her.

Kat shrugged and waited for another attack. Directly below her foot this time. Easily dealt with by making use of her wings. The monster wasn't really going for Blue anymore, its focus was squarely on Kat. One more attack down meant a bit of breathing room so Kat threw her fan in the direction indicated by Blue. To her surprise, it kept going quite a while before it hit a wall about two hundred metres in that direction.

Kat was ready when the monster appeared again. She wasn't entirely prepared for it to be right above her head. Luckily for Kat, the ceiling was actually quite high so her slight shock from the exact angle the monster had chosen still gave her enough time to dodge to the side and take it out once again. Once it was down, Blue dashed forward and Kat followed heading down the path they couldn't really see.

Kat heard the monster launch another attack from behind them and she threw her fan straight at the monster. It just opened its mouth, swallowing the fan whole. Shit, probably should've opened that. Kat let her arm come out to catch the monster's jaws, she didn't think she quite had time to sidestep it and

better a chunk of arm than something much worse. Once the jaws were locked around her forearm Kat slammed her free hand onto its head even as Blue kept running.

Kat quickly caught back up just in time for Blue to run straight into something. As Blue started to topple over, Kat heard the rush of wind and saw the monster trying to come up from the ground where Blue was about to end up. Kat slowed her perception of time and shot her tail out to catch Blue. She managed to just barely get it wrapped around her before yanking her away just as the thing's jaws clamped shut on thin air.

The only difference was instead of fading back into the ground, this time the monster stood on the floor twitching slightly as its long hair flowed around it. "Blue, what do we do?" asked Kat hesitantly.

Blue summoned a magic circle, pooling energy into the construct ready to attack. "Kat... I need you to distract it for just a few moments..." said Blue as she stared the thing down. Kat gulped but nodded, ready for whatever it was going to pull off.

The pair were tense, staring down the monster as it continued to twitch in place. Both of them could feel somehow that things were different they just didn't know why. Kat glanced at Blue again and saw a complete magical circle glowing a bright blue so she just returned her gaze to the monster. Waiting for it to make its move.

Kat was almost disappointed when it just sunk back into the floor, returning to what it knew. Kat waited. She listened. She heard the slight sound indicating it had reappeared, and she struck. Kat was told to distract it this time so instead of going for the kill Kat slipped around the monster just barely before wrapping her arm around the thing's neck, trapping in in a choke hold.

Seeing the monster bound Blue unleashed her spell. Not in Kat and the monster's direction, but off to the side, where whatever she'd run into landed. Kat watched as a glowing blue blob of water raced out towards... a wooden chair? Kat didn't know what to think. That was until the thing in her arms started screaming.

Chapter 706 Out of the Darkness and Into The...

Kat felt her ears ringing as the creatures just kept screaming and screaming in her arms. Kat wanted to let go, to hurl the damned thing as far away as possible, especially when she started to feel a slight trickle of blood leaking from her ears. Blue was doing a little better. She had summoned up to small pools of water and stuck them around her ears, but Kat could see pain on Blue's face quite clearly.

The thing screamed and screamed as it writhed in Kat's arms, trying to escape. Kat was much stronger, and holding it was no real issue. With its jaw trapped its mad scrambling didn't do anything to her at all, couldn't even get through her skin. At this point though she wished her eyes weren't constantly healing from the damage. *Just let me go deaf for a bit then regenerate it after dammit.*

Kat tried to pull her energy away from her ears but apparently it wasn't willing to listen. Too close to her brain perhaps? Kat didn't know but it wasn't playing nice and that's what mattered. Kat was starting to have very mixed feelings now that the screaming had been going on for more than thirty seconds.

Blue had given up on standing and now lay flat on the ground completely straight with water hovering around her ears. Kat's grip didn't loosen but her opinion on the matter did drop. *Is this even the right

idea? I mean... I feel like this has to be. Unless I still need to destroy it? Crush its head and now the chair is gone it can't come back? I mean clearly it's been effected by the chair's destruction in some way. I just don't want to destroy it and potentially waste all the efforts.*

Still, Kat held on.

Time started to get a little fuzzy around the edges the sound seemed to just go on and on but Kat decided she'd held on so far, she'd have to keep going. Kat didn't know if this was the right call, but she had to believe it would be.

So Kat held on.

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Then all of a sudden, the screaming stop. Kat's ears rung even as they healed. Kat kept a firm grip even as her hands started shaking. She didn't want to lose it. Even if it was dead now. Even if it had stopped screaming.

Kat held on.

