

## DEMONS 841

### Chapter 841 Catching up with Gramps Part

Kat sucked in a deep breath as she tried to steel herself. "Well... um... see... well a lot happened... and there were some other things... but um... it turns out that... hmm... turns out that I... that I'm dating Lily," managed Kat finally.

Gramps walked forward and gave Kat a heavy slap on the shoulder. It wasn't painful, physically anyway but Gramps' face was set into a frown. Kat had a moment of panic as Gramps said, "That was pathetic," Kat felt her heart freeze, "what sort of admission is that?" wait what? "that was weak Kat. Do you love this woman or not?"

Kat glared back down at Gramps for a moment and let her passion for Lily fill her. Her eyes burned purple, demonic energy leaking from the sides. Purple markings on her horns lit up and her wings flared. "Of course I do!"

"Then own it," said Gramps forcefully. "Just like you are now. My eyes might not be as bright now that my own love has passed, but you can bet your ass I took every chance I could to talk about her when I was younger. I still take most of those chances. I'll admit it is a little surprising... but I've never known you to be so timid about something. Tell me, you were scared to admit your feelings clearly but... what would you have done if Lily got hurt?"

"Terrible things," were the words that leaked out of Kat's mouth dripping with venom and demonic energy. "Truly terrible things,"

"See, that's the sort of certainty you need when admitting your feelings Kat. Even to unrelated parties. Perhaps it's different for young people these days but I loved the chance to gloat about my wife. It's much better then gloating about my own accomplishments. So tell me, how exactly did this all come about? I'll admit it's a bit of a surprise to me," said Gramps.

"Why is that?" asked Kat.

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"Unlike your own... sexuality I suppose you can call it, I didn't notice Lily had a crush on you. I wonder if it's due to her skill at hiding things or because I simply didn't know her as long... how did you both manage to figure everything out?" asked Gramps.

"It... well... it was a bit of a thing... um... hmm..." Gramps raised an unamused eyebrow, "No I'm not embarrassed it's just... I'm not sure where to start. A lot of things sort of all came together and it's difficult to know when to start..." explained Kat.

"The beginning tends to be a good place I find," offered Gramps.

"Yeah laugh it up Gramps..." said Kat. Gramps decided that was a great queue to laugh of course. Letting out a sigh Kat continued, "See... I'm not sure if I should start with the stuff that happened before Lily met me. It's a bit of a story and it's really more hers to tell... but it's kind of important. Then again... if it's just about how we got together that can be started earlier... but how much earlier is a bit of a question,"

"Wherever you feel comfortable Kat. This is your relationship we're talking about," said Gramps calmly.

"Hmm... I guess I'll just say that Lily found me rather attractive since she's known me-"

"Of course" snorted Gramps playfully.

Kat gave Gramps a quick glare. "As I was saying, apparently I'm quite attractive to her," Gramps rolled his eyes but stayed quiet, "but she didn't really have a crush on me till I started helping her out with the bullies at school. Still after what happened with her last crush she pushed that all down and decided we could just be friends.

"Then I did a Contract that really only I could do at the time and got two favours from the demon system, D.E.M.O.N.S and I could use them for basically whatever I wanted. In the end I thought they would be best used to change what race Lily is, and maybe Sylvie when she gets older as well."

"Isn't that kinda racist?" asked Gramps jokingly?

"Well first off no. If you can be a magic space elf you'd pick magic space elf. Humans are objectively weaker at a base level. This isn't some barely relevant difference like skin colour. Almost all of the other races she could chose had something innately magical about them and different lifespans. That last part is particularly important because I'm quite likely to be functionally immortal, and even if I don't quite get there my lifespan is already measured in thousands of years," said Kat a little sharply.

"Sorry, I was just messing with you. You're treating this quite seriously. I know I said to be confident... but you can have a bit of fun with it as well," suggested Gramps.

"I'll keep it in mind," said Kat curtly. "Anyway, as I was saying that seemed to be the best use of them. I made the offer of magic to Lily and she jumped at it... but buried amongst the frankly ridiculous number of options Lily managed to find a somewhat experimental one that would allow her to live as long as I do, and connect us permanently so we can hear each other's thoughts. It also gives her access to three kinds of magic which is a lot. There wasn't anything that gave MORE but I think there was a few that would also give three...

"It took her weeks of searching to find this particular race. I'm not sure when exactly she noticed it... but eventually it became too good a chance for her to pass up. Despite all the worry she had... she decided she had to try. From what I've gathered... she tried despite the fact that she was all but certain it would end horribly, and...

"Well the reason I've been able to dedicate myself so fully to Lily isn't just the strength of my feelings or the new realisation about my sexuality. It's because... well you know how I can't lie?" Gramps nodded, "Yeah... I tried to say that it'd be better that Lily found someone else, or that I'd be happy for her if she found someone else... and I was physically incapable of saying it. I was incapable of lying and I've never been happier for it...

"So... once that was established I put my own concerns on the table, that I'm not sexually attracted to her or anyone else. That she'd need to be the one to push our relationship along... though that part seems to have been a lie but whatever I didn't realise how shy she'd be about some things despite dating. Still... I was quite worried I wouldn't be able to give her everything she'd want... but well...

"The bond helps. I can push my feelings through the bond so Lily can feel them properly and she can do the same for me. It gives us both a way to know that we really do care for each other. I'll never be attracted to her the way... and that's something we've both managed to accept, surprisingly easy actually,"

"Hmm... that sounds lovely. What problems are you having though? It's good to talk them through," said Gramps.

Kat let out a short huff, "Well... I think the biggest one is that... despite how we've settled into things... there are times where Lily doesn't seem to think she deserves the love I do have for her. She also tends to act as if I do find her sexually attractive..."

"I mean maybe it is just embarrassment but a good example is that she doesn't really like wearing revealing outfits even when there isn't really anyone around except me. I just can't understand why. It's not going to change the way I look at her..."

"Perhaps she's worried you'll find something you hate or worse, are disgusted by?" suggested Gramps.

"What? That's silly!" retorted Kat.

"Hmm. Perhaps it is but that doesn't mean she isn't worried. I would say it isn't about being sexy or not at all... I would hazard a guess it's more of an issue with comparisons. She evidently finds you attractive in a wide variety of ways, mind and body. I suspect she is constantly finding herself coming up short. While it might not matter if you find her attractive... she feels self-conscious about the fact she is less attractive than you are," suggested Gramps.

"Is she less attractive than I am?" asked Kat, "It's really hard for me to tell."

Gramps let out a pained groan. "Kat. I am so much older than the both of you I cannot see either of you as anything but children. Furthermore... neither of you look anything like my wife so I probably wouldn't want to risk betting on either side anyway.

"It doesn't really matter anyway though. From the sounds of it, Lily could be the most attractive woman in the world and still have this issue. It isn't a matter of her true attractiveness, it's the fact she doesn't find herself attractive and assumes everyone else must compare favourably to her. It's a mental issue probably stemming from her past. It's something that will be hard for her to get over. It's not normal to find yourself sexually attractive so... she'll likely always consider herself inferior unless you can smash that idea somehow,"

#### Chapter 842 Catching up with Gramps Part

Kat frowned. It wasn't exactly a pleasant description of the situation from Gramps... but it did seem scarily accurate. "I think you might be right Gramps... I don't really like it... well not that you were correct... just that the situation I see that I don't like is being confirmed. Still... I don't know how to fix something like that... do you have any ideas?"

