

## DEMONS 791

### Chapter 791 If the clothes fit

Eventually Lily's human mind was able to acclimatise to the feeling of bliss and return to the real world. Having her human body did help. Well, that and the stone floor. It wasn't exactly comfortable. Lily managed to crack open one eye only to see Jara hiding her amusement. Lily was instantly mortified. She quickly rolled away from Kat's hands, not trusting her legs would actually let her stand up. I... I can't believe you did that Kat!

"I regret nothing," said Kat aloud.

Lily pouted and carefully pushed herself to her feet, ignoring the wobbling in her legs as she managed reach her full height. Still the shortest in the room, unless her ears counted, but it was something. Her blush only deepened as her mind properly caught up to everything before she started to run over to Jara. "Jara I'll change in with you yes?" said Lily quickly as she dashed past Jara and into the closet, nearly tripping over the Jara's foot as she did so. Only her new cat instincts and tail saving her from falling flat on her face.

"Sorry sorry," said Lily as she whipped around and gave an awkward bow as Jara closed the door. "I... I can't believe you saw me like that. I'm sorry. I'm also sorry for tripping over your foot... and taking your clothes... sorry,"

Jara gave Lily a light chop between her ears. Jara paused, hand twitching before slowly retracting it. Lily's hair was now exceptionally soft and smooth and Jara was very tempted to try scratching behind Lily's ears. She restrained herself though. While it would have been entertaining... it also seemed rather intimate for Lily and considering she was a person, potentially inappropriate. "Firstly, it's fine Lily. I didn't feel a thing, these boots are for working. Even though they don't have steel caps they're quite sturdy.

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"Secondly... I think I agree with Kat. You are quite adorable and I didn't exactly enjoy seeing you put yourself down so much. I mean, I take care of myself, I do understand I'm attractive and Kat's quite aesthetically pleasing as well, but you are positively adorable. It makes me want to just protect you from the world. I imagine Kat suffers from more extreme versions of those feelings," Lily's blush had returned with full force. "And finally... these are all old clothes so it's fine."

That's when Lily took a look around the room. It wasn't small at all and it was packed full of more clothes than Lily had ever seen in her life. There wasn't just one rack of clothes but three. The tallest of which seemed to contain a variety of outfits from Jara's youth. There was even one of those book ladders you saw in particularly large libraries that ran on a small set of rails around the room.

Jara had managed to pick out a couple of outfits that she thought would fit Lily and put them on the vanity next to the door. It had a nice square mirror that took up the entire back length. It was edged with thin wood carved into the shape of vines curling around it to hold it in place. There was a small stool in front of it with an old cushion that had seen some use. There were a couple of drawers on the right side but the top only had outfits on it now. Next to it was a full length mirror that flanked the doorway.

Lily's blush was starting to die down until she noticed the second pile. Instead of clothing it contained a few undergarments. Lily couldn't help but swallow loudly at the sight. She glanced over at Jara who seemed to see nothing wrong with the offerings. "Um..." Lily started to say but her question died when she saw Jara's completely unconcerned look.

So Lily turned away and stripped down. Carefully not looking at Jara who was actually doing the same sort of. She was just removing her overalls and dumping them in the hamper, revealing cleanish clothes underneath. They still had a bit of dirt and a fair deal of sweat. While Lily was panicking slightly over the clothes Jara was letting her hair down. Eventually though Lily managed to divest herself of her ill fitting clothes and pulled on the bottoms.

\*Huh... these actually fit quite well...\*

[That was the point]

\*Out. Out of my thoughts. I'm already embarrassed enough.\*

[Well then block me]

\*I can't. Please can you... just... maybe not make it obvious you know?\*

[Fine. I'll hold my replies back.]

\*Thanks Kat...\*

Lily shook her head to try and clear away the now perpetual blush and pulled on the bra. It wasn't particularly modern but it was made with very soft materials. She just... didn't quite understand how it fit on. Jara, seeing her issues quickly came over and messed around with it. The fact that it fit nearly perfectly was a surprise. \*Why does this fit?\*

Lily turned around to glance at Jara, and now that she wasn't covered in gardening gear, it was even clearer just where Lily was... underdeveloped in comparison. "How can these possible fit me!" hissed Lily while glaring at Jara's breasts.

"They're my old clothes. I wasn't always like this!" said Jara innocently.

Lily frowned and looked at Jara, then at the piles of clothes then back at herself before nodding and putting on the outfit. It was an interesting style. The shirt had two pieces of dangling cloth that hung from the shoulders and there was a split starting in the small of her back to draw attention. For Lily though it was a nice gap for her tail. With that in place Lily pulled on the pants. They were loose but well fitting puffy silk pants in a light blue style to match the blue ribbons coming from her shoulders.

With that on Lily looked herself over in the mirror and couldn't help but smile. That was until she glanced at Jara behind her and her mind caught up to a few things. Double checking their comparative heights Lily frowned. "Jara... how old are these clothes?" asked Lily.

"Not even a year old. They might not fit anymore but they're practically new!" said Jara cheerily. Not caring at all for most of her closet. One of the outfits she'd chosen was a nice set she'd worn to a ball exactly once before growing out of it. When her mother had bought it, it was already a bit on the smaller side so getting any extra use out of it was asking too much.

"The whole outfit?" asked Lily suspiciously.

"Yup," said Jara playing oblivious.

"Even the undergarments?" asked Lily not willing to let Jara avoid the question.

Jara let out a light cough. "Well I mean. I don't really keep all that close track of those sort of things..." and then muttered under her breath, "the maids do it for me."

Which of course, was perfectly audible to the girl WITH CAT EARS. "I see. Well Jara... how old would you guess?"

"Two?" Lily's slitted eyes narrowed at Jara's response, "maybe three?" Lily's gaze didn't let up, "certainly no more than four?"

Lily sighed. \*That's the best I'm likely to get.\* "Why even bother trying to hide it?" asked Lily.

Jara shrugged, looking off to the side to avoid Lily's continued gaze. "Some people are sensitive about it and it's not like I HAD to tell you. If you were only as intelligent as the other young nobles I have to deal with on a daily basis you'd never have even thought about it!"

Lily sighed, "Yeah... it's... I don't normally feel bothered by it... but there's a world of difference between 'not bothered ever' and 'not bothered when your attractive acquaintance is lending you clothes'."

Jara smiled and let out a polite laugh and said "Can't let Kat hear you flirting with other girls,"

"I'm afraid your legs aren't nearly as attractive as Kat's... well that and..." Lily paused waiting,

"I can hear you all just fine. You're only on the other side of the wall," added Kat. Jara just let out a slight huff in response.

"See... I feel like you're both cheating somehow," said Jara.

"Magical bond," the pair said in sync.

"Hmm..." said Jara as she glanced at Lily. "Still not really sure if that's my thing. I mean... it would probably help. I wouldn't need to fear them trying for anyone else. Still, if I do ever get married I'd probably want to find someone else who's asexual like I am. We can just be best friends together. Adopt a bunch of Caaaa... hmm... is that an offensive stereotype to an actual cat person?" *novelnext.com*

"Um... not really?" said Lily, "I mean... I still know of it and it doesn't bother," \*nearly as much as it bothers me that fantasy worlds STILL have it as a stereotype. I feel like it says things about the human condition I'm not ready to analyse.\*

Chapter 792 Lazy Guards

Back to Kat

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Kat watched as three outfits and a bag later Lily exited the room. "Are you sure I can have this? It's all really nice and I don't want to impose," said Lily.

“Yes of course. It’s completely fine,” said Jara waving away Lily’s concern. “None of those outfits fit anymore so it really is no issue. I don’t really understand why mother insists I keep so many of them around. If you could fit more in that back I’d be passing them off as well,”

“Well what about the bag?” asked Lily as she continued walking over towards Kat, trying not to see whatever reaction her girlfriend might have, “It’s quite nice, made of sturdy materials, is it fine to keep as well?”

Jara shrugged, “It’s got a stain on it,” which was true in the loosest sense of the world. The bag did indeed have stain, but only a small one in the bottom corner. It was barely noticeable, “and I’ve got three others exactly the same,”

“Alright... if you’re sure...” said Lily slowly.

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\*I can’t believe she managed to get a bag before I did. It’s also filled with clothes so I can’t even use it to store Lily. Aw well, it’ll perhaps serve as a reminder to actually getting around to buying a bag.\* Lily took a few more steps forward before finally stopping in front of Kat and said, “Um... how do I look?”

Kat took a step forward and gave Lily a light kiss on her forehead. Lily’s ears twitched around rapidly as she tried to control her reaction, tail sweeping out and doing its best to wrap around Kat’s leg, “I think you look adorable as always Lily,” said Kat before bringing the shorter girl into a hug.