Kat blinked slowly, muscles wanting to relax but Kat held them back for a few more moments... and was rewarded. The thing in her arms suddenly collapsed bonelessly, sliding around her fingers till it hit the ground. Kat looked around, unsure of what to do, arms still fixed in their old positions as she shuddered.

Kat stepped over the creature to Blue and lightly tapped her on the shoulder. Blue flinched back, before glancing up at Kat, eyes bloodshot and red, the water coating her ears no longer a clear blue, but a slight pinkish shade. Before Kat could say anything light engulfed the pair, blinding them both. The world shifted under their feet for a few seconds before the light dimmed, and a single lightbulb clicked on overhead.

Kat quickly picked Blue up into a princess carry. Blue, not being a fan of this development pushed against Kat's chest to try and convince the demon to let her go, but it was a weak attempt at best, completely unnoticed at worst. Taking in the room and ignoring Blue for the moment Kat found them to be in a small cramped supply closet. It was surprisingly clean with a single shelf filled with boxes and a door on the side. The strange thing though, was the map. Why it was in a supply closet, Kat didn't know, but that wasn't the strange part.

No the strange part was that it shifted around as she watched it. There was a big 'you are hear' sign pointing at a small red rectangle in the centre of the map. Well, the centre of the paper the map was on. The rest of the rooms didn't have the decency to keep the closet centralised at all. There were all sorts of rooms, the dining room, the kitchen, a ballroom, several guest room markers, a healing ward and a few other places.

It didn't even have the decency to keep the rooms the right size though. If the ballroom was next to the dining room for example, and they needed to use doors right next to each other all of a sudden the ballroom was only half the size it was normally or if the kitchen and the dining room were placed next to each other they merged into one big room for a short time before splitting off again. The guest rooms occasionally merged, but when they did it was into the 'master suite'. Kat wasn't quite sure how master it was though because sometimes there was two or three of them on the map at any one time.

“Well... this isn’t ideal...” mumbled Kat.

“What?” said Blue.

“I said, ‘this isn’t ideal’” repeated Kat.

“What?” asked Blue again, slightly louder this time.

Kat frowned. Oh please don’t tell me... Kat sucked in a deep breath wanting to be wrong, “I SAID, ‘THIS ISN’T IDEAL’”

Blue looked at Kat with comprehension, sadly, not the kind either of them wanted. For it was comprehension and dawning horror. “Oh no...” murmured Blue eyes shaking somewhat as she realised what had happened. “Please tell me I’m not deaf...”

*Well, hopefully it’s temporary and it’s certainly something Thyme can fix... but I think that might indeed be the problem. The only issue is... I can’t tell you either way because you wouldn’t hear me. Wait is that rude to think? Hmm... if only Lily and I decided to learn sign language that one time. It was something Lily almost researched but I think she had a test or something and never got around to it? Really regretting that now....

Wait... would sign language work with my translation ability? Also, hold up another moment. If it DOES... shouldn’t that mean I can figure out some way for Blue to ‘hear’ me? Or is it because she doesn’t know any sign language in her own that I wouldn’t be able to talk to her? Like does my translation work on babies that don’t know how to talk yet? I have questions now... and I’m making a note to learn sign language if I have time. It’ll be an interesting test if nothing else.*

“Sadly I can’t tell you one way or the other,” said Kat with a soft smile at the end. Blue pouted rather fully in Kat’s direction, lip quivering and exaggerated sadness on her face. It seemed Kat’s idle thoughts had given Blue enough time to... perhaps not come to terms with it but accept the situation somewhat.

Ok. So Blue’s deaf for the moment. Where do we need to go... and where should we go? Kat looked over at the map again and noticed there were a few things written on the sides. Kat was about 80% sure they weren’t there before and a quick check of her memories confirmed they were not in fact, there before. *But why?*

Kat read over the list and it went as follows:

All Personnel are to be in uniform at all times. Failure to do so will result in a trip to the dungeons

All outsiders are to be in their assigned rooms or the dungeons

The kitchen is for KITCHEN staff not for general staff

The medical wing is open to everyone. If you are injured GO THERE do not try and tackle other jobs instead.

If there are more than 10 people in a room something has gone wrong

Laundry is for the LAUNDRY ROOM not for the bathroom or the floor

No you are not allowed to snack during work hours.

Hmm... well I think that means we should head to the medical wing then right? I'm not sure if we've actually been assigned rooms and I don't see anywhere else immediately useful... unless we could find uniforms somewhere? Maybe in the laundry? Or here in the supply closet?

Kat looked at the crates and stabbed into one with her tail to avoid having to put Blue down. Inside was what looked like old bedsheets. A few more tail strikes later revealed that to be what every box contained except for one that contained two spare pillows. "Ok Blue, I think we should take you to get healed, we should at least try," said Kat.