"Nothing guaranteed... I know when you are in a straight relationship that sort of thing is more easily dealt with. Most women struggle to measure how attractive they really are, same as most men... the issue you face is that Lily has both a better and worse idea. Better because she actually knows what makes a woman attractive, at least to her. She can judge herself based on her own tastes quite easily..."

"But on the other hand, she'll almost certainly never find herself attractive. Not the way she can find other people attractive. It's just not how it works for most people. I went over it a bit already... but what you would normally do is point out the fact you aren't dating X person who is supposedly more attractive. Seeing as you don't lust after anyone you can't use it as a compelling argument.

"You could try the angle of 'it doesn't bother me what you look like' which... while likely true probably sends the wrong message at this point. She already doesn't think she looks great, so instead of thinking you mean exactly what you say... she'd probably jump to, 'you're not very attractive but that doesn't bother me' which is not what you want at all...

"Hmm... didn't she get a new body though? With the whole race change thing," Kat nodded, "Ok. And she picked it all out?" Kat nodded again, "I'd probably focus on that. Point out that she's one of the lucky few people to choose what she looks like in totality. Bring up the fact that with countless possibilities at her finger tips she looks the way she does now by choice.

"Now, that might cause issues... but Lily is a smart girl. I'm sure she thought about it quite a lot. Lean not on how pretty she is, but that she chose this. That she should be comfortable with her own body because it is exactly as she wishes it to be," explained Gramps.

"So... that's your recommendation?" asked Kat hopefully.

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Gramps sighed though, not quite able to commit to it. "I suppose it is... but Kat please understand I'm just giving you the best advice I can with my own experience. I've never dated a man, and I've certainly never been a lesbian. Then add on top of that the fact your asexual and you've already moved out of my personal experience. That's not even including all the magical stuff Kat.

"Perhaps just making use of the key factor in any relationship. Understanding, or perhaps, compromise and understanding. I've told you how best I think you might go about it... but ultimately just sitting down and taking some time to speak with Lily might yield better results in the end. That's a distinct possibility,"

Kat pouted but Gramps pointedly ignored the look. "The thing is Kat... this is your girlfriend, and hopefully partner for life. I can give you suggestions... but it's like asking a boat captain for advice on how to fly a plane. Sure some of the basics are similar, and maybe that captain had a chance to see how an old pilot did his job... but he's never been a plane pilot. He can only give so much instruction,"

"I know... I know... I just don't want to screw things up. I think I'm doing alright... but my biggest worry right now is Lily's feelings of inadequacy I think. It's the most obvious at least. I can't judge how... intimate... we should be or what a good pace for that sort of thing is... though I'm working on trying to make sure she's always comfortable around me now.

"I think I've mostly gotten her through the 'yes you're actually dating me stage' at the start she was still quite scared or perhaps ashamed whenever it came to her more... forward thoughts. And normally it wasn't anything too bad... but she's trained herself to push them down. I know it was so I wouldn't figure it out... but now she doesn't need to do that and she's been getting better in that regard.

"So, I guess I'm just looking for advice where I can... I mean... I've never done this before... and ideally, I'll never have a second shot at it either. I mean sure I'll forgive mistakes and so will Lily... but that's all part of the same story in the end. I try not to let it worry me often because Lily would be able to tell... but I do still worry," said Kat.

"Hmm? Why can't she hear your thoughts now?" asked Gramps.

"Oh, it's because she's asleep still. I can also block my thoughts and emotions but sometimes I think the emotions at least might be able to sneak through. So... use this chance to ask me things you don't want Lily to know I'm thinking about till she wakes up I guess," said Kat.

"Well, if Lily is the same as before we've still got plenty of time then. I suppose... the big question then is marriage. What are your thoughts and plans there? Ceremony or just paper signing, how big would you want it if you made it an event? Would you go to a church or just find a nice plot of land? That sort of thing," asked Gramps.

"I don't really know," said Kat easily. It wasn't that there had been no thought on the matter... but it didn't really mean to much to her. "I'd marry Lily officially in a heartbeat if she wanted... but yeah... it's not that important to me personally. Especially with a magical connection. Why would I need a ring when I've got access to her mind?"

"Still... I have thought about it and things would be complicated. I'm not sure how hard it is to coordinate things across dimensions either. In an ideal world we would probably have it in the Hub... but there's a bit too much demonic energy just built up there to be entirely healthy for others to visit without something to prevent it seeping in.

"The issue I guess is that everyone who matters here on Earth knows that we're together. Maybe Lily would be interested in telling some of her extended family... but I don't know anything about Vivian's family and I know Callisto hates hers... but none of our new friends would be able to come here easily. Especially not if the world rejects the for some reason. I'm honestly not entirely sure that Nira even could enter the world without either it throwing a fit or breaking... not sure what's more likely or worse...

"And the fact I have friends now... but now that I'm dating Lily, depending on how you count it, I have zero friends on Earth. Then there's just the fact that Lily and I aren't human anymore and don't look it. Public appearances aren't really high up on our list. I think in the end... it'll be a problem for future Kat and Lily,"

"Well as long as you've given it some thought you can't be surprised." Gramps let the sentence hang for a while before asking. "How is it going with your living arrangements? You've mentioned a few generally positives things... but how is it really?"

"I... I feel like I'm mostly on Contract even if that isn't entirely true. Um... the room is nice and so is the bed... Callisto has been great for Sylvie, she's really got a new role model to look up to that isn't me. As cute as it was... it's also pretty clear that Sylvie is a radically different person to me and trying to emulate me wasn't likely to work well... but I worry that Callisto is a little too... herself.

"While certainly closer to Sylvie's temperament than me... she doesn't sleep and abusing that fact to do a lot of extra work. With that and her high intelligence... I worry Sylvie might chase unrealistic goals.

Callisto is over a decade older, literally has more time in your average day... and is likely just as smart as Sylvie so I worry about that..."

"Yes but what about for you?" asked Gramps.

"That's a bit harder... I think the big sticking point is I struggle to know what I am exactly to Vivian and Callisto. A little less so Callisto. She's the crazy aunt, but Vivian... I don't know if she's more of a big sister or a mother figure. It was a bigger deal a while back and I came to terms with the fact that isn't really that important... but I'm still trying to settle into a box rather than existing halfway. If that makes sense,"

#### Chapter 843 Return from Gramps and more Practice

After talking about how things were in Vivian's house, things quietened down for a while as they rushed to finish up. Once everything was put together and just needed a bit of watching as it cooked they broke out the food Callisto had prepared. Kat let Gramps enjoy most of it, only testing a few samples of things at the old man's prompting.

Eventually Kat was able to turn the talk towards the goings on at the orphanage. Kat hadn't missed anything major except for a record number of adoptions. For once Gramps actually had a few open beds. It all started after Vivian's visit so perhaps she was a good luck charm.