While this was happening Jara took a glance outside and frowned. She gave the pair a few moments before clearing her throat. Lily panicked, turning back into a cat and looking startled, Kat just grinned and held the ‘cat’ close to her chest. Jara rolled her eyes with a grin and said, “Sorry to interrupt, but it’s getting a bit late. Zuhra should be returning soon and if you don’t want her to catch you on the way out you’ll have to leave now,”

Kat nodded and started walking towards the door. Jara skipped ahead and past the pair opening the door first and leading them out of her house. Just as she was about to open the front door she glanced out the window spotting Zuhra. She quickly backed up, pulling Kat with her. The demon let herself be led away as they travelled back into the house past a few doors before ending up in the library. “I just saw Zuhra. She’s already heading for the house and will likely meet up with me in a few moments. You’ll have to sneak out on your own. Personally, I recommend waiting for her to open the door to this room and sneaking out then,

“I can keep her occupied here for a while. She’ll probably want to go off and get in uniform quickly, but I can drag her into conversation about what she did today. That should buy you both some time to get out. The guards shouldn’t be an issue, you can show them those papers and say you arrived during the previous shift,”

Kat nodded and looked to Lily who let out a slight hiss before sending a feeling of acceptance towards Kat. Kat burst into mist. A rather common sight recently. As she reformed in Lily’s mind Kat couldn’t help but ponder it. \*This is by far the most use I’ve gotten out of this ability. It’s really started pulling its weight. It might not be great for combat, but with Lily’s help it’s great for stealth.\*

While Kat was pondering that, Lily headed over to door, and pretended to merge with the shadows. What she didn't realise was that even an inactive shadow affinity can help with that and the particularly patch she chose seemed to darken to match her fur. Her eyes also seemed less noticeable, the piercing colour somehow seemed so normal amongst the darkness, if it was even spotted.

On Jara's end she made a beeline for one particular shelf to pick up three books for her ongoing research. She took them all and laid them across one of the libraries tables. Once that was done she headed to a set of drawers and picked up a pencil and a stack paper. Once she sat down though, she intentionally knocked the pencil off the table and then proceeded to open the book to part of the way through.

It didn't take much waiting for Lily's sensitive ears to pick up the sound of a door closing followed by footsteps. It was then a matter of moments before the door cracked open. Lily held her position, ready to pounce but unmoving. What she saw was a person, a young woman, poking her head into the room.

She had short shoulder length brown hair and tanned skin. Her eyes were a piercing green and looked like somebody had used jewels instead of flesh in their construction. It took another moment for the girl, presumably Zuhra, to notice Jara and step inside. Once she did, the rest of her body was revealed.

Her hands were lightly calloused, indicating long periods of work, though never anything too strenuous. Her arms however had a set of clearly defined muscles. Nothing overly large, but quite noticeable in her current sleeveless outfit. Her legs were currently hidden by a pair of loose pants, but her feet were uncovered, revealing a rather nasty scar on her left foot.

That was all Lily really got to take in before Zuhra was fully in the room and moving to shut the door behind her. Lily jumped at the opening, sliding silently behind the door before it could shut. As she was dashing away she could hear, "Hello mistress, I have returned from my break," but Lily didn't pay attention for long.

She got to the door and signalled Kat, who burst out in a cloud of purple mist. Letting Lily take her spot in Kat's arms was just an extra moment, and then the pair left the house. The guards glanced at the newcomers and said, "Halt, who goes there?"

Kat turned lazily and said, "I am here to assist with a minor thing on orders of Jara. Do you require my papers?"

The guards shared a glance between each other. Technically they were supposed to answer yes to that question if they didn't recognise the person in question. It was only a few extra moments of work. The thing is though, Kat looked remarkably unconcerned and didn't have anything obviously hidden on her body. They were both quite tempted to just let this slide. Apparently though, not quite enough, "Yes please," said the left guard.

Kat nodded and pulled out the three notes from her sash before finding the correct one to hand over. Before she finished the motion the guard waved her off, "I can see you have the required documents you're free to go,"

"Thank you," said Kat with a slight inclination of her head before turning around and once more heading towards the outside. She decided to pick up speed as she did so, letting her legs work harder but nothing too extreme. She made it look like a casual jog despite her speed eclipsing a normal sprinter.

This continued all the way up to the first door, where she took the time to slow down and head into the next area.

None of the gardeners even turned to look during her journey. It was smooth sailing. The guards at the door outside didn't even bother to ask. Kat just gave them a nod as she left and apparently that was enough for them both. She managed to get to the gate and into the street with no interruptions at all. That was when Kat took a glance at the sky and realised it was actually starting to get late.

\*Shit. We spent more time with Jara then I thought. I mean, I knew she said Zuhra would be back soon but... I guess I just didn't quite think about what that meant. Hey Lily... what do you think we should do for the night? I'm cool to just find a try or whatever and sleep there. You can use me as a bed and we'll have no issues.\*

[Is that really the best idea Kat? I mean... you're very comfortable of course... but I doubt it'd be great for you to sleep like that...]

\*Regeneration and Succubus flexibility make sleeping in awkward places quite easy. I probably won't feel any stiffness in the morning and my skin is tough enough that if I roll over onto some rocks or whatever I want scratch myself up. It won't exactly be comfortable for me, but I don't really mind it all that much.\*

[Hmm... I feel like we should think of something better...]

#### Chapter 793 A Discussion Under a Tree

Kat managed to wonder down a few streets and find a rather nice park with a fake river running through it. Apparently it wasn't enough to have a giant greenhouse, Jara's family also felt the need to brighten up the surrounding districts as well. In the late afternoon the park was still quite busy. Children were playing, a few couples seemed to be laying on picnic blankets. They spotted a gardener trimming the grass with a metal rod that spat out sharpened blades of air.

That was of particular interest as the first and only evidence of magic outside of the fountain. Sure there were magical side effects such as the large number of healthy crops, the lack of dead grass, the giant glass greenhouse. Yet they hadn't seen anything magical being performed in the moment. Even if it was just a glorified lawn mower.

Eventually Kat managed to snag a spot under a tree. It was only because the previous occupants were leaving just as Kat walked past, giving her space to claim it before anyone else noticed the available area. Kat settled down against the and let Lily fall to her lap. It was barely a moment later when Lily decided that wasn't good enough and expanded to her humanoid form and sat her hole body down in Kat's lap. "Where do you want to start Lily?"

"We already started on the accommodation issue. We should probably just stick to that before we go over anything else..." offered Lily.

"Yeah perhaps... but we didn't exactly learn much about Zuhra. We can sort that out and our plan going forward in basically no time," returned Kat.

Lily rolled her eyes. [I don't really think there's much discussion to be had regarding where we're staying either but if that's what Kat wants to talk about...] Lily's thoughts weren't necessarily intended to be

broadcast at the moment, and recognising that fact Kat decided to ignore them until she said, "Sure we can go over what we know,"

"The main point is that we need to visit the orphanage, perhaps find some of her old friends. I'm not entirely sure how to approach that though. Sure we can just walk up... but we're both pretty distinctive. I'd have recommended you do it if I had seen a single race that wasn't human... but it might just be them. Makes it hard to pretend everything is normal. Probably. Do you have any thoughts about it?"

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Lily shrugged as she got more comfortable in Kat's lap. Mulling over the question in her mind. "Hmm... I guess I see what you mean... but it's not like we need to keep this super secret or hush-hush. If we don't mention Apep at all, and at worst have to show off Jara's papers. I mean... how widespread is the knowledge of demons? Or... how weird do we look to people? We're not getting too many glances but I don't know what others are assuming really."

"Hmm..." mumbled Kat. \*Lily brings up a good point. In a world of magic it's actually somewhat hard to judge how strange we look or how many people know what exactly I am. Even if we've only seen humans around they might be more willing to accept the strange... or just have a different version of what strange is. Makes me wonder what they'd think of a car or a train.\*

[You do know I can hear you right?] Lily's thoughts paused. [Oh...] Understanding washed over her as Kat nodded. "Yup, I didn't bother masking my thoughts because I heard yours earlier. I don't really mind if you hear them or not and until you can shield your own... I'm trying not to go about shielding my own too often. I mean, it happens, obviously but I am trying to balance not sending you all my random thoughts with wanting this to be an equal exchange,"

"Kat..." whispered Lily and she lightly kissed her girlfriend on the nose, "you don't have to worry about that at all. This was something I wanted and I'm not going to complain if I don't have full control over it. Plus... it probably is for the best I'm not hearing ALL your thoughts. Your mind can operate much faster than my own some times and it can be hard to follow those. Still... you're letting me get sidetracked. How are we approaching the orphanage?"