Blue of course, couldn't hear what Kat had just said so she pouted and glared at Kat once again. Kat felt her cheeks... well, not burn with embarrassment but she was sure the blood was there to make it look that way at least. Kat wanted to apologise... but she wasn't entirely sure how without just saying she was sorry. Kat bit her lip and frowned, before just sighing and using her tail to tap the line about medical. Seeing Blue's determined nod, Kat was pretty sure there next course of action was set.

Chapter 707 Out of the Closet and into the Hallway

With the plan to get uniforms scrapped Kat instead wanted to find some sort of pattern in the endless shuffling of rooms. Kat stared at it, taking in as much detail as she could while comparing it to her memories. To Kat's great pleasure, a few patterns did actually emerge quite quickly. She was mostly watching the medical wing, and that was where she got her answer.

The medical wing, for all of its shuffling tending to stick to the east side of the house. This might be somewhat hard to realise when everything else is moving and the centre point of the house is changing on the regularly but the medical wing was almost always on the east side of that line. Not always true, and not always by a lot, but it did give Kat a major advantage when it came to finding it.

Once she'd spotted that little bit of interest, she managed to work out that the kitchen liked to stay in the south, but unlike the medical wing, it limited itself more to the southern two thirds of the house, caring much less strictly for the centre line... except when it came to the dining room. It would never be anywhere near the dining room if they were both in the northern section of the house. Kat wasn't entirely sure what she could DO with that information but it was something.

The only other readily apparent pattern was that bedrooms liked to clump up even if they weren't on a path to merging. They didn't necessary all clump together, but there was almost never a bedroom attached to a hallway all by itself. They tended to stick in twos and threes wherever they went. Oh, and the hallways. Kat was annoyed at that particular revelation.

The number of hallways in the house liked to change, but unlike the other rooms which shuffled around and merged, the hallways would just materialise out of thin air between blinks or whenever Kat wasn't looking directly at the map though they had no issue vanishing, it was only appearing they would do completely unobserved.

Ok, so head east, or rightish... or wait... no it'll be left because the door is behind me. Good thing I didn't instantly make that mistake. Ok, so turn left, try and stick to the east side of the house and open doors until we find the medical wing. Kat took a quick glance at the laundry and followed its path for a bit but confirmed there was no pattern for that particular room. *If we find the laundry, good, if not too bad I suppose.*

Kat tightened her hold on Blue just a bit before using her tail to tap the medical wing and then point at the door signalling she wanted to leave for the medical wing now. Blue seemed to get the message and nodded in acceptance. Kat shifted Blue in her arms so that she was now holding the fae with one arm and a tail so that her left was free to carefully open the door and she could peak out without Blue getting in the way.

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Kat eyed the corridor carefully but couldn't find anything of note. It was just an empty corridor, didn't even have another door. Well, it was somewhat fancy and had two vases filled with flowers, but that was all really. Kat tuned into her hearing a bit for an idea of if there were any staff around but to Kat's annoyance there was a slight layering of white noise in the background now that she concentrated.

Well that's just great. Apparently we're only allowed to SEE the staff. Hopefully I can manage that before they do. Kat carefully pushed the door open before turning to look back at the map. That extra check was enough to confirm something. The mansion only moved pieces you weren't looking at. The hallway Kat was in, as well as the two that connected to it moved, but only together in a big block. The block could move, and that wasn't the best thing to realise when she was trying to head for the east side, but it was nice to know... probably.

Kat sighed and looked at the map, waiting for when the set of hallways were the furthest east before dashing out of the door and settling Blue back into a proper princess hold. Kat new her tail could do in a pinch, especially if she placed it under Blue's knees to keep them in place while her arm supported Blue's back, but it wasn't ideal for her own balance. Her body was much to used to her tail being able to act as it wished so freeing that up took precedence over keeping an arm free.

Kat got to the next hallway and glanced down it before biting back a curse. There were two servants, a butler and a maid pair standing guard in the middle of the hallway. They looked out over the centre of the room, starring at each other, with two doors in either side of them. Kat bit into her lip. They hadn't turned to see her and didn't look like they were going to. Kat just wasn't exactly sure how she wanted to tackle this problem.

Do I try and sneak? Can I sneak? Perhaps... I'd have to fly over and... Kat checked the ceiling height and found it to be right in that grey zone. It was certainly high enough for her to be comfortable flying over everyone's heads but it wasn't so high she was certain they'd never look up. *Maybe if I move Blue to my back? No she'd get in the way of my wings like that unless she could sit across my legs... and that's just awkward.*

The other issue is I think I need to check those doors. So... combat looks to be the only way. Hmm... I can probably take one out, and they're just Thyme clones. I just have to ask if Blue can take the other one out... yeah I think going for them would be the best. I don't know if I can sneak, and a surprise attack is better for checking the doors.