Aside from that there were only minor issues. Gramps had to give regular reminders to the three kids responsible for waking everyone up and helping around, the youngest kids and recent adoptions were still having some issues with crying but that was quite normal. Grief was something very few children could handle well, and they shouldn't be expected to.

Kat's disappearance had been mostly felt by the kids around the longest besides her. It wasn't so much that Kat was needed for jobs, but some of the children, while not living at the orphanage for over a decade, had been there for three or four, and in one case five years. Kat had been one of the major constants for those kids and it was simply jarring for her to be gone.

Part of Kat wanted to go and reassure those kids she was still around and hadn't even left town. Another part though, wanted to point out she didn't exactly look human at the moment... and that in more normal circumstances it still might be best for Kat not to return. They needed to understand Kat wouldn't be around forever. She'd only left a year earlier than the maximum length of her stay. So when you added the fact she looked like a demon on top of that... it didn't seem worth the risk.

It was likely at least one of the kids would have an extremely negative reaction to finding out they'd lived with a demon. There was also the opposite issue as well. That they'd decide if Kat was a demon, perhaps they should try and become one as well. Gaining twisted ideas in the process or simply causing a bunch of trouble.

What really decided it was that while Kat did know them all, none of them were that close with her. It wasn't like her relationship with Sylvie where she took on a more obvious older sibling roll. She'd just been a constant presence in the background and now she was gone it was causing issues. A lot more like replacing an old pillow. The new one, no matter how much better all the advertising insisted it was... rarely felt more comfortable than the pillow you'd been using for a decade or more.

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Once the meal was over, and the dishes were checked one final time, Kat decided to leave before anyone else arrived. Better for everyone that way. So with a quick hug from Gramps, Kat picked up the bento box and her jacket before she headed for the door. She could actually hear a few kids walking around. \*Not a moment to soon. I shall depart mysteriously like the wind. Nobody shall no I was there except for Gramps!\*

Kat chuckled at her over the top thoughts as she started running down the driveway. It was a good way to keep her mind off the uncomfortable position of her wings once again. So this time while Kat ran she turned her full attention, or well, most of it, towards trying to sprint as quietly as possible. Silencing her footsteps wasn't even that hard.

A little application of demonic energy and she could take the shock of landing internally, dampening the sound a good deal. It wasn't completely silent but she just had basic shoes on. A bit of work there and she would be silent. Her next focus was on her arms and the bento box. She needed to adjust the bounce so that the upwards motion silenced any sound the shifting of the wooden box gave out. There wasn't many, but if she wasn't careful the layers clacked together somewhat. Part of her wanted to fix that by tying the box tighter but that felt like cheating.

Once that was done Kat focused on her wings. A mistake, but one she didn't really have any way to avoid. To others her wings were basically silent. To Kat they were constantly ruffling her jacket and the noise was quiet noticeable when she was focusing on it. Sadly she didn't find a good way to prevent it before she reached home. At least it kept her mind occupied for a time.

When Kat arrived at the front door she could smell Callisto cooking. Despite that... she felt somewhat mentally exhausted. So with a 'thanks for the food' Kat pulled off her jacket, handed the box and went upstairs to sleep a little more. Her excuse, if anyone were to ask was to say that Lily's need for extra sleep was bleeding over. It wasn't true of course, but it was a good excuse. Kat was simply tired. The mental fatigue catching up to her after what was really only a short nap overnight. When she got upstairs, Kat simply flopped down and let sleep take her.

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Kat woke up around lunch time and had a small bite to eat. Vivian was out at work and Sylvie apparently had something she wanted to finish up first. So after eating a quick meal Kat found herself in the backyard practicing again. This time, she was focused on moving around on her hands. Perhaps not the most useful skill but it improved her acrobatic capabilities.

It did let her learn something useful almost immediately in fact. Something she should have picked up earlier perhaps... but it wasn't overly clear unless you were thinking about it. Despite being upside down for ten minutes already Kat didn't feel dizzy. There was no blood rushing to her head, and barely any disorientation... and most of that could be chalked up to simply not being used to walking on her hands.

\*Hmm. I wonder if my blood is mostly responsible for this or something else. I imagine my inner ear isn't on a hair trigger either... though I do wonder where the difference comes in.\*

[What are even doing?] Came Lily's confused voice over the link.

\*Ah. Sorry if I disturbed you. I'm practicing walking around on my hands.\*

[Right... well... you can probably ask Nira... but good luck with that. I'm still stuck here with my mum. She's forcing me to watch television with her. Which would be fine... except she's been taping this show and we started halfway in at least. I have no idea who most of the characters are!]

\*Good luck with that!\*

There was some more grumbling from Lily but nothing important. Evaline seemed to notice when Lily wasn't paying attention properly. Even if she didn't know why Lily was zoning out it was easy to notice when she was paying attention to it.

Kat continued her practice and found it wasn't too bad. Perhaps a little harsh on the wrists, but that was more of a problem for other people. The real issue was getting up to speed. Elbows just didn't bend the same way knees did. This meant you needed to... less take steps and more throw one half of yourself forward and then follow up with the other side. It just wasn't that fast.

Kat suspected that if her fingers were stronger using them might be better. The problem was... she couldn't really balance on them properly. They were a bit too small and jamming them into the dirt and pulling them out constantly in rapid succession when she tried to use them to walk was needlessly destructive and slow.

Sylvie eventually came out to watch and spend time with Kat, but was eventually recruited into the training effort. Kat and Sylvie stole half a ream of paper and proceeded to draw a number of poses and positions for Kat. It took a bit to draw them all out, but they were just basic stick figures. It didn't need to be pretty. No time to flex any artistic talent.

Once that was done, Sylvie would hold up one of the many sheets of paper and it would be Kat's job to mimic the pose as quickly as possible and then hold it until another pose appeared. It went quite well... with only a few mix ups. See, they'd forgotten to draw in the ground and occasionally the papers ended up upside down.

After Kat was 'told' to do a pose that wasn't really possible upside down unless she wanted to balance on her horns and hope for the best, they quickly added in a line for the ground and got back to practice. For Kat, it was an interesting exercise in swift and efficient movement. For Sylvie it was amusing to spend time with Kat and watch her curl up into different shapes.

#### Chapter 844 Questionably Legal Activities

That was how Kat passed the time over the next few days with only slight variations. Lily was freed of course, but she holed herself up in Kat's room and started to really work on her paper magic. There was always a little niggling draw in the back of Kat's mind because of the bond. Lily's desire to spend time with her was always bubbling under the surface... but every time Kat prodded her about it, Lily turned her down. [Kat, I love you but you're very distracting. Especially when I can see you. I really want to get at least a few spells out of this book. I... I think I'm actually starting to understand why there is so much repeated information here. I don't want to be useless next Contract]

Now, Kat didn't think Lily was ever useless, especially not with her help understanding romance. In fact, Kat was pretty sure that whole task would have been much harder if not impossible for Kat to complete



by herself. And even if it WAS most of that experience would have been using things Lily had taught her. Still. Lily was determined so Kat just blocked off the endless stream of madness that seemed to be paper magic as best she could.