"Well... we can either start with whatever orphanage director there is," said Kat, "or alternatively we can head over and try to find some of the kids or teens that live there and ask about her from them first. I imagine we'll either have two very similar stories or two completely different ones,"

"You think it's likely they'll know who she is?" asked Lily.

Kat nodded, "Yup I can guarantee it. It depends on the age range but if it's mostly younger kids they'll all know her, but probably not that well. We can use that to get an honest sense of what she's like with kids though, and maybe that's worth it by itself. Furthermore, if it's mostly younger kids the older ones are bound to know her. They might not be willing to say anything bad about her, but we can certainly confirm if she had a fiancé or not, and maybe even what happened to him.

"I mean, if it was even slightly a big deal they'll have tried, and probably succeeded, in prying the information out of her. The only way it won't be huge news is if she kept it super quiet and then left afterwards... but I think that's highly unlikely. I mean, she'd have to have told the person in charge when she was leaving, and the other kids would notice that.

"A lot of that's true even if the orphanage is mostly older kids. If it is though... the younger kids might not know everyone but the older ones should... I think. I imagine it would be more like a school where you know most people in your grade and know about the big things. Once again, getting married is big, and having your fiancé die is even bigger. I just think it'd be somewhat common knowledge,"

"That should be fine," said Lily. "We can get a nice general feeling from the kids, maybe some details, and then head over to the person in charge. How do you think we should deal with the matron or... huh... I know Gramps ran the orphanage but I don't know what the male form of matron is,"

"Neither do I," admitted Kat easily. "As for how we deal with them... I'm not sure. I mean I have plenty of experience with Gramps but I don't really know how he'd react to a quasi-official enquiry. He has a great memory and he's been around for a while. I think it's likely he knows all the government people that he could possibly meet. What he'd do when he didn't recognise us... I'm not sure..."

"He certainly wouldn't share private information... but rumours and general information we could get from asking anyone at the orphanage may or may not be fair game. As I said I just don't know how he'd treat that sort of enquiry. Personally... I think we just try and get what we can unless she's clearly hiding something. I mean... we're not here to find out if Zuhra is a good person to marry, just if Apep has a chance or not..."

Lily frowned at that, "I feel like we should at least make sure they'll get along..."

Kat shrugged, "I'm not opposed to sharing what we know, or making recommendations but I don't really know anything about romance. I didn't read romance novels, I didn't watch romance movies. I think the limit to my involvement in romance was reading Holes back in school."

"Kat... Holes isn't a romance story..." retorted Lily.

"I know that's kind of my point," responded Kat.

Lily let out a long sigh, "I... hmm... I was going to say I can help in that area... but it's not like I really sought out standard romance stories. I'm not entirely sure how explicable my experience is. I mean I got the girl in a much more secure way than any sort of ceremony. We won't have any potentially relationship ending misconceptions because we can hear each other's thoughts and emotions."

"Communication is perhaps the biggest deal, and if Zuhra doesn't know how to talk about her issues, which she clearly has, and just... throws herself into work instead it probably won't work out between them. Or if Apep is forever too nervous to address things properly. Considering he SUMMONED A DEMON instead of just talking to her, or even Jara and risking her finding out... honestly that might be the biggest black mark against this idea..."

Kat pursed her lips for a few moments before saying, "That... that's a good point. Not one I necessarily like thinking on... but a good point. Hmm... I don't think there's much we can do. I mean, if Apep has a chance... I want to give him that chance you know? He clearly cares and he's trying to do this as respectfully as possible,"

"Going behind her back is respectful?" asked Lily.

"No. Well... sort of. He's trying to avoid involving her in Noble politics if he can,"



“Hmmm” murmured Lily non-committedly.

#### Chapter 794 In Apep's Place

“What would you do in Apep's place?” asked Lily carefully.

Kat paused and couldn't help but let the thought, well in Apep's place I'd still be asexual. Part of her wanted to bite down on even that mental response and not let it get to Lily... but Kat let the thought flow. She could practically feel the eye roll coming from Lily as the words went out. “It's no less true... but I do understand it really isn't the answer you want...”

“Honestly... I think I'd take a similar approach to him. No matter how much you might like to hear that. In case you've forgotten, I almost told you to go find someone else. Onl- ok, in large part, due to the fact I can't lie I was able to be more honest about things. I didn't really think it was right to tie myself to you when I don't feel sexual attraction.” Kat felt Lily's annoyance rising, so she continued, “obviously I don't feel that way anymore.

“And look. I can SAY it. It would have been wrong for both of us to try and push you away. The thing is though. I had to LEARN that. It wasn't my first instinct. My first instinct was that because I can't necessarily give you everything you might want, even if you want to argue that I can in fact offer you everything, I'm not sure I'd have agreed or believe you. Now I'm a bit more inclined to. I can see how much us being together means to you. I can feel that a lot of the details I thought were big, aren't really in your mind.

“But it's not like Apep has that sort of perspective. It's not like I'd have that sort of perspective if I was in Apep's place. So... I can't honestly say I'd have done things too differently. Well, I doubt I'd have been quite so cowardly or so ready to summon a demon, but I'd have found someone to trust and investigate. Perhaps I'd be willing to go to my parents about it all first. Or maybe I'd leave a letter for Jara in secret... but I don't think I'd talk to Zuhra about it. What about you?”

Lily bit her lip. Part of her wanted to say she'd just talk it out with Zuhra. She wanted to say that she wouldn't make it so complicated. She wanted to say that she'd act without going through intermediaries. The issue was. Unlike Kat who could only really speculate. Lily could already see herself in Apep's place. She'd been in a similar situation already.

She had continually found reasons not to ask Kat out. Accepting the idea Kat wasn't interested. Thinking of ways to avoid coming out of the closet to Kat. Continually delaying and delaying any sort of proper reveal. She didn't even have other friends to try and subtly find out the answers to her question. Heck, she could have asked Gramps and gotten an answer. Yet she never even properly considered the idea, simply dismissed it like so many others.

Lily sighed as she shifted around to burry her head in Kat's shoulders. Her ears tickled the edge of Kat's mouth, and Lily tried not to let them twitch everywhere as the soft breath from Kat tickled them. “Ugh... I wish I could say I'd talk about it but I'm apparently incapable of approaching things normally. I mean, I couldn't just ask you out. No, I had to wait till I was getting a new body and then ask to bind myself to you forever.

“I really don't know how I managed it looking back. I mean... maybe I was just shooting for the moon? I don't really think I'd accepted that it would never work... or that I could move past my crush on you...”

but I can't really picture my old self properly anymore. I cannot remember what was going through my head that decided this was a good idea. I mean it was the BEST idea, but that's only with hindsight. I don't even think going back in time to convince my past self it really would work would do anything.

"So I guess... I guess I'm really just throwing stones at Apep from my nice comfy glass house. I didn't really think of the 'noble politics' angle... and I can't say I really understand the cultural significance of maids and how appropriate or inappropriate it is to marry someone else's. I just... maybe I just don't like it? Or maybe I see too much of myself in Apep's choice and want to make sure we do well for him?" Lily let out a light huff, "I dunno. This Contract stuff is confusing. I mean... are we obligated to follow it to the letter or do a good job?"

Kat pulled Lily closer and ran her hands along Lily's back. Said wandering hands were followed by Lily's tail, poking them as they shifted around Lily's back. "Personally, I try to do the best I can, but make allowances for malicious compliance. Apep was polite, if clearly quite overwhelmed at the time, and offered us as much support as he felt he could.

"For me... this means a lot. I've seen what the alternatives are. I've been summoned by people who didn't really want to. I've been summoned by an overly formal Queen. I've been summoned by a businessman who was just doing his job. It really is all different. For a lot of them I took a wait and see approach. It also depends on how hard things are.

"Take the first time I participated in that Tournament. I wasn't really planning to go all out. It just sort of happened. With Green going first and performing well, I felt like I could do it too. Then I ended up with what was basically the easiest challenge ever. If you remember, the thing that caused quite a few issues was when the orbs we had to hold were superheated. For me that was basically a joke. After that I was committed. Well, that and Nira was happy to answer a lot of my questions. Even if Kress is a bit of an ass, three out of four is pretty good,"

Lily rubbed her face further on Kat. "You make it sound so simple."

"That's because it is," said Kat. "This is just a fancy version of a job. Even if it's what I enjoy doing... you just have to meet your requirements, and go the extra mile when you think about it. I mean, it's not like I get paid more for a better job... I think? System?"