Kat looked down at Blue before carefully leaning the fae around the corner. Kat then moved her tail around beside Blue's face before pointing deliberately at the maid Thyme and then dragging her tail across Blue's neck before pulling her back around the corner. Blue gave Kat a glare for how she delivered the message. Kat shrugged and manoeuvred her arm so that Blue could see her right thumb. She gave an exaggerated thumbs up, and then a thumbs down before pointing to Blue.

Blue rolled her eyes, "I can do it," said Blue.

Kat nodded, glad that only one person was doing charades and that Blue got the message. Carefully putting the other girl down Kat flew up the ceiling, carefully making sure that she wouldn't hit her wings on any of the support beams or the light fixtures, Kat made her way very carefully over to near the two Thymes. It wasn't directly above but Kat was going to dive down at them from where she was. Kat wasn't confident enough to risk getting closer. Kat looked back and gave Blue a thumbs up, and got a spell circle lighting up in response.

Kat waited five more seconds before swooping. Kat dived, tail flat behind her and a fan in each hand. Kat watched the Thyme start turning towards her direction but it was too late, two fan blades working in concert sliced through the Thyme's throat cleanly as Kat flew past. It wasn't as easy as that monster the pair had recently fought, but it was no great hardship. The harder part was not causing a racket by shattering the floor when she landed. Kat had to flare her wings and bend her knees to take as much of the impact as she could, even then her shoes clacked loudly onto the floor.

At the same time Kat was dashing in, Blue released a thick globule of water, unlike Kat the maid didn't even manage to turn all the way around before the water bullet impacted the side of their head causing it to explode like a ripe tomato, blood going everywhere, staining the hallway where it fell. Kat was interested to note Thymes' blood sap, which wasn't a surprise, though it was a reddish colour. Possible, but rarer. Kat wondered if that was Thyme's default or not.

With that taken care of, Kat opened a nearby door to give them somewhere to hide the bodies and to check the room. What she found instead of a nice place to hide something was a brick wall. Kat stared at the wall behind the door with a frown on her face. *This has Thyme written all over it and I'm disappointed in myself for expecting something else.*

Chapter 708 Swing around the corner.

Kat gave herself a few moments to just stare at the brick wall, let the disappointment, slight amusement and anger wash over her... before slamming her head into the wall. Now, this wasn't the greatest idea despite the sturdiness of her skull, but her horns took most of the damage and managed to even break through some of the bricks. What balance of anger and curiosity led Kat to making this decision and in this way... not even she fully knew. What she did know, was that looking through the broken bricks, she could only see more brick.

I wish I was surprised, thought Kat as she shook her head to remove some of the debris still there. It might not stick on her long, sliding off at the first opportunity, but headbutting a wall meant a lot of little bits of stone were sitting on her head with a few lighter pieces in her hair. Blue was of course, just sort of watching all of this go down from the other end of the hallway. She was slowly approaching Kat but didn't really know what to make of the odd sequence of events she'd just witnessed. *Novelnext.com*

With a drawn out huff Kat dragged the body over to the next door and threw it open. Kat was quite pleased to see a similar storage room, though the intact boxes off to the sides indicated it wasn't the same storage room the pair had recently left. This one was also missing the lovely map. Kat bit her lip at that. *A shame. Would have been nice to check if this hallway is actually still on the east side of the house.*

Kat got to work, throwing the bodies into the room and trying to ignore the bloodlike sap stains. As it wasn't real blood Kat was sure with a bit of time and some effort they could be cleaned properly but Kat decided that wasn't really worth it. By the time the bodies were dealt with Blue had caught up to Kat. The fae had tried running over but with her eardrums shot and the blood, it was also affecting her balance so she was forced to walk instead else risk falling over her own feet.

Seeing Blue nearby Kat pulled her back into a princess carry, causing the fae to pout and say, "You know you don't have to carry me right?"

Kat just shrugged and checked the other two doors with her tail pulling on the handle. One was a storage room and the other was a storage room... but for food. So more like a pantry really but it certainly wasn't what Kat was looking for. So, seeing as Kat couldn't use words to express how little it inconvenienced her to carry Blue, she just got back to exploration.

The next corridor they found was empty, doors and servants alike, and the one after that had only servants in it. There were a full ten servant Thymes just hanging out in the corridor. Kat agonised over how to deal with them for a good five minutes before Blue hit her hard on the arm and pointed back the way they had come.