While that was happening Kat was practicing the best she could. Sylvie was helping with an increasing number of poses, each new one increasing the complexity somewhat. The current hardest one involved Kat standing on just a single finger that was buried into the dirt while her legs were curled up against her chest along her other limbs. It was apparently all about making her the smallest target possible. Kat thought it was a bit silly, but didn't complain.

Callisto took an interest on the third day. Recording data on Kat as best she could in the limited space. Callisto even managed to produce a radar gun to track Kat's speed as well as a few anemometers to determine just how Kat was messing with the wind. The answer didn't seem to make all that much sense, at least according to Callisto, but the information sort of flew over Kat's, and even Sylvie's heads.

Part of Kat wondered how Callisto had the time to be at least passable in weather science considering how much other stuff she knew and did on a regular basis but Kat decided it was probably all the extra time in a day. Perhaps partially attributed to Callisto's childhood, but that was just a guess.

On the other hand Vivian was not having a great time. Apparently she was still having issues with that client from before, and already had another client lined up, with a third she was in talks with. It was all piled up together because the first client was causing issues, and partially because the third client had asked for a rush order. Something that usually was fine... except Vivian was already doubled up on clients due to delays. Having to triple up was a bit beyond Vivian's standard workflow.

It also turns out that when Vivian gets stressed, she gets a bit manic. Her smile even wider than normal, her hair almost perfect, with just a few stray pieces that would never stay in place no matter how much work went into styling. Suits in perfect condition except the belt on Vivian's pants were clearly a step or two, too tight.

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Through that all though, the two most off-putting things were the eyes and the voice. Vivian's normal voice was thrown by the wayside and instead Vivian sounded like an auctioneer trying to make ends meet. It was loud, clear, and three times the speed of normal human conversation, as well as a good octave lower. Then there was her eyes. They burned with a sort of eery brightness that asked if you were ready to join in on the madness. Kat was more than a bit concerned.

"Will she be ok?" Kat asked Callisto on the fourth day of practice.

"Eventually yes," said Callisto slowly, "I would not say she is currently ok or that it will be an instant fix but the main issue is that client of hers dragging things out. I wish she would simply allow me to have... a few words with the man in question. Perhaps he would be more inclined to pay for Vivian's work after that,"

"Callisto... don't take this the wrong way but well..." Kat struggled to find a away of wording her thoughts that didn't sound offensive. Then she realised Callisto might just take it as a compliment anyway, "how is it you can say 'just a few words' and make it sound like you're prepared to break the guy's kneecaps?"

"He will be having more issues than just his kneecaps if he continues to refuse to pay Vivian," said Callisto icily.

"Right... um... why?" asked Kat.

"Because Vivian so rarely allows me to intimidate her problems away. I have to take the what chances she gives me not just to punish the fool refusing her payment but also have it serve as a warning for all others that may wish to snub Vivian in the future. If they know that the only thing standing between me and them is Vivian... well... I can play the attack dog quite well..." explained Callisto.

"You... just checking but you haven't killed anyone right?" asked Kat.

"Of course not," said Callisto, perhaps a tad too quickly. Then again, the continued existence of Callisto's shitty parents helped soothe some worries. For about ten seconds. "I find that killing is rather brutish. Not only that but dead people cannot exactly pay you back and it is ever so likely the police will get involved. It is simply not worth the time and effort to plan, execute, and cover up the incident. Much more efficient ways of getting what I desire are available..."

"Ooookay then..." said Kat. "What exactly do you normally do?" \*I know I'm going to regret this but I have to ask...\*

"It is amazing what you can do by calling in a few favours Kat," said Callisto like it was the most obvious thing in the world. "A few words here and there and all of a sudden it is rather hard to do business, not just in a small town like ours, but even in the city nearby... or with a few more words in the correct ears, perhaps in a chain of favours, across the country or the globe. It is entirely possible to financially ruin anyone with a few words. Completely legal too."

Kat turned a horrified look towards Callisto who laughed in such a fake manner Kat could only shiver.

"Oh, do not worry too much Kat. I doubt it will get that far. I have only managed the feat once. It was necessary... and Vivian punished me for it."

"What... what did they do to deserve it?" asked Kat almost scared to know the answer.

"Well it was just a few small... issues... that they were required to correct. The fact that they later went completely out of business and eventually ended up in jail for tax evasion is hardly my fault. It was just some minor fool who didn't pay for Vivian's work, pretended it got stolen, and then attempted to sell in an art auction... under a fake name. Don't worry, the auction house didn't get off lightly either,"

"Um... did the auction house deserve to get caught up in your... retribution?" asked Kat warily.

"I believe so regardless of what Vivian says. Not only have they handled pieces from Vivian before, they have also handled one, and it shall remain that one now, piece of work from me. It is their job to authenticate the piece. Not only did the work have Vivian's makers mark on it, but it was also something she worked with Chekov on. Truly the fact they attempted to get away with allowing such a false claim through means they are unfit for the business. If I knew who they used as an appraiser I would have gone after them as well... but if I were to be truthful with my guesses my imagination concludes that they simply did not bother with a certified appraiser and just accepted the fool's word."

Kat nodded slowly. \*You know. I'm quite glad the person Callisto is obsessed with is Vivian. Give Callisto a bit of time and nothing else and she might just take over the world because she can run the place

better. This way Callisto is more concerned with keeping everything clean and cooking for Vivian instead of how best to break those who wronged her.\*

\*I do wonder how good Callisto would be as a super villain. She's more than a bit obsessive but I'm not sure if she's got enough care or hatred involving the world at large. Hmm... she'd probably go crazy inventor... but she might just be left alone. I think the most likely thing Callisto would get in trouble for, assuming Vivian wasn't around, would be theft of public services like electricity and water.\*

#### Chapter 845 I Didn't Think I'd See You Again

Kat was taking a break after those days of intense practice. Lily was using her as a chair during her reading and Kat could feel increasing amounts of both hope and frustration leaking through the bond in equal measure. This was partially due to Kat's own management of Lily. Any time the frustration spiked Kat would give Lily a slight kiss, instantly dropping Lily's frustration to nearly nothing. They did climb somewhat swiftly once Lily recovered from the bliss, but it was really helping.

The most recent spike in frustration had Lily wind up to slam the book into the bed... only for her to pause halfway through the wind-up and carefully close the book before placing it down on the bed. She let out a frustrated whine before turning and burying herself into Kat's chest and wrapping her arms and legs tightly around Kat. "I'm SO CLOSE. I just don't know what I'm doing wrong!"

Of course, the words were heavily muffled by Kat's breasts, but Kat was pretty good at understanding Lily when she was only half paying attention to things as she was reading. So having Lily's full attention, if a little distorted, was easy to parse out. Kat let out a low hum as she carefully stroked Lily's hair. "Lily... it's probably because there isn't any mana in the atmosphere."

Lily's groaning intensified as she wiggled in Kat's arms. [How did I miss something so simple!] Kat decided not to comment on Lily's mental chastisement. This one did feel somewhat justified. There was a simple answer of course, that she was too frustrated to think of it, or she'd spent too long trying to work out how to cast properly that she forgot the simple fact that casting on Earth was much harder, if not impossible.