User Kat is somewhat Correct. It is possible for additional rewards to be handed out by Summoner. It is possible to find 'rewards' during Contracts. It is also possible for rewards to be withheld if the Contract is deemed incomplete by D.E.M.O.N.S even if the Summoner accepts the Contract as done.

"You get that Lily?" asked Kat.

"Yes... and I mean... I guess that all makes sense. I imagine the last part is to prevent demons from deceiving people about their contracts... but wait... that doesn't make sense because demons can fight back and change their contracts... so what's the difference?" asked Lily.

Altering the Contract to suit the User is different to manipulating the Summoner to believe falsehoods about the Contract.

"I'll just say I agree with that," mumbled Lily.

Kat agreed with her girlfriend. It made... enough sense. Seemed a bit of a strange line to draw. "Well... with that out of the way... where do you want to sleep?"

Lily groaned and hugged Kat tightly, "I want to complain and say you should find a proper bed but you're more than comfy enough for me..." Kat of course rewarded this response with head scratches and Lily confirmed this was the correct answer.

Kat glanced up at the tree and wasn't terribly impressed. As she scratched Lily's ears she pondered on how acceptable it would be as a sleeping spot. The answer was not very... but worse came to worst she could hang out in the greenhouse. They surely had some comfy trees. \*Hmm... the ground isn't that bad. The grass is nice and healthy because of the fountain and it's pretty soft... could be better though.\*

[Maybe find a bed then?] was all Lily could offer through the haze of scratches. She had to send that thought mentally as she doubted that she could properly form words at the moment. This lasted for a good while, Kat simply passing the time and Lily enjoying herself immensely. A large part of her was wondering if she would ever need to get intimate with Kat when her cat instincts were strong enough for head scratches to be such a blissful experience.

Eventually the sky started to darken and Kat decided it was time to move and find a proper spot to rest. Lily pouted a bit at the lack of scratches and transformed back into her Memphis form to be carried around. Kat said nothing during the quick dash around the park. Eventually she found a hill that was covered in moss instead of grass. Well, it wasn't much of a hill, but Kat was able to settle herself down and use the small bump as a pillow. Sleep took Lily quickly and Kat... well she had meditation for times like this.

#### Chapter 795 Wasting Time in the Morning

In her meditative state Kat started to feel Lily stirring. She gave it a few more minutes to confirm it wasn't just a brief period of semi-wakefulness like the last two were before bringing herself out of her meditation completely. Kat felt particularly refreshed for some reason. \*Hmm. I wonder if that's simply because I'm getting better at meditation or if it's because I have a water based meditation technique and I'm so close to a very powerful water artifact.\*

Lily heard the thoughts Kat was pondering but wasn't quite awake enough just yet to make any sense of them. She groaned and stretched, unconsciously loosening her control and swapping to her other form. Now human she continued arching her back much further than could be reasonably expected from a human and then continued even further before springing back into Kat and rubbing her face over a large portion of Kat's body before catching herself and blushing a bright red.

"Good morning," said Kat with a big smile on her face.

Apparently this was somehow more embarrassing for Lily who glanced away and gained yet more red in her face. "Um... yes... um... good morning. Um... off to the orphanage?"

Kat shook her head and glanced at the sky. The sun was barely peaking over the horizon. In fact, from where Kat was sitting you couldn't even see it yet, all you could see was the glow it produced peaking into view. "Lily. Even if we're lucky enough to find someone awake they'll be much too busy either hiding from the people doing work, or doing work to get all the kids up and about. I should know. I was the one running about most mornings,"

“Oh... right...” mumbled Lily, ears drooping at the obvious information she’d overlooked. Kat found this adorable and gave her a light peck on the lips. It did not help with the blushing situation but Lily’s ears perked right back up, her tail joining in on the fun as well. Gently swishing from side to side with barely contained happiness.

“So what do you want to do to past the time?” asked Kat.

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“Maybe just... goonadate?” mumbled Lily.

Kat let out a puff of air and pulled Lily in closer for a hug. “Sadly... I don’t think that’s the best idea...”

“Why?” asked a pouting Lily. “Don’t think you can distract me with hugs. I feel like I deserve to know. And hugs. I deserve extra hugs for that answer,”

Kat smiled and tighten her grip on Lily slightly. “Well. First off I have no money that would be accepted here. So for the same reason we didn’t sleep in a hotel, we would also have issues going on a date. Now, I’m sure you’d say that we don’t have to spend money to have a good time on a date. Well the second issue is I have no idea where anything is. I wasn’t paying that much attention while I was flying around, there was plenty of cloud cover and things were far away.

“So chances are... any ‘date’ we might go on would be a lot of walking around the city trying to work out what is what and where interesting things are. Honestly... the best date idea I can come up with would be spending some time flying around together. The problem with that, is it’s quiet tiring for you and we need to go flying towards the orphanage eventually as well. So it’s not even really a date at that point,”

“We could pretend though?” offered Lily.

“Lily. We can hear each other’s thoughts. You’d have figured it out,” said Kat.

“Yes but I could pretend I didn’t” retorted Lily.

“Lily... I feel like indulging in shared delusions where we both know the other is completely aware of it is probably not the best idea. I mean, sure, setting things up beforehand and pretending is fine... but I feel like it’d only cause issues if we both looked the other way for those sorts of things all the time. Feels like a rabbit hole we could get lost in a bit too easily,” explained Kat.

Lily pouted but didn’t dismiss Kat’s ideas. Kat waited a few moments for Lily’s response as she did that... but after a minute of nothing Kat asked, “Would you like to fly around together to pass the time?”

Lily couldn’t help but deflate a bit at the question and answered with, “Honestly... not really? I mean... I’m sure it would be fun... but I can’t help but remember how tiring it is... that really points a dampener on the idea. Honestly it was just the first thing that popped into my head,”

“Hey it’s ok. We should do something date-like together when we get back to Earth. Even if we are a bit limited because of what we look like, we could go for a walk in the woods, or maybe a fly if that’s not too hard on you back on Earth,”

Lily nodded. “Thanks. I mean... it’s not really that big of a deal... we spend a lot of time together anyway... I just... I kinda want at least one proper date so that I can say I’ve gone on one you know? I

understand that it's dumb, and I don't even want it to become a regular thing. I think hanging out with you as a I read is a wonderful way to pass the time. I just... I dunno. Relationship goals or something?"

"Lily that's fine. I may not understand it, or feel like I need you to take me out on a date, but I am perfectly happy to take you on one if that's what would make you happy. Remember, I really don't know what I'm doing. I'm perfectly happy to do the things we used to do, with some added cuddling on top. I do not really need or want for more because I find things quite lovely as they are. Maybe I'll want to do stranger things with you once we've been together for a long time, but for now at least I'd be perfectly happy to just hug you all day and meditate. Maybe practice some martial arts stances... actually hmm..."

Kat suddenly hid her thoughts from Lily, who pouted but that was fine. \*Hmm... would Lily enjoy seeing me perform a bunch of stretches and a few katas? My body likes to keep itself in peak physical condition so it isn't that necessary for me... but I'm sure it couldn't hurt. It's not like I got to use any of my better stuff during the tournament because of that limiter. Hmmm...\*

"Kat what are you thinking?" asked Lily after she decided Kat had more than enough time to plan whatever it was, believing falsely that Kat had sped up her thinking for that particular planning session as the reason for the cut-off.

"Lily. I think I know what we're going to do to pass the time. Quick, change back into Memphis form I need to find a good spot..." said Kat with a grin. Lily wasn't quite sure that was sufficient explanation, but she trusted Kat. Even if she WANTED more it didn't mean she needed it.

A short moment later and Kat was soaring through the sky. She was heading towards the wooded areas near the summit of the mountain. It was a bit too steep, or perhaps too sacred, to build past a certain line. Kat did see a few trails that people walked around on though, and a few guards around the aqueduct openings. She didn't need to bother with them though, so it only took around fifteen minutes of flying to find the perfect spot.

Kat glided down quickly to the small clearing. "Ok, we're here. So Lily, you can either stay or transform, just find a nice place to sit," said Kat.

Lily's tail flicked sharply in annoyance but she nodded. She wasn't sure what Kat had planned but it was starting to bug her that she wasn't being told. Looking around she found a large root sticking out of the ground. It didn't look all that comfortable for a human, but for a small cat, it was a rather large seat. It took her a moment to find a good spot without any large nots to disrupt her before she turned her eyes to Kat.