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Kat frowned a bit at the idea of just giving up before Blue repeated the motion with a roll of her eyes and somehow that was enough for Kat to get the idea without Blue needed to resort to whispering the answers and risk the Thymes hearing them. *I'm can't believe I forgot. The rooms move when you're not looking at them, so heading backwards is fine, or at least, backtracking a bit can be excused.*

Turning around Kat raced back down the empty hallway and looked down at the hall that should have contained four doors and a few bloodstains. Instead it was a completely clean hallway with one butler and a single large door. Kat slowed her pace before looking at Blue. Blue got the message and summoned up a spell taking the Thyme out in one shot.

The pair snuck, or in truth Blue remained in Kat's arms while Kat snuck up on the door, listening for anything but the same white noise that had prevented any meaningful findings before was still around. Kat let Blue stand on her own two feet to check the door herself. Kat found herself looking at the ballroom.

It was a beautiful room backed by stain glass windows that framed a stage with Thymes all sitting next to their own instruments, mostly familiar ones like trumpets, flutes and what looked to be a saxophone made from wood. The Thymes all seemed to be just chatting with each other at the moment, with their own unique uniform consisting of a tight blue jacket, slightly puffy green pants and shoulder pads large enough to be hats, complete with dangling gold tassels.

The rest of the room was fairly spartan, obviously so that guests could actually use the space to dance. There were three large tables pushed up against the walls but there wasn't anything except a white tablecloth that had some embroidery on it.

The only other thing of note was the door on the other side of the hall. *Hmm... do I want to risk getting across this room and hope it's the healer's wing?* Kat quickly checked her memories and found that, yes, the room did occasionally link up with the ballroom. Not in any regular way to suggest it was likely

that room was there right now but it was possible. Kat didn't really want to acknowledge the fact that the room behind the door was constantly randomising at this moment either. If she did, it meant the best course would be to just keep going through hallways and Kat couldn't help but think that was a mistake for some reason.

"Come on, let's just go," said Blue, having got board of Kat's second guessing and marched out into the room, not even caring if she was seen. Kat followed awkwardly behind and as soon as the pair crossed a golden design on the floor a magical barrier shot up around them. Kat jumped, startled somewhat from the sudden magical phenomenon but calmed when she took a spare glance at Blue and found her companion was utterly unconcerned.

The band on the other hand, were much more concerned. Instead of attacking or something else sensible though, they all pulled out their instruments and waited. Kat froze, looking around. Every band member was mid breath and she braced herself for whatever was about to come for her...

Thirty seconds past before anyone made a move, well except Blue who had kept walking and was stumbling her way across a quarter of the room. That's when the trombone player kicked something hidden from view and a Thyme with a tube popped up from the ground. It was a female looking Thyme, shortest of the whole group. They were practically minuscule and didn't really look like they had any business playing the tuba.

Of course this was Thyme so the little tuba Thyme sucked in a huge breath and started belting out notes. The rest of the band picked up as well, following the baseline the tuba player set down. Then everything broke into Swing.

WHAT? Kat still stood frozen, trying to work out why the band was playing swing music of all when music notes started to fly out of the instruments. The notes varied in thickness and quantity based on the instrument. The low bass of the tuba was one over sized treble clef while the flutes had a flock of twenty sixteenth notes that used their flags as wings to flap around.

It was at this point Blue started dancing, it was more of a shuffle really and hardly in time with the band at all. The thing is she was doing it, and Kat was not. The notes converged on Kat who still had no idea what to do about all of this when a quarter note from the trumpets slammed into her face, knocking her back a few steps.

Kat wound up a fist, but just as she was about to punch the note in question Blue shouted, "You have to dance your way across Kat. This is like... puzzling one o one. It's not exactly common, but it is a classic!"

Kat frowned again. *Why couldn't this have been ball dancing or something else that they taught in PE class. Why did it have to be swing? I'm surprised I even recognise the fact this IS swing and not just jazz.*

Kat took another glance at Blue and got struck by a sixteenth note for her troubles, it slapped both sides of her face with the 'wings' before flying off. Kat was able to see that Blue didn't really know what she was doing either. Part of this was from balance, a lot of it was from the lack of hearing, but it was still surprisingly good. Those noble dance practice lessons must have been paying off.

So Kat, always one to mess around with the kids at the orphanage did something she was quite used to. She decided it was time to make a fool of herself. Kat would also swear, in that moment, she could hear Lily giggling over their connection.