In the end, Kat just continued to softly run her fingers through Lily's hair. The urge to pet her properly and scratch behind her ears was strong... but Kat resisted. Lily was working through her annoyance quite quickly and it would probably be best not to interrupt that right now. Kat was content to slowly bring Lily out of her funk when the familiar glow of red lines appeared. A Contract was about.

Really? Right now? I almost thought it wasn't going to show up considering it's the afternoon for once... but I guess that would be the real surprise. Kat glanced down at Lily who couldn't see anything of course. Hmm... do I want to bother Lily? Maybe I can just ignore it for a bit...

In the end though, Kat's decision wouldn't matter either way. She'd gotten much better at not automatically closing down the link to think private thoughts, especially with Lily around... so the whole thing was broadcast quite clearly. Lily unwound herself from Kat and flopped to the side, "You know I could hear you right?"

.....

"Oh... um oops? Does this mean we have to leave now?" asked Kat.

“Not if you don’t want to. You just can’t use me as an excuse,” said Lily with a grin.

“Fine... let’s head off. I wonder what we’ll be doing this time,” Kat mumbled.

Lily transformed and hopped up on Kat’s shoulder, nuzzling into Kat’s cheek. Kat smiled as she stepped onto the platform. Pausing, Kat carefully covered Lily’s ears with her hands before yelling out, “I’m off on a Contract!”

As soon as the words left her mouth fire exploded around them. It was beautiful no matter how many times the pair saw it. The author however was running out of ways to make it interesting so the scene was over quickly.

Kat found herself in a ruin. Already she was getting a sense of déjà vu. It was especially apparent in that one area in front of the summoning circle she refused to look at. This ruins looked to be much better maintained than the last ones. There were spiderwebbing cracks through the ceiling but nothing had fallen down yet. The lamps on the sides still glowed with light... even if every third was missing or broken. The staircase up to the platform was smooth marble, and it only had one damaged step.

There was a series of four empty pots nearby. Whatever resided in them before was dead now, and the dirt was cracked and dried. It looked like serious effort would be needed for anything to grow there again. With the rest of the room examined Kat let out a sigh. She couldn’t put it off any longer. Well, that wasn’t true. She’d slowed everything down to give her time not to just snap angrily at her summoner.

But it wasn’t helping as much as she thought it would. In this frozen time. Especially where she couldn’t properly feel Lily against her face or Lily’s mind threw the link with the speed differential. So Kat let her eyes move, seemingly in a lazy arc to come fact to face with a familiar face, and his companion. “Xiang.”

“Kat”

“I didn’t think I would be seeing you again any time soon,” said Kat, trying not to sound like she wanted to spit on his face. Based on the nearly silent hissing coming from Lily on her shoulder as the Memphis’ tail bristled. She probably failed.

“Neither did I...” admitted Xiang. Words somewhat pained though not as put out as Kat seemed to be. If Kat was trying not to seem like someone had just punched her in the face, Xiang was trying to avoid looking like he’d just been reassigned to the janitorial department at work with reduced pay.

“Xiang... who is your... friend here...” now you might think that question was coming from Kat. It wasn’t. It was said through the gritted teeth of the fourth occupant of the room. She had her golden blonde hair done in a long twin tail style. Her face was only slightly tanned, indicative of time outdoors, but no major dedication to it. She had a very slight dusting of freckles running down her cheeks that looked almost like tear tracks.

Her outfit was plain with only small embellishments, it was white with lines of gold, and a yellow sash that hung from her shoulders. Her gaze was harsh and piercing, though Kat felt remarkable unconcerned with the hostility contained within. The thing that stood out though was her weapon. It was a giant iron club that was wider than her shoulders at the top.

Xiang glanced at the girl before back at Kat and his face went through several emotions before coming to some begrudging compromise. "Well, I believe I said her name already but the demon in the circle is Kat... she was summoned last time I found one of these... I believe I mentioned that before... would you like to add anything Kat?"

\*I don't know do I Lily?\*

[I don't really know. I mean perhaps? It's a pretty poor summation of you and your relationship with him... but at the same time it's not wrong and the blond twit isn't exactly endearing me to her. I'm not really seeing a reason to give her any extra information]

"For now your explanation suffices Xiang. I have nothing to add at this time," said Kat. "Would you care to introduce the rude individual beside you?"

Xiang winced as the girl instantly took the words as a challenge. "You got a problem with me? Step out of your fancy circle and try it!"

Kat just ignored her and looked at Xiang expectantly. Xiang winced again, but deciding to prevent things from escalating chose not to comment on either of their behaviour. A surprise to Kat. "This is the lovely Yang Ming, a good friend of mine," the flash of murderous raise at the word 'friend' was impossible to miss... unless you're Xiang apparently. "and she's not feeling the best at the moment. See... a friend of ours was kidnapped and... well I was trying to figure out what to do and stumbled across..." Xiang waved his hand around the room.

"Another demon summoning circle," answered Kat for him.

"Well... yes exactly," agreed Xiang. A few beats of silence passed. "So... are you going to help?"

"You haven't exactly explained anything Xiang. I can't really say," said Kat coldly. Xiang winced at the tone but held Kat's glare. Kat wasn't trying to antagonise. Not really... but she'd begrudgingly gone along the first time and came out of it decidedly unhappy with the whole ordeal. So while saving someone who had been kidnapped sounded like something she could get behind. She wasn't just going to agree off the bat. Even if she could guess the pay from this would be similarly overblown like last time.

Xiang took in a deep breath, ready to explain. He might not be happy to see Kat again... but he did need help and he was hopeful Kat would be strong enough for the job. He didn't exactly have a lot of people lining up to help him with this.

Of course Yang had no appreciation for this and blurted out, "Who are you to question us?!" The sound of Xiang's hand slapping against his face almost made hearing the insult worth it.

#### Chapter 846 Bound and Gagged

Kat looked over at Xiang and gave a slightly smug smile. She was going to try a second time. She was going to test them both... and the ancient circle she was in. Instead of trying to brute force it though, Kat answered Yang's question by summoning up a small wisp of fire. Kat then poured power into the flame, all while keeping it small instead of allowing it to grow. Kat waited until she'd dumped half her reserves... and then kept going, including a large chunk of Lily's reserves as well.

At this point the circle around Kat had projected lines up to the ceiling. It was wobbling and hissing despite Kat not moving at all. The ground beneath Kat had started to freeze over, the ice quickly inching towards the edges hoping to cover the entire ground. When it reached the edge of the circle it seemed to stutter a bit before successfully climbing up the wall of Qi.

Kat nodded and took a single slow step forward before pressing her flame covered hand into the wall. A horrendous screeching sound blared out, like the wailing of a hundred tortured souls. Xiang covered his hands and made the sane decision of ducking for cover, hopping off the stairs and using them to block some of the sound, and hopefully most of the blast. Yang flinched back, and stood on wobbly legs. She tried not to look intimidated but the sweat running down her face was giving her away quite clearly.