Kat smiled and removed her outer layer. Lily's eyes instantly went wide as she tried to work out what Kat was doing. Kat of course, was providing a show. She summoned her fans immediately after and started to do a basic set of katas. She started off slowly, trying to make it so her muscles really felt the movements. If they did or not was unknown because they were more than strong enough to support Kat's weight, regeneration aside. It did make her movements supernaturally smooth though, drawing Lily's eyes completely as Kat started to increase her pace. From slow, to quick, to superhuman. Kat's form started to blur a bit in Lily's eyes as Kat reached higher and higher speeds. Snapping into focus at the end of each pose. Of course, that did cause a good deal of movement in other areas when stopped.

[What a show]

## Chapter 796 Flight to the Orphanage

Kat slowed her movements carefully over a few seconds as she wound down from her workout. She'd stopped after her muscles had actually started to regenerate a little bit. Kat was actually quite surprised she managed to do any damage to them at all with just her body and some speed, but she decided it made at least some sense. Once getting to that stage, Kat had decided it was 'good enough' because she wasn't entirely sure if she could gain muscles through training.

On Lily's end of things she was slightly dazed from the sight. Seeing your girlfriend flipping through a myriad of posing while half naked was exciting at the best of times. Doing it at ridiculous speeds while barely sweating was something else entirely. Lily decided that if this didn't count as a date, romance was dead. It totally counted in her book. On an unrelated note she also now had an appreciation for martial arts. No idea where that came from.

Kat breathed out a long smooth breath and found a slight dusting of snow came along with it. \*Hmm. I wonder why that happened. Enough demonic energy in the lungs perhaps? Maybe just in the body in general? More investigation required.\* Kat wasn't terribly bothered by the hit her demonic energy reserves had taken, though it was quite a lot. She'd started burning it to increase her speed somewhere near start and now she was down to twenty percent. Still, that was just for a moment. The combined regeneration from herself and Lily was more than enough to get her back to full in no time.

"Off to the orphanage?" asked Kat.

"Mhm" mumbled Lily, still not completely recovered from the wonderous sight. Kat resummoned her kimono and picked Lily up before taking to the air. Lily had no complaints. Partially because she thought Kat had chosen the correct course of action... but a much larger part was that she'd have agreed to basically anything Kat asked in that moment. A poor decision perhaps, but Lily had never felt unsafe with Kat around and her mind had no fear in simply loosing itself to fantasies with Kat nearby.

The more lewd part of Lily's mind had been having a field day. With the main obstacle, the potential for Kat to find out about her feelings, had been completely destroyed. With their feelings out in the open it was only Lily's sense of propriety. Something that had been taking a good battering recently. Especially with Kat's pushes for Lily to be less concerned about it in her presence... well... Lily's defences could only handle so many strong attacks.

As such, having Kat pull Lily into her chest and take to the sky was just another cue for Lily to get lost in more fantasies. She'd already imagined being 'attacked' by Kat a few times during the performance. Being smothered in boobs, even somewhat modest ones like Kat's, was a perfectly valid way to go. Well, according to Lily's current thoughts now.

.....

Eventually, though it took Lily an embarrassingly long time to recover, she did manage to come back to the present. Lily wiggled slightly in Kat's embrace so that she could look out at the city. If that meant she rubbed more of her scent on Kat in the process... well had to appease those 'pesky' cat instincts somehow.

Lily couldn't stop her eyes widening when she spotted the fact they were nearing their destination. She could see the compound for the 8th of the 10th already. The area looked somewhat old. It was wrong to

say it looked to be in disrepair, but compared to a lot of the other areas of the city they'd seen so far it really had an 'old fashion' type vibe. Most of the stone looked to be discoloured, with edges sanded down from wind and ran over time. Lily's eyes weren't good enough to see the occasional crack or the more frequently repairs over cracks. Still, they were present and certainly changed the vibe of the place. [Apparently I was more out of it than I thought...]

\*Welcome back to the real world Lily. I'm guessing you just realised we're close? I'm not totally sure which building is the orphanage just yet. I have a few guesses but because they don't actually have a backyard I can't be totally certain.\*

Kat was speaking of three buildings that jutted up against the 8th of the 10th's compound wall. The first, Kat was pretty sure was actually an inn. It had a few balconies that overlooked the street and a sign she couldn't properly see hanging at the front. There was two children playing on one of the balconies, but the balconies and rooms seemed to large, and the fact both kids had the same shade of brown hair implied they were siblings.

The next two were harder to tell apart. They were both large buildings with tiny backyards taken up almost entirely by a clothesline. One was one building over from the inn while the other was the last building in the street. They were somewhat plain buildings, but what caught Kat's eyes were the occupants. In both there were a few children, in the closer of the two it was a group of younger kids helping out an adult with the washing. The kids would scrub the clothes down while the adult would hang them up.

\*Bit of a hard task but then again... not like the kids can reach the clothesline either.\*

In the other backyard the clothes had already been hung up and there was now a mix of older and younger kids playing with a jump rope. Well, it wasn't just one rope but three instead. They were using two large ones for multiple people while one other teen stood off to the side jumping with a third smaller one rope. They seemed to be keeping as far away from the clothes as they could... which wasn't quite far enough. The slight breeze would occasionally blow the nearby sheets into the rope's path.

\*Now. One of these two is the orphanage... but perhaps that's not what I need right now.\* Kat took another look around and spotted something even better than the potential orphanages. Two blocks away there was what looked to be an empty lot. Though it wasn't so empty at the moment. A group of children had taken it over and split it up the best they could. One half looked to be a soccer match, while the other half was a group of four squares with one child each. They were passing a ball around, making sure it bounced once first. A small line of kids waiting next to it would cycle in when someone inevitably missed.

\*I bet these kids are part of the orphanage. It's a great place to start our investigation.\* Kat angled herself towards the street near the lot. No sense in dropping straight down on the kiddos. The ages seemed fairly varied. The youngest look to be perhaps five, while the oldest was twelve. Probably. Ages could be hard when it came to unfamiliar children after all. Sylvie was a great example of that.

[What makes you say that? Wouldn't it be better to try and guess which of the buildings is the orphanage and then talk to the kids in the back?]

\*No not at all. Firstly, we don't want the person in charge to break up any conversations. If they decided we were 'bothering the children' or whatever silly thing they got in their heads we'd be in trouble. We want to ask them questions later, so seeing us interrogating children before that would give the wrong impression. That's not even getting into the fact we can cross reference them with the kids better if they don't know.

Secondly, we're approaching them on 'their turf'... sort of. They'll feel a lot more comfortable where they are. Especially if we join the line for the four square ball game, whatever they call it here. We'll look like we're participating, and they'll be more open. They won't be looking over their shoulder afraid of whatever they say getting back to the orphanage director. They'll feel safe telling us what they really think of Zuhra.

I guess the question for you is. Do you want to play around with them as a human or a cat? Both have advantages. If you're human we can get to more kids before overstaying our welcome. I won't just be asking ALL the questions. Alternatively. If you're a cat I have another adorable talking point. You are however more likely to be poked and prodded with a not insignificant chance of having your ears and tail pulled. Then again... might happen in either form. You can just be a lot more direct with your displeasure if you are human.\*

[What do you think they'll react better to?]

\*Not totally sure. I'd say they'd react 'better' to you in cat form, because if I'm carrying something so cute I'm obviously not a scary grown up. But you'd also be very distracting so I might not be able to direct the conversation with something so eye catching in my hands. It's a trade off.\*

#### Chapter 797 Too Cute to be Intimidating

Lily and Kat walked down the alley, both as humans. It didn't take Lily long to decide that it was preferable to being a cat. She could always change later to entertain the kids, but first impressions were a big deal and 'funny cat with horns' is quite interesting, but it's still a thing. Not a person. A child doesn't always think about being careful with their pets. A person with funny ears though. That was someone interesting, perhaps a bit strange, but not someone to play around with too much.

As they rounded the corner though, Kat came face first to a scrappy looking kid with an interesting attire. They had a rather ratty top hat that was more patches than original material. Many of those patches were plain cloth as well and it had collapsed to the left side caving in on itself. The right side was in slightly better condition... but only because they had a painted bit of wood stuck to the side of the hat keeping it standing.

In his hand was a cigar... well... no it was a child's attempt at one. It looked to be a somewhat well made prop. The wrapping was just a tightly wound rag, causing it to be rather oversized, especially for a child's mouth. The end was interesting as well. It seemed to be stuffed with a combination of dried grass, a single stick to give it rigidity, a decent amount of ash to grey it up a bit and a slight dusting of red paint. The fact that paint was mostly on the cloth and extended further back than it should if it were really flames seemed to be lost on the child.

The rest of his outfit wasn't all that interesting. It was a plain brown shirt that looked comparatively new, though it may have just been the colour hiding the stains. His pants were sturdy leather things that



had seen better days. They had a leather patch over each knee and the side of the left one had been sewn together in a bit of a patch job. It had clearly been caught on something and torn.