Chapter 709 Dance Yourself to Good Health

Once the pair got into the groove of things it really wasn't hard to get across the dance floor only a matter of time. The notes were remarkably lenient towards Blue's completely out of time shuffling and whatever the heck it was Kat was doing. It could really only be called dancing in the vaguest of senses but it was movement in time with music and Kat was making her way to the door.

When they made it to the other side of the room the barrier was still up, Kat was tempted to break through but a "Just wait out this song," from Blue when she spotted Kat's actions was enough to still Kat's thirst for violence, especially considering it wasn't really all that high. Punching things just happened to be a good answer to problems since she'd become a demon. nOvelnext.com

When the song wound down, trailing off with a soft duet from the trombone and the flute player Kat picked Blue up and carefully opened the door. When Kat saw a receptionist desk in front of a Thyme in a nurses outfit... a really buff Thyme in a nurses outfit 2 sizes too small Kat wasn't sure if it was best to laugh or cry.

The scene was both wonderful and horrific, she was overjoyed they'd found the medical bay, but found the chances that this worked out were so high she had to laugh about their success. *Praise the lord! Wait... is that heretical for a demon to say? Also is God real? Demons are real but they aren't anything like what they should be. Angels are also real and I don't even want to get into those guys. If a shadow of an angel can predict the future days in advance, or compute the most likely events brute forcing it... well either is horrifying. How much stronger would a god be if they're real? Nope. I don't wanna think about it.*

Kat stepped inside and the nurse took this as prompting to address them. They had a soothing soft spoken voice completely at odds with their appearance, "Hello dears, what can I help you with today?"

"My friend here," said Kat as she raised Blue up slightly at the mention of the word 'friend' "has had her eardrums destroyed and we were hoping you could help us out with that?"

The nurse nodded, "Certainly I can, please step this way," said the nurse as they stepped out from behind the counter to push open the curtains to the back room. "I am a little surprised though. Usually the band is quite wonderful,"

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"Um no... it wasn't them..." Kat mumbled as she carried Blue into the healer's room. It was both a lot like a doctor's office and nothing like it at the same time. There was an examination bed, a desk, and three chairs nearby. Instead of a computer they had a large stack of paper, presumably for writing out medical instructions if necessary. There was also some kind of incense burning on the windowsill, the open window blowing the scent further into the room. The wall Kat was moving through had a glass cupboard with a number of glowing tinctures and for some reason there was a large plant sitting at the foot of the bed.

"Would you mind explaining to me the exact cause of the damage then? It might change the spell I'll need to use," said the nurse.

Kat nodded as she placed Blue down on the bed, "It was this... weird chair..." Kat wanted to say 'chair demon' but as a demon herself she knew it certainly wasn't one, "chair thing. It was this creepy looking woman? Girl? Something that had long black hair and could launch itself out of shadows and stretch its jaw to the size of a small child. When we... destroyed the chair it just screamed and screamed and screamed and it was too much for Blue,"

"Not yourself though?" noted the nurse as they summoned a glowing magical circle, to get some diagnostic results from Blue. It was actually a five ringed spell, making it the highest level spell Kat had SEEN cast. Thyme had likely done better, but also hidden the rings in other instances.

"Um... I have regeneration so... arguably I was caught as well. Trust me... it's not fun having to listen to high pitched screaming as your eardrums rupture only to heal themselves and repeat the process..." grumbled Kat.

"Ah, my condolences," said the nurse, summoning up a second diagnostic spell this time four ringed. "Ok, so I've looked at the issue and it's a good thing you guys came to me. The damage isn't just the eardrums but also a bit of a lingering curse and I think some minor brain damage. The last one is a little tricky to spot even with the right spells, but actually not something to worry about despite being 'brain damage' it would naturally repair itself once the curse is removed but while you're hear..."

The nurse Thyme summoned up three four ringed spell circles and Blue lit up like a Christmas tree. Green light spilling from her body especially her ears. Blue shivered under the sensation as the damage was repaired. A few seconds in the nurse summoned up a single red circle spell and a moment later blood rushed from Blue's ears.

Is it rude I keep thinking of this Thyme as a nurse despite clearly being a competent healer? Wait... if they are the healer why are they manning reception? Why are they in a nurse outfit? Why does Thyme know what an Earth nurse outfit looks like?

Kat's questions would go unanswered as Blue groaned at sat up, wobbling slightly as she rose. The nurse steadied Blue slightly, "Easy there dear, your balance will still be a bit off for a few moments as you readjust to having working ears again. There was a good deal of blood that had flooded the ear canal as well complicating that further. Just stay steady,"

Blue nodded and once she was sitting up scooted backwards to lean against the wall. Blue let out a long thankful sigh as she relaxed into the wall. "Thanks," said Blue slowly as if testing the words. She'd sounded fine back when she couldn't hear, but it was still something Blue wanted to make sure of now she had her hearing back.