The screeching suddenly ended and for a moment all was still. Then like the sound of thunder a massive crack ripped through the barrier and the floor. A large bundle of snow seemed to explode outward from the point of contact, giving the entire room a light dusting as the bits that remained floating for a time slowly descended. Kat's practice certainly seemed to be paying off. The demon in question took another slow step forward, stepping over the threshold that should have kept her locked in place at least until a contract was established with nothing more than air obstructing her. **Novelnext.Com**

"I believe I was already introduced Yang. I am the Succubus Kat and I was called here to assist you with rescue. Not only do I usually require more information when it comes to contracts then just 'we need your help to rescue someone' but in this case I have prior experience with Xiang and it was not something I care to repeat. Before, maybe I was asking... Xiang was at least trying to be polite and despite my misgivings I was willing to go along with it...

"However you appear to be attempting to spit on my intentions and Xiang's work. You have not summoned a friend. You have not summoned a servant. Perhaps, arguably, you have summoned an employee... but in truth what you have summoned is the cavalry. You are both too weak to do this alone and instead of recruiting adventures on your level you summoned a demon. You summoned me.

"Now. In case it wasn't clear. I have no desire to speak with you anymore. Xiang came to me for help, and I'm not completely heartless. I'll hear him out for something like this instead of just leaving you with a broken summoning formation and a sense of disappointment. Now, let the adults talk please,"

.....

Kat had a moment of worry where she thought maybe she went too far. Last time she was here Xiang never seemed to quite understand how much stronger she was... and after learning how to use her weapons, general training, and giving her powers some thought she was far stronger. Her rather sturdy power base had been polished to something much more deadly. It wasn't a lifetime of practice but it was certainly something. It was also the first time Kat had tried to intimidate someone so thoroughly. Perhaps it was too much.

Then Yang tried to yell out a retort and Kat was questioning if the display was enough. Only the fact that Xiang seemed to know Yang well prevented things escalating. Xiang wrapped his arm around Yang's midsection lifting her up as his other hand blocked off her mouth. Her muffled growling continued as Xiang pulled her down the stairs and out of the door. Putting her down just long enough to slam it shut before the screaming started.

“WHAT THE FUCK XIANG!” shouted Yang.

Kat winced. The door was apparently not quite good enough to prevent the sound leaking... well that or Yang was even louder than she seemed.

“I should be asking you that!” said Xiang firmly... though it was too quiet for Kat to hear, Lily’s ears could make the words out. The door was quite a good sound dampener. Yang really was just that loud. Kat poured some demonic energy into her ears to try and hear the words for herself and not feel the need to rely on Lily broadcasting Xiang’s words.

It was a mistake. “WHY AM I SUDDENLY IN THE WRONG?” screeched Yang as Kat heard a loud slamming sound. At a guess, it was the sound of a large club hitting stone.

“Because Kat was right!” this time Kat could hear the words just fine. “I don’t understand what your problem is with her! You’ve never met her before! I’m not really sure what to think of her myself because my memories of the last time we met are rather hazy, but I’ve heard a few things about what happened. She wasn’t a great travelling companion, but we NEED this help!”

“It must be her pheromones!” Insisted Yang, “I bet that’s why you can’t remember anything! We shouldn’t even be talking about this. We should be binding her to a strict contract and forcing her to help us!”

Xiang’s exasperated sigh was a bit too quiet to be heard... but Kat and Lily still felt like they could hear the spirit of the gesture from beyond the door. They were doing the same after all. “Yang! I know for a fact my memory issues have nothing to do with that. Plus, even if they did we STILL NEED THE HELP. I don’t know what your problem is but if you can’t behave while we work out this contract like reasonable people, you can wait here,”

“Sure, I’ll just wait right here while you go off galivanting with the slutty demon! You both can rescue Xuena just fine by yourselves from the sound of things!” insisted Yang.

“Now you’re just being insulting. Kat’s attire is perfectly reasonable. I’ve seen much worse from fellow cultivators and she’s a DEMON for crying out loud. From some of the stories I’ve heard Kat’s attire is exceptionally proper,” Xiang sighed again. “Look. Just... why are you trying to pick a fight about this? If you want to try fighting Kat that can be arranged I’m sure but where is all this hostility coming from?”

“I’m not being hostile you idiot!” shouted Yang and another loud crash resounded, this time though it was followed by three more lighter thumps and the sound of Yang screeching. Kat and Lily shared a glance as the screeching continued until it was muffled by something. A moment later the door was opened and from a brief glance, Kat could just barely make out Yang. She was bound and gagged. Before Kat could really process that the door was slammed shut rather thoroughly.

\*Well... that’s a thing that just happened. I don’t really know what to think of that whole mess. I mean... what was Yang’s deal? She was rather rude to us... but then she went and acted WORSE to Xiang! I... I just don’t understand Lily.\*

[I... I think she might be the token Tsundere character for Xiang’s harem...]

\*Wait what? Since when does he have a harem?\*

[Well there isn't anything confirming it of course... but he sounds a lot like a cultivation story protagonist and we're being asked to save a second girl from a kidnapping with Xiang and the first girl. I'm also willing to be the reason she called you slutty is because she thinks you're the competition. I'm guessing that Xuena is probably the calm one of the two and together they balance each other out somewhat while you are supposed to be the exotic beauty in the harem. Or at least that's her fear.]

\*Lily... that is not a picture I wanted in my head. Not only is Xiang an arrogant ass he STABBED ME THROUGH THE HEART! I don't really care that he wasn't properly in control of himself or if it seems like he can't really remember it. This wasn't figurative heart stabbing Lily. This was real, honest to god, metal sword through fleshy heart. You do not fall in love with a guy after that.\*

[Yeah... she's got nothing to worry about. Though I do wonder... would it be better or worse to introduce me and point out I'm your girlfriend? She'd either consider us both 'taken' and thus safer to be around... but on the other hand...]

\*She's proven to be a few swords short of an armoury and would probably assume somehow that Xiang's manliness will suddenly make us straight or bi.\*

[Yeah that...]

\*Xiang better have a good argument for rescuing this girl. If I was less inclined to help people we would already be gone.\*

#### Chapter 847 Thousand-Year-Old Sunlight Silk Moth Cocoon

Xiang returned to the top of the staircase and Kat said, "Now that Yang is..." \*should I point out that I saw her tied up? Hmm... let's go with no on that one.\* "... otherwise occupied with the intricacies of the escape arts would you be able to fill us in on who exactly we are supposed to save?"

Xiang's eyebrow only twitched slightly at the phrasing but he managed to slowly nod. "Yes... I suppose I should. Though... would you like to hear the longer version of this story or the short one? I... I'd have to start more or less straight after we last... met."

"If it is necessary for the long version feel free to start then. This seems to be a rather big issue... so I'm willing to hear you out. I just want all the information you can provide. If I find it satisfactory I shall put forth considerable effort to help you. Your goal is much nobler this time," said Kat.

"Yeah... well... you know... hmm... could you?" Xiang started and stopped a few times, clearly struggling with the desire to ask something. "No never mind. We can get to that later. I don't remember the immediate aftermath but I woke up alone in the woods. I'd been captured by a trapdoor tarantula and I didn't quite realise how badly injured I was when I first awoke.

"I struggled and failed to free myself for quite some time before Yang came in and saved me. It was rather harrowing... but I imagine you don't much care what sort of danger Yang was in do you..."

"Eh.... I'm not completely uninterested but it doesn't seem all that relevant from where I'm standing," explained Kat.