The kid himself wasn't terribly clean either. The rest of the group, from what Kat had seen, were actually quite well cared for. This one though had dirt in his hair, dirt on his face, dirt on his feet, because apparently shoes weren't standard for him. There was also a very noticeable scar on his arm. It was a long gash on his forearm that looked like he got it blocking a knife.

Kat almost expected him to start speaking with an old timey gangster accent... but it was exactly the same as Apep's just perhaps a little less refined. "What do ya want?"

"Why are you assuming we want something?" asked Kat still trying to figure out exactly who this person was and how they fit into things. \*Hmm. I don't think Gramps would ever let a kid seriously dress like that... so we're already operating outside of my experience. Joy.\*

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"Eh. Everyone wants something, the fact you is confused is saying a lot more about you than it does about me. Still... I guess that isn't what you're asking. The answer to that well... you don't look familiar, I know all the people around here. That means you don't live here, and so, I ask, what are ya here for?"

[I bet he's just repeating things he thinks sounds cool.] "You saw us landing in the street over didn't you?" offered Lily as an alternative answer.

The boy flinched but admitted to nothing, "Think what ya want. I really do know everyone around these parts and you ain't from them. So I'll ask one more time. What do ya want?"

\*How do you want to play this Lily? This is a lot more formal than I wanted the meeting with the kids to go. I was imagining getting a couple of eight years old girls talking about their pretty big sis that was going to be married until suddenly she wasn't. Instead we're getting grilled by a kid trying to pretend to be a crime boss.\*

[It's not like this is in my wheelhouse either Kat. Still... I say we don't lead with the papers. We say we're looking for information on someone and see how he reacts. Then if he goes 'what's it to ya' or something, then we can say we're here on someone's orders, and then finally if he asks for proof of that, we show him the papers.]

\*Sounds like a good idea as any.\* "We're here for information. We're looking into somebody who used to stay at the orphanage nearby," said Kat.

The boy looked Kat up and down before taking his 'cigar' out of his mouth and pretending to get rid of the ashes. "Hmm... and you decided to approach kids for that? If this is all official like surely it would be better to go to the matron?"

"As somebody who grew up in an orphanage myself I know that sometimes the best place to get good information is the other kids. It's why I was looking around for where you all would likely be playing during the day. We'll still visit the matron of course, but not till after," said Kat.

The boy nodded as if this made a great deal of sense to him. Despite that, the slight twitching of his lips and the fact he wasn't able to hold Kat's eyes made it less clear just how much the kid figured out.

Probably just thinks it sounds correct enough. "Well, seems like this is has the chance of becoming a real conversation. You can call me..." the kid paused for a few seconds, "Watcher."

\*Alright kid. I get that you don't want me to use your real name but you are no older than fourteen. You should have come up with something that sounded more like a name. Even if it was still probably fake.\*  
"You can call me Kat then," said Kat.

Watcher glanced from Kat to Lily, eyes specifically tracking to Lily's ears. "Shouldn't she be cat?"

"No, you can call me Lily," responded Lily. To which Watcher's eyes moved to the very obvious flower detailing on Kat's outfit.

"Right..." said the kid uncertain of what to make of the duo's names, not able to realise they were both just giving their real names. "Well, as I already said, I know everyone. So who exactly are you looking for. I can think of a payment later..."

\*Should we mention we don't have money while he's still thinking?\*

[No, definitely not. Why would you think that was a good idea?]

\*Seemed polite.\*

[Just... just no.]

"We're looking into a girl, or perhaps young woman, called Zuhra," explained Kat.

Watcher nodded, "Yes, yes I remember her. Wasn't she meant to be getting married or something?"

Kat nodded, "Indeed, though 'meant to' is the key here. Her fiancé died and it's actually him we're trying to find out about for the most part. Zuhra is more a secondary concern," \*PRAISE THE SYSTEM I COULD SAY THAT\* "the thing is we don't even know who he was supposed to be. We just have Zuhra's name, at the moment."

Watcher tapped his chin a few times carefully. Then he ran a finger down the length of his cigar. Then he fiddled with the brim of his hat. After that he straightened a non-existent tie. Really at this point it was more than clear he was trying to buy time for some reason. Kat gave him a few more moments of fiddling with various things, but put a stop to it when he was checking the bottom of his feet for whatever reason. "You have no idea who he is do you?"

Watcher winced. "Well... no... I mean... Zuhra never mentioned his name exactly... but I do know he's real... probably. She was always somewhat cagy about who he was... but... she got a few expensive gifts from him over a couple birthdays. Um... um... I don't remember what the first one was... but she had a very nice handheld mirror. A fancy dress... maybe more than one... I think she grew out of one? Um... a ring... I think that was the engagement present... and two necklaces. One that was SUPER fancy. Not the sort of thing you'd just wear around town freely. And um... the other one was a carved wooden locket... I think it opened? She'd always hold it when she was nervous but I dunno if it had something in it..."

\*You know. I wish I had a proper concept of what everything was worth here. I mean, as dirty as the kid looks he's clearly not starving. With the water here nobody should ever be short on food. I just don't know how that translates to jewellery or mirrors. I mean. Is it more likely Zuhra's old love interest was a wealthy merchant boy? Or more like the heir of the 8th. \*

[Well. Logic dictates there are more wealthy merchant heirs to go around... so I want to say that... but... I'd give it about an 80% chance that she was set to be married to the heir of the 8th.]

\*Welp. I have no idea how to break that one to Apep.\*

Chapter 798 Who Watches the Watcher

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With Kat's thoughts at a completely normal speed the 'silence' stretched out for a while causing 'Watcher' to pout and glare at the two before saying, "So what are you gonna give me for that information?" as a way to get the older pair's attention.

Kat turned and frowned at the question. [Hmm... you think I could offer like an hour's worth of rides? Letting the kids fly around is a pretty unique experience and he does seem to be more of a caretaker than a bully. I bet he'll go for it]

\*That sounds like a lot of work for you though...\*

[I'll be fine. Two small kids should be doable. Maybe. One at a time certainly. We'll just have to play it by ear but it'll keep the kids busy, happy, and you can use the time to ask our friend 'Watcher' more questions]

\*Fine. I'm not exactly happy about it. But fine.\*

.....

[Thanks Lily!]

Lily pouted, not entirely sure what she was being thanked for but entirely too happy to receive praise from Kat. She still had mixed feelings about it sometimes. Sure Kat was the one she loved, but was it really ok for her to be THIS happy with just a bit a praise? She didn't know. She also wasn't really paying attention when Kat said, "I can give the kids a chance to find out what it's like to fly for an hour or so. I'll carry them around, do a few loops and drop them back off. I can carry one, maybe two if they're smaller, at a time,"

Watcher's eyes lit up like Christmas lights in December. Brilliant and dazzlingly bright with a big smile on his face. For all of about half a second, when he realised how he must have looked and tried to close his face off again. It didn't really work. The corners of his mouth were still twitching upwards and his eyes were still nearly as bright as before. It was only really the hat he'd pulled further down over his face that did anything at all to disguise things. If he wasn't still looking up at Kat it might have worked but he hadn't actually changed that.

"I mean... I guess that'd be cool. For the little kids that is," answered Watcher, trying and failing to keep his own interest from leaking into his voice. Kat just smiled pleasantly at him, hand twitching at her side as she tried to resist giving him a pat o the head for being adorable. Still, in the end she just nodded and walked past him towards the other kids. She'd get her chance when she gave him a chance to fly later.

With Kat walking away, Watcher's eyes "So, what are you going to do?"

Lily shrugged, not wanting to seem to eager for new information. \*Now how do I want to play this? Maybe try and get him asking me questions? See if that leads anywhere? He didn't really seem to know a tonne about Zuhra but maybe we can find out other important things like when exactly the fiancé died, what merchant company he might have worked for. Maybe things about the matron? I think he said matron specifically earlier...\*

"I guess I'll just kill time until Kat's finished playing with the kids. What about you? Do you have any questions for me while we wait?" asked Lily.

"Um... why do you have ears?" asked Watcher.

Lily grinned, "The same reason you have ears I'm sure. To hear things with,"

"No, no... I mean... why are yours on top of your head?" retorted Watcher with a pout.

"Well... where else should they be? I feel like I'd look rather funny with large triangles sticking out the side of my head," revealed Lily with a grin.

Watcher huffed, making it quite clear he knew Lily was playing with him. Lily, for her part, was using this as a chance to take a bit of revenge for forcing them into 'paying' for information and occupying Kat with something for an hour. That was an hour she could have spent in Kat's arms, or leaning on Kat. \*I might have a problem... hmm... nah.\*

"Grrr," grumbled Watcher, "No I mean why don't you have human ears? Why are they all furry?"