"Now dears, I'll just leave you here to rest up for a bit before getting you to leave. The healer's wing is for sick and recovering people not for those of us that are healthy. It is simply the way of things..." said the nurse as they left the room and Kat could imagine the steely glint in their eyes as they left.

Kat swallowed instinctively, flashing back to the school's nurse and her no nonsense attitude. "Right... well... if it wasn't clear before it is now, we can't stay here too long... but where do we go? I mean, I

think we should head to the bedrooms, right? That seems like the most likely place to end this challenge...”

Blue tapped the side of her leg a few times as she thought about that, “I suppose so. That does seem to be what the rules said. I know I couldn’t speak before but I was paying as much attention as I could through the pain. Still... my memories of the list are a little... fuzzy... so anything else you want to jog my memory with?”

Kat shrugged and said, “Not really? I mean, the master bedroom appears when two bedrooms merge together, sometimes multiple master bedrooms show up, and I hope we don’t have to find one of those specifically. Um... hmm... otherwise the only things I can think are worth noting is that if we find the kitchen we’ll probably be attacked and the laundry likely has spare uniforms but that’s more a ‘neat if we can find it’ type of thing. If we find a bedroom first that would be for the best,”

Blue inclined her head and said, “Yeah. There were a lot of those, almost as many as the storage rooms scattered all over the place. From what I saw it’ll just be a matter of rushing around and opening as many doors as we can. Do you want to try and be sneaky about this or just rush around and ignore the Thymes?”

Kat raised an eyebrow at that, “Weren’t you the one who tried to convince me not to carry you around? If we’re really moving, even with the suppression bracelet, I’m still a lot faster than you are. I’m happy to carry you of course, but I didn’t expect you to let me once you were healed,”

Blue pursed her lips in thought, biting the lower one, “Hrnh... yeah but I think I’ll just need to deal with it,” said Blue with an odd air of determination. Kat just nodded along, because it really was no issue. Blue was light, as were most people these days, and Kat didn’t really see any issues with just carrying people around. Perhaps part of it could be blamed on wrangling orphans from a young age.

Chapter 710 Mastering the Bedroom

Blue stood up, wobbling a little but keeping her feet, steadying herself on the bed. “Ok, I think we’ve been here long enough,” said Blue.

“Are you sure?” asked Kat, “It hasn’t even been ten minutes Blue, you can take a bit more time if you want,”

Blue shook her head, “No this is still a challenge. If the challenge had ended or this was a regular job I’d wait. As it stands the risk of death is non-existent and we are on a timer even if we can’t see it. I am combat capable, unwinded and while a bit of water would be nice I’m not currently willing to use the mana required to summon it properly,”

“What do you mean, ‘summon it properly?’” asked Kat.

Blue marched out of the room, “I’ll tell you if you follow me,” and Kat let out a sigh and did as she was asked. The nurse nodded to the pair on the way out and when they opened the door to the ballroom, they found themselves in another corridor instead. The two maids guarding the entrance were a bit of a surprise though.

Blue reacted by summoning a water ball around the head of the one on the left, while Kat dashed forward to take out the one on the right. Kat was about to simply ‘kill’ them but realised the nurse, the

POWERFUL nurse was watching them from the desk so Kat restrained herself. Instead she took a cue from Blue and came up behind the Thyme and put them in a head lock, chocking them slowly as she bound their arms with her tail and locked her legs around theirs to prevent them fighting back.

Once the two Thymes had fainted Blue turned to the nurse and said, "We've got two new patients for you!"

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The nurse sighed, "Roughhousing just outside my domain. What is this mansion coming to?" Despite their words though, the nurse just walked up to Kat and Blue before taking the Thymes of the pair's hands and heading for the back room.

Blue kept walking then, and started to explain, "So, anything made with mana is inherently temporary to start off with. The reason for this, is it's prohibitively expensive to use mana to create 'real' things. You can however cheat really easily. Wind doesn't have this problem at all, and Earth can sort of fake it by making more dirt instead of making it from nothing,

"Water can do a similar thing, but most people just summon 'fake' water and go from there. The issue with that is you can't drink it otherwise it causes issues internally. When the mana in the water runs out it will just disappear and suddenly your body is dehydrated all in an instant and the shock really isn't good for you.

"If I wanted a drink, I'd need to pull what water there is from the air, drying it out, and potentially making me thirstier as I breathed in all the dry, stale, air. It's useful in a pinch, but really not something to rely on unless you're moving a fair distance away or you're outside where it's not so big of a deal."