"Yeah... so... um... Yang was being given a test by her sect. She is rather good at cultivating... but the club is considered... well it's not looked upon very fondly. She was tasked with slaying the tarantula as a



test of worthiness and just so happened to find me trapped. She saved my life for the first time in that moment.”

.....

Kat and Lily, though Xiang didn't realise the cat on Kat's shoulder was anything abnormal just yet. Still, the simple nod showed they didn't really understand. Xiang ran a hand through his hair as he sighed. “I see you don't really understand. I... I'm not sure how to properly explain it to you considering you aren't really part of our culture. Yang didn't try to determine my allegiance, didn't try to bargain with me.

“She simply cut me down and said I was free to go. She... she clearly hasn't made the best impression on you but she is beyond kind when it truly matters. To be rescued like that... it is a great shame for a cultivator even one as young as myself. Perhaps easily forgiven amongst family, or sworn brothers and sisters... but for someone like me... we are not of the same sect. I did not offer her a reward. I was already in a monster den.

“Many cultivators, not just demonic... errr...” Xiang glanced at Kat's lack of reaction, “I mean to say... those cultivators that will do anything for power would have killed me without hesitation. In fact they likely would have used me in some bloody ritual for more power. I was already trapped so the hard part was done. Many cultivators that like to think themselves as righteous wouldn't be much better.

“As I was not clearly affiliated with a sect, I'm at best a wandering cultivator and at worst a... I'm just going to say demonic ok?” Kat nodded, “Sorry it's hard to explain otherwise. Right so... in more simple terms, I'm either a useless wanderer, or someone actually evil. Many would consider it right and just to simply leave me to die. I was already caught and they were not obligated to save me. They owed me nothing.

“Then there's of course those who would ask me to swear on my cultivation to serve them in exchange for my life. It is a... I hesitate to say fair trade. Considering my lack of formal training I like to think of myself as exceptionally talented. I do not truly know how rare a talent I am among cultivators... but my cultivation talent is likely more valuable than my life. Many demonic cultivators would point that very fact out as they steal my talent and life, or simply kill me to prevent the competition.

“If they were a bit nicer, they might just take everything I own in exchange. It makes them feel like the better person, and the fact I'm likely to starve afterwards is really none of their concerns.

“Despite this though... Yang cut me down, and said I was free to go. Of course, I was exhausted, and I'd later learned poison on top of heavily injured. So I just collapsed straight to the ground. In the end, Yang asked me a few questions, and I managed to answer them by blinking. She agreed to take me to safety in exchange for a promise to never attack her or her family.” *novelnext.Com*

Xiang sucked in a deep breath as he let the words hang. “I want to be clear, I do mean promise. Not oath. I would not truly be bound in any way. It is... honestly as touching as it was, and as much as I appreciate it, it was a foolish request. In the end, I accepted of course and Yang took me to safety.

“She then took it a step further and brought me not only to safety but to her friend, you may have already heard her name Xuena, Xuena Ning. She is not as good at cultivating, apparently, it's something to do with her rare physique, but she is a genius of alchemy. That was the second time Yang saved me life. Even if much of the credit goes to Xuena. I count them both as saving me that second time.

“Xuena nursed me to health using some rather rare and valuable herbs. I insisted I’d pay her back... but at the time I wasn’t aware of just how rare what they’d used on me was. Not to say that I would have stopped them anyway... by the time we got to Xuena’s workshop I was delirious from the poison and in no shame to make deals of that magnitude. Xuena said it was all fine because I was a friend of Yang’s. Which was not true at all at the time. All that I’d done for Yang was be a burden up to that point. So you can see why I hold her in high esteem. Anyway...

“It turns out what they used to help me was a thousand-year-old sunlight silk moth cocoon.” Kat and Lily gave blank stares. Xiang grumbled a bit about that but explained quickly, “Sunlight silk moths aren’t all that rare. In fact, as far as cultivator insects go they are one of the most common. The issue is that they do not live long. They have only a short time before they cocoon themselves and try to reach the next stage of their development.

“So perhaps, that is all fine and good. Set up a temporal array and stick some moth cocoons in? Sadly it doesn’t work like that for these moths. They have two annoying properties that when mixed make them nearly impossible to find at later ages. The issue is that the moth must decide how long it will remain a cocoon before it starts to weave its silk... and that once the silk moth leaves the cocoon it is entirely useless for alchemy.

“This means that you need to constantly watch the cocoons or simply get lucky in the wild. The other problem is that while rare, there are technically better ingredients for most things. This means most people will farm them. They are quite valuable but not exceptionally so for the rarity of it. The main issue with acquiring them is just how rare they are. You can’t buy them not because they are worth a king’s bounty but because you hardly ever find them.

“So in most scenarios, I would have been heavily indebted to Xuena, or maybe Yang depending on how deep their friendship is. The problem... is that the sect patriarch of the endless rain of immortal ice sect needed SPECIFICALLY that one ingredient to heal a wound his son procured.

“Xuena didn’t know this when she took the ingredient for me... and when the sect patriarch showed up a few days later... well things were bad. Xuena’s family were shamed for withholding the purchase. Though let it be said the patriarch had not actually paid for the materials yet. It is why Xuena had such easy access to it. Relatively speaking. Xuena didn’t know of her parents deal either...

“But in the end they had no choice but to allow Xuena to be taken as collateral until they find another cocoon to exchange. However, it is unlikely they ever will find one. The cocoon they were trying to sell had been in the family for three generations, waiting for someone with talent to use it. There is little hope Xuena will live long enough for one to be found.

“That’s why I need your help. Well, I wasn’t specifically looking for you... but now you are here... can you help me?”

Chapter 848 Xiang Thinks For Once. A Shock to All

“Well... I’m not agreeing to it as a Contract just yet... but... I’ll admit I’m more interested this time. When you summoned me before, I only really went along because I NEEDED to finish one more Contract. This time I’m under no such obligation but I am already more interested in seeing it through. That being said...” Kat paused letting her words hang.

"This also sounds a lot more complicated," \*because sure I can break her out without too much trouble. The real issue is keeping her safe in the immediate aftermath.\* "so I'd still like some more details about what to expect."

"Um... I... I can try?" offered Xiang. "Truthfully I'm mostly operating on rumours and hearsay when it comes to the endless rain of immortal ice sect. It's known as 'the hidden power' of this area. A lot of other sects try to branch out as they grow larger and more powerful. They didn't. Instead they simply concentrated their talent further and further in their domain."

"They claim a rather large mountain range as their own and the patriarch is a stage four practitioner and one of the oldest people on the continent. Frankly, we cannot afford to fight him," seeing Kat's frown, for he was an ICE cultivator after all, no major threat to her in theory, "I'm not saying you couldn't beat him," said Xiang as he threw up his hands in surrender, "it's just that..."

"Well, the issue is... he is known to specialise in wide area battlefield control tactics. Unless you have some new trick up your sleeve you won't be able to contain his wide area attacks. Even if you could keep him in place, apparently he has the strength to cover a whole town in an blizzard in under ten minutes. I fear we'd be slowed drastically at best, or killed with that kind of skill at worst,"

Kat gave a reluctant nod of acknowledgement. It really did seem like a step too far for her. Perhaps if she was Rank 3 it would be possible to fight him, force the patriarch away from her allies... but at Rank 2 really all she had the chance of was surviving such an onslaught. Xiang seemed to have some idea though, "So how do we avoid him?"