"I've got a tail too," said Lily bringing her tail properly to the side, "but that's because I'm not human, I'm a Memphis Beastkin,"

Watcher frowned. "You're weird,"

Lily rolled her eyes, "I'm weird but Kat's not?"

"You're both weird... but she's kinda cool I guess. You're annoying though!" said Watcher triumphantly, as if he'd just uncovered a major secret. Lily felt her eye twitch slightly. She wasn't truly annoyed that Watcher wasn't fond of her, but it was the first time in quite a while she was insulted so directly, interactions with Jara notwithstanding.

"Sure kid," said Lily letting her fangs show, "now did you have any other questions?"

Watcher's face scrunched up like he ate a lemon, but he held his tongue. Impressing Lily somewhat. That he didn't rise to the bait at all showed good control for someone his age. He didn't exactly hide his distaste, but it was certainly better than many other responses. Eventually, he seemed to find a question, "Did you grow up in an orphanage too?"

"No, I've still got both of my parents," answered Lily.

Watcher nodded as if expecting this before he took in a deep breath, "What... um... what's it like? I mean... to um... to have parents. I mean... hmm... you... well you and Kat are friends right? So you... you'd probably know best the difference and um... how to explain it right?"

Lily sighed. \*Oof had to ask the heavy questions.\*

[What did he ask?]

\*He asked what it's like to have parents.\*

[Oh. Oof. Yeah... um... I can't help you with that one]

\*I'll figure something out. I... I don't really know where to start. Then again... perhaps I can ramble.\*

"That's a hard question to answer because it's easy for me to turn it back and say 'what's it like without parents' and you'd probably struggle much like I would. It's... hard to pinpoint the big differences but... I think the main thing is attention.

"Good attention, bad attention, attention you don't want but maybe you need. When you have parents, you are a much larger part of their mind. Even if one or both of them work jobs. It's sort of hard to explain... and it's not always better to have parents, but... I think attention is probably the biggest thing,"

Watcher frowned and said, "I... I don't get it,"

Lily tried not to sigh, and failed. \*Ok how do I word this into something he can understand.\* "Right... um... hmm... how do I explain this. Ok. For parents, especially when they only have one child, that child takes priority. That's the ideal and most parents can manage it fairly well. However for the matron... she can't really play favourites. She might try a little, or might try not to, but she has to watch so many kids all the time that none of you get a chance to stand out unless you're in trouble.

"Which... I guess sometimes that happens to kids with parents too... but hmm... maybe that wasn't a good explanation..." Lily tapped her foot, tail swinging sharply behind her. "Ok think of it like this. It's a bit like what you do for the other kids. You watch. Except they have to watch a lot fewer kids so they always have an eye on you. They'll be watching when you play, they'll make sure you're always fed, they'll hug you when you scrape your knee.

"Unlike the matron though. These things happen automatically, almost as soon as an issue arises. Quite frequently they're just... there. Even if you don't want them to be. Does... does that make sense?"

Watcher nodded, but he still had a frown on his face. "I... I don't know that I actually like the sound of that..."

Lily shrugged, "It's the same for Kat. I think it might have something to do with the fact you both stepped up into leadership roles for the younger kids. You'd probably find it stifling, at least at the start, and maybe forever. It's a very different lifestyle. The thing is... it depends how long you knew your parents.

"Kat never knew her parents, and doesn't remember them so she never wanted to be adopted. Some of the other kids though, they DO remember and they miss the feeling of comfort and safety having parents around all the time brings. For them... not to say you aren't doing a good job... but you're more of a temporary replacement, just like the matron, but if you never remember them in the first place... well there isn't anything to replace is there?"

Chapter 799 Food for the Kiddies!

Back to Kat

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In the end, Lily didn't really get any more information. Subtle questions about the matron was mostly met with confusion. The matron was the matron as far as Watcher was concerned. Even pinning down how old the matron was didn't seem to be in the cards. The again, kids weren't exactly good with those kinds of things if they didn't know the answer off the top of their heads. Still, Kat was a big hit with the kids. As they headed off to the orphanage, the smaller kids were all smiles.

Actually, that was the one bit of information Lily had managed to gather. The truth was that technically both buildings were part of the orphanage. One of the buildings held the few older kids at was treated as sort of a halfway between living on your own and living in the orphanage. The kids there were still checked up on quite regularly, but they were expected to provide their own money for food, keep the place clean, and get along with each other. The matron or one of the staff would come around once every third day or so just to make sure nothing major was happening and leave the teens to it.

Part of Kat wanted to ask them a few questions as well, but she decided to head to see the matron first. They'd put that off a bit already and had some context so they weren't just going in blind. Perhaps it wouldn't feel necessary. Then again... if those teens were expected to provide money for food, it was entirely possible, even likely, that they wouldn't be home at the moment. Assuming it wasn't a weekend or whatever the equivalent was.

It was only a short walk to the orphanage and Kat lead the charge, knocking heavily on the wooden door to the front of the building. A few moments later it was opened a crack and a younger girl with black hair done up in pigtails peaked out at them. "Hello? What are you here for?" though it was a bit muddled. The girl seemed to be missing a few teeth at the moment and Kat could hear both versions overlapping a bit.

"Hi, we're here to see the matron," said Kat gently.

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The girl nodded and threw open the door before sprinting down the hallway off to the side. The entrance was a very small room with a reception desk and basically nothing else. As the pair followed down the hall, they could see that the 'wall' behind the reception desk was barely qualified to be such. It was just a line of planks with some wallpaper over it. Behind it was a large dining room with two big tables taking up all the space, there wasn't even space to walk between them, the two middle rows of chairs pressing against each other.

Luckily there was some space to one side, and the girl was running along it. Little feet pattering against the smooth stone floor. She stopped at a door and knocked before yelling, "MATRON SOME GIRLS WANT TO SEE YOU!"

There was a slight shuffling of sound behind the door that Kat could hear, it sounded a lot like a knife cutting into something just before one large 'thunk' and a pause, "Are they looking for me specifically and is it one of the children or some adults?"

The young girl turned around and looked at Kat and Lily really hard for a few seconds, "I think they might be adults?"

“What?” yelled the matron.

“I THINK THEY MIGHT BE ADULTS” answered the girl, loud enough to be heard by the matron this time. Hopefully.

“Ah, alright dear they can come through and you can go back to playing,” said the matron.

“OK!” cheered the girl who bolted past Kat and Lily without a care in the world. Kat and Lily shared a glance and opened the door to reveal a rather cramped kitchen. A large oven took up most of the space in the corner, with an ‘island’ bench that didn’t really leave much space for walking and a counter top. A sink was pressed up next to the door outside and seemed to be fed with a house instead of a normal tap. The room was completely filled with cupboards in every bit of spare space.

The matron was in the middle of carving up a leg of ham. Presumably for some sandwiches considering the loaves of bread sitting nearby and an assortment of vegetables sitting in a few crates. It looked to be mostly lettuce, with a few tomatoes and other things.

Kat and Lily could now understand why Watcher couldn’t give an age for the matron. She looked an odd mix of mature and properly old. Her hair was beautiful. A chocolate waterfall that extended to her shoulders with a slight wave to it and a few lone streaks of silver that showed her age. Her arms were muscled, veins starting to show but not a wrinkle in sight. Her legs were covered by the grey dress she wore, and revealed nothing... but her face was another matter. Only her eyes were bright and lively. The rest of her face had a huge number of wrinkles all pulled and drooping. It really was an odd sight, and Kat was guessing that wasn’t entirely natural.

“Well dear, oh sorry, dears,” said the matron as she turned around to see her guests, “I’m just doing up some lunch for the children. If your business is urgent you can speak now or you can wait till I finish,”

Kat glanced at Lily and stepped forward. “Actually, if you don’t mind I’m happy to help with prep. I grew up in a place like this and helped out whenever Gramps let me... which was... not as often as I’d like but my skills haven’t rusted,”

“If you want. Get started on the bread. Keep the slices to about 2-3cms. I’ll be putting on plenty else so they don’t need to be extra thick. Still, can’t have them too thin or else the sandwich will fall apart. Bread knife is in the third draw just to the right of the bread,” said the matron even as she turned back to her own work.