Kat was halfway through nodding when a thought occurred to her, "Wait... if that's the case... is all the stuff Thyme makes with magic real or not...?"

"I don't want to think about that," said Blue as they cleared another corridor, of Thymes. When it was over she kept speaking, "Yeah no. I don't even want to consider that. Either Thyme is using a bunch of mana to keep it all from falling apart while in use, or Thyme is using a bunch of mana to make it all real. I think the only idea I want to really consider is Thyme using time magic, which is still really expensive, on themselves and building it all by hand with an army of Thymes. That's probably the most efficient magic wise..."

Huh... I guess you learning something every day. I don't know if I'd have guessed time manipulation would be the key to the everything Thyme has made. I also don't want to know exactly how much mana that would take. "Is Thyme's mana capacity really that much of an outlier?" asked Kat.

Blue didn't say anything as they opened a door only to find a Thyme break room. It was swiftly shut back up, "It is and it isn't," said Blue carefully. "Dryads, as a species, have a lot more mana than we do simply because... well they're all massive trees that take ages to form a sentient consciousness. Like... say for the sake of argument Thyme has ten times the amount of mana I do. Now Thyme MUST have more than that, but for the sake of argument lets go with ten times.

“Thyme’s main body, their tree, is at least a kilometre tall. I don’t even reach six feet. Even if I’m generous and say I’m six foot for the sake of the making the math easy, Thyme is still like 160 times my height, let alone how much wider their body is. When you start thinking of it that way...”

Blue trailed off as if that was all that needed to be said. In many ways it really was. If you considered the fact that Thyme’s body was simply that much larger, there was no way their mana capacity would be small. It would have to be monstrous. Kat wasn’t totally sure the regeneration rate would increase as well, as Kat didn’t know how exactly mana recharged. “That’s a big tree,” said Kat.

Blue nodded again, “Yes. Yes it is. The next question then, is Thyme an outlier amongst dryads? To that, I don’t really know. There aren’t that many dryads, the ones that do exist don’t wander around anywhere near as much as Thyme does and Thyme is OLD. The chance that Thyme only has a 1km tree form and no practice speeding up their mana... I think the world ending tomorrow would be more likely,”

Kat shivered. *You know. It really puts it into perspective. Everyone is scared of the giant monster, whatever it might be. Thyme is another one, in fact they must be humongous. You just don’t notice it at all because Thyme is always slightly crazy or using strange forms. The biggest I think I’ve ever seen Thyme was for that king and queen skit at the end of the Tournament and even then, Thyme wasn’t even close to 500m.*

Kat continued struggling to wrap her head around exactly how different a league dryads had to be when compared to normal casters as they cleared out another corridor. This one with three Thymes and no doors. Eventually, Kat had to ask, “Is there any weaknesses to dryads? They seem... kind of ridiculous,”

Blue scoffed, “Says the demon. But... well it really depends how you’re looking at it Kat. Remember they can’t move. Well, I wouldn’t put it past Thyme to move the forest around and transplant it somewhere else, but typically dryads can’t move. If you find their tree, that’s it. Also, as magical as dryads and dryad trees are... for most of their life, they are just slightly better than average trees.

“A lumberjack can cut down a dryad’s tree just as easily as an arch mage, probably easier if they have a good axe. As long as the dryad isn’t awake yet. Well, that or if the dryad is distracted. I’m not entirely clear on how ‘aware’ they are of all their individual parts. Thyme might be... but I think that’s not entirely normal, making so many bodies...”

Kat kicked her way through another lot of Thymes and threw the nearby door open expecting something else underwhelming. Instead, Kat found a master bedroom. It was a tastefully done affair. A King-sized bed pressed against the left wall with a picture of a forest above it. There was another door, presumably to an ensuite and there were two large dressers for clothes. There was also a small writing desk and chair tucked away in the corner. On the opposite side of the room to the bed was a small four person table with a window right next to it. The windowsill was lined by a vine of some kind, lightening up the space and giving it a bit of green.

“Blue over here!” said Kat joyfully. Blue turned away from her door to look at Kat, and smiled at the sight.

“YES!” Blue shouted as she rushed in past Kat and flopped down on the bed without a care in the world. Kat raised an eyebrow at this. *We just went through a dungeon, a storage closet, and a healer’s wing

and I know you don't have the resistance to grime that I do. I really think you should have showered or something before just... jumping on the bed.*

Kat sighed, in the end this wasn't exactly something she was unused to. So she just rolled her eyes and popped over to the bed, sitting on the corner and waiting for Blue to get it out of her system.