Kat opened the drawer and found three bread knives. Shrugging she grabbed the first one and got started, quickly slicing her way through the pile of bread and not worrying about using her extra speed for it. This meant it took only a few minutes to slice through all three loaves of bread. Kat let the knife drop, “Ok done,”

The matron paused in her slicing to look over at Kat. She raised an eyebrow at the sight of the perfectly sliced bread that was in fact, done. The matron was expecting perhaps Kat had finished just the first loaf, but to see everything done instead was quite the feat. “I see... well in that case get on the lettuce. Don’t bother with the first layer or two, you can put that into the scrap bin under the sink. We’re not so short on it we need to ration. Just make sure to wash it all and then separate it,”

Kat nodded and got to work on her new job. There was a lot more lettuce than bread and she quickly found that while she could use enhanced speed for it, she actually had to be a little bit careful. Apparently, the small layer of demonic energy that helped stop things from just falling apart didn't interact all that well with layers of lettuce she was trying to separate. Sure she was still faster but it wasn't blindingly fast this time.

While Kat was making quick work of the lettuce Lily was standing off the side awkwardly. There wasn't really that much space in the kitchen, and even if she was confident enough to help, which she really wasn't, Lily knew well enough that she'd take up too much room in the kitchen if she set up her own cutting station. Well, that or she'd get in Kat's way. See, Kat was running around the kitchen isle, because there wasn't enough space to sneak behind the matron.

So Lily could either use the spot on the bench filled with bread, the kitchen isle Kat was constantly running through, the spot where the matron currently was or perhaps the place where the crates of food was stacked. Really there were just no good spots so she just stood in the corner making herself as small as possible... in human form. Lily let her hand smack into her face and transformed, now truly taking up only a small amount of space.

Taking a glance out at the fast working pair of matron and Kat, Lily decided that if she couldn't help, she could make sure not to collapse later by sleeping now. So she just curled up into a nice little ball and let herself drift to sleep. It wasn't even that hard to tune out the constant stream of water or the slight sounds of a knife carving into pig flesh. Little weird with advanced hearing, but not that hard to tune out.

#### Chapter 800 Meeting with the Matron Part

"Wake up," said Kat into Lily's ear.

Luckily for them both, this time Lily wasn't in a particularly deep sleep. Her left eye cracked open to gaze at a table full of nicely prepared sandwiches. Lily hopped down from Kat's arms and transformed back into her human form. "Sorry. I'm not all that confident in my knife skills so I just sort of fell asleep... I hope you don't mind..."

The matron waved Lily off, "Oh it's no problem dear, your friend here saved me probably an hour's worth of work so it's really no trouble. Normally I'd call in Colin to help towards the end once the meat and lettuce is prepped but I got it all done already. Hmm... give me a moment,"

The matron moved to the back door and yelled out, "Sharleen! Foods ready when you want to serve it. I've got two nice ladies here with me that helped me get it done early. No rush, but you call everyone in whenever!"

Once the back door was closed she turned back to the demonic pair and asked, "Would either of you like any a bit for yourselves?" as she was pulling out a small plate and grabbing her own two slices.

"No thanks," said Kat, "I don't really eat much and I'm not hungry at the moment,"

Lily was about to similarly deny the need for sustenance when her stomach growled rather loudly. Lily went red and buried her face in Kat's shoulder as Kat held back a set of giggles. "I see your stomach has spoken dear," said the matron grabbing out a second plate.



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With food in hand the matron passed off a plate before opening the door and heading back into the hallway. She stepped into a side door leading to a staircase to the second floor. Then to the third... and then the fourth. You might think they stopped there, but instead the matron reached up to a small string on the ceiling and pulled it down. A moment later a ladder slid down and the trio marched further upwards.

It turned out the matron's office was the attic. The ceiling was low and the only reason Kat could stand at all was that the peak of the roof was sufficient in height. A slight move to the left or right would see her horns poking through the ceiling very easily. Lily wasn't too much better off now that she had her ears. It wasn't quite as bad as it was for Kat, but as she was forced to stand off to the side so Kat could take the middle it was still closer than everyone would like.

The matron for her part had to bend right down to get around the desk and into her chair. She slipped into it somewhat heavily and turned to face Kat and Lily. "Sorry I don't really have other chairs up here. I'm not even entirely sure how this all got up here originally, just that it is the same office used by my predecessor. Feel free to sit on the floor if you like. It's mostly clean,"

Kat took a glance at the floor and shrugged, sitting down without any real hesitation. It was a simple matter to resummon her clothes if necessary, though it probably wouldn't be. The floor was clean after all and not much stuck to Kat. Lily bit her lip slightly but seeing Kat take a seat so quickly decided to do the same, placing her plate on the floor next to her as well.

"Now that we're all settled can I ask what you were after? Oh and my name is Theresa," said the matron, now identified as Theresa.

"Well..." Kat glanced at Lily, "We were wondering if you could tell us a bit about Zuhra?"

Theresa's lips tightly slightly at the name, "Hmm... can I ask if this is official in some capacity?"

Kat nodded, "Yes and we do have the paperwork to prove it,"

Theresa nodded and asked, "I see... can I ask if she's in trouble at all?"

Kat shook her head quickly as Lily grabbed a bite of her sandwich, "No she's not in trouble at all. She's just..." Hmm... how do I say she's a potential marriage candidate for the heir to the 3rd of the 10th... hmm... that could work... "potentially moving to a higher position and we're doing a bit of a background check you could say."

"I see... so who exactly are you working for?" asked Theresa.

"Are you willing to keep this somewhat quiet?" asked Kat. Theresa nodded quickly, "right well officially we are here on behalf of the heir of the 6th but I am in actuality employed by the 3rd." Praise technicalities!

"I see. Papers?" asked Theresa, when Kat handed them over without any issue Theresa gave them a quick scan before handing them back. "Thank you for that. It's not that you don't seem like nice girls but you can never be too careful. I know my predecessor had a few horror stories passed down to her about

why you always check papers... I'm not sure if you want me to get into them... but needless to say I listened."

Kat shrugged but Lily was already in the process of nodding. Lily paused partway to glance at Kat who glanced back and shrug. "It's up to you," said Kat.

"Um... while Kat might not want to... I kinda do? It sounds interesting so I'd like to hear it if you don't mind," said Lily.

"It's no trouble really. With lunch done I shouldn't be too busy so I can spare the time. As to those stories... well... perhaps I'll explain a lighter one. You see a group of boys were pranked quite thoroughly by some of the orphanage kids. So they dressed up all officially and asked for all the information they could get on the perpetrators. Once that was done, they worked out who they didn't get along with in the orphanage and hatched a giant plan to get back at them. In the end, they set up a haunted house and had a slightly innocent third party offer to pay the kids to clean it.

"A few hours later, a group of four boys come running back to the orphanage screaming, fake blood that was really tomato juice on their clothes, a bunch of cobwebs stuck to their hair, and mud all the way up their pants. It was somewhat funny... but a little too far. The boys had nightmares for months afterwards," the matron paused. "I'm sure you can see how it could have been much worse,"

Lily gulped and nodded. Theresa smiled and said, "Yes that's the more fun version of those stories. Still, it's fun to tell. I'm not the best at it, Sharleen actually is. She can do the whole atmosphere really well and likes to do a bit of a production during the day of the dead when she can."

The moment stretched on for a little until Kat broke the silence by asking, "So what can you tell us about Zuhra?"

Theresa let out a long breath of air before taking a bite of her sandwich, "Where to begin. Well, the start obviously but truth be told I don't REALLY want to start there. Still, I suppose you'll need to hear about it eventually and might as well get it all over with. It was about a year after I took over as matron actually and I think this was the first truly tragic accident I encountered.

"See, it's not all that uncommon for us to take in children shortly after they are weaned from their mothers. It's sad but a lot of girls just aren't ready for it or don't want the child so we take them in. Other times accidents happen but they aren't quite to the scope this was... see..." Theresa swallowed heavily.

"You see, Zuhra's family were a family of bakers. A rather innocuous profession perhaps, but they came from a long line of bakers and it was their downfall. Now, this is what I've heard second hand and all pieced together after the fact but it makes sense to me, and my brother, who is also a baker, confirmed this certainly was possible. Their house was an old one, and normally that wouldn't be so bad, but they had a basement where they stored a lot of ingredients.

"Well, one morning after the ovens were lit, a part of the floor collapsed and a huge bag of flour was thrown when Zuhra's father fell. If you know anything about flour... well... you might be able to guess what happened next. It exploded not moments later. This chained into a much larger issue because it took out the rest of the floor and while the oven wasn't technically over the basement it was close. The

explosion took out the rest of the supports and it leaned over dumping burning logs straight into the supplies and well... everything else went up.

“A few hours later, a distraught fire chief handed me Zuhra. Burns all across her back, hair hastily slice off where it caught fire, and her whole family dead. I think she might have been five or six at the time? I don't actually know her birthday exactly... but... she lost her parents, her older brother, and her grandparents in a single night. That's how she came to live here with me...”