"His son," Kat raised an eyebrow, "Er... right... so. He's still looking for that cure right? He's travelling around quite a bit at the moment looking for ingredients or high quality medicine to heal him... so as long as we make our play when the patriarch is away things should be much simpler. He is the strongest in the sect by far and if we can avoid getting caught it will be even simpler," explained Xiang.

.....

"Well... plan for the best hope for the worst I suppose... what are the chances the patriarch catches us though? How will we know if he's in his base or not?" asked Kat.

That's where Xiang winced. "Right... well... he has a special relic known as 'The boat that rides the sunrise' and it's a flying boat the size of... well I've heard it's the size of a Carrack but I've never seen a boat in my life, not a flying one, and not one that floats on water. One of Xuena's family members said it was that size... but I don't really know what that means. I think it's large though right? I think we can just wait and watch for the ship leaving, or maybe ask around about it."

"Wait... if he takes a boat... how far away are these mountains?" asked Kat warily.

Xiang winced again, "Yeah... that's the thing... I mean... the patriarch takes his boat everywhere... but... um... running without stopping it'll still take us at least a week... and with breaks included... probably longer..."

\*A WEEK! That's... that's already making this one of my longer Contracts and that's just to get to the mountains! It's also IF we don't stop. If the range is large it might take us even longer just to get to the

main base of the sect or wherever they are holding Xuena. Dammit. Huh... hmm... well... I've got you with me Lily but I'm not exactly pleased with this. Are you going to be ok?\*

[I... I think so? I mean... I'm not super happy about it necessarily but I'm not too annoyed. I can sleep in Memphis form on you. That's just as comfortable to me as my bed if not more so. Food might be a concern but Xiang and Yang will clearly need food as well so it might not be an issue. Um... hopefully I can figure out my spells? If I sleep while your running I can practice while we rest.]

[Which... probably makes this something I'm willing to do. Assuming that I can cast spells considering this is a Qi world. Even if I'm not good at it or able to cast useful spells... if I can get practice I think I'll be ok with however long this takes. Well, not however long but... a week or two is more than fine. Though... I will send a message to Vivian to let my parents know. Just in case.]

"That is... quite a while but not unacceptable," said Kat.

Xiang gave a surprisingly sincere bow. "Thank you." Kat nodded in return, "If that's all fine... I don't think there's anything else? I mean... if there is I don't know it... Xuena has been kidnapped... long way away... strong cultivator guarding her... um... it'll probably just be the three of us?" Kat nodded again, "right I'm glad you assumed that. Hmm... I guess it's just wording... um..."

Xiang thought back to the first time this happened. His wording was horrible and Kat pressed things in her favour pretty hard so that she had a way to back out. He didn't want to leave any large loopholes... but he also didn't want to encourage Kat to push back at all because he felt that would probably set back a lot of their progress in terms of civility. Something he was pretty sure they'd need in the comings days because while Yang wasn't an issue right this moment... that would change very shortly.

Still he thought it through for a full minute, time Kat and Lily gave him. Xiang honestly didn't know where to draw the line. It was easy to say 'get Xuena out of the compound' but that was a completely threadbare as a binding. Kat could just throw Xuena out without care of how she lands or how many chase after her. He didn't want to think Kat was that bad... but he also wasn't willing to risk Xuena's safety to that degree. Some trust was necessary but that seemed to be too far.

So that was out. The other easy answer was 'help us free Xuena and escort her back to her parents' but if Xiang thought about it for a few more moments, something Xiang had sort of been doing for the weeks it had taken to find this place and summon Kat, he knew that taking Xuena back to her parents was in fact a horrible idea. If they could plead innocence successfully the patriarch probably wouldn't punish them... because if they're smart they could argue she was under his 'protection' and thus he shamed them not the other way around. No Xuena could not go back.

Truth be told... Xiang was pretty sure the best course of action would be to hire a ship to another continent or find a hidden realm to train in. Somewhere out of the way and remote. After this... if he was connecting to both events... he'd be wanted by two of the top 5 sects on the whole continent. It probably wasn't the smartest idea to stick around regardless of how clean things worked out.

'Out of the compound and away from pursuers' seemed better but if one wanted to get technical he'd be a wanted man twice over. They might not be actively pursuing him, but passively? Certainly. Kat would probably fight such a Contract, or so he thought. In truth Kat probably wouldn't, not really

thinking out the intricacies for it... but Xiang didn't know that and Kat had played things fairly close to her chest last time. Xiang didn't really know Kat well enough.

A time limit seemed the best compromise. 'Xuena out of the compound and no fights with pursuers for X days' Xiang just had to work out exactly how many days felt right. A week... was a lot. It's what he wanted to go for... but that meant a Kat would be stuck here for at least two, probably three, maybe a month of more depending on how long the infiltration and scaling of the mountain took. Probably too long. "I, Xiang do Contract Kat to help with the safe extraction of Xuena from the endless rain of immortal ice sect. The Contract will conclude when three days have passed without an attack by pursuers, and Xuena is no longer in custody."

[Sounds good Kat]

"I accept"

Chapter 849 Freeing Yang

"Now that I've accepted... there's one thing you should know," said Kat as the chain lightshow died down. \*Lily get ready.\*

"Not to sound ungrateful..." said Xiang slowly, really trying to keep the annoyance from his voice, and mostly succeeding too, "but what is it? Surely if it was important it's something that should have been brought up before we agreed to anything,"

"Perhaps but..." \*now.\* Lily hopped off Kat's shoulder and transformed. Xiang took a panicked step back, pulled out his sword and getting into a ready stance. "This is my girlfriend Lily. She will be accompanying us," Xiang was frowning pretty heavily as Kat continued. "The reason I didn't inform you earlier is mostly due to the fact I wasn't going to give that information away if I didn't have to. Now we're working together... again... I feel like I do."

Xiang sheathed his sword but kept the look of disapproval. "Right... but for what possible reason could you think it's a good idea to bring your girlfriend along?"

"I believe Kat mentioned my name is Lily," was said by Lily at the same time as Kat's "I don't particularly but we are magically bound together now which means not being in separate dimensions,"

Lily shot Kat a betrayed look but the demon in question just shrugged and said, "Lily, you already know I'd much rather you safe. I don't begrudge you joining me on Contracts, I don't necessarily dislike it, and I love spending time with you... but your safety is something I put above all the other benefits,"

Lily huffed and looked away pretending to be mad. Of course her red cheeks alongside the waves of love and affection radiating down the link proved just how 'mad' she was in truth. Xiang on the other hand was sighing at the byplay. "I see. I'm not exactly pleased... but I understand at least,"

.....

"I wouldn't be too grumpy. There are plenty of places that a cat can get a human cannot. I'm sure at the very least Lily will be able to help with finding Xuena once we get closer. Even if she's not really a combatant at this stage," said Kat.

“Right... um... not sure if this is a rude question but... what exactly IS she? Another demon?” asked Xiang.

“I’m a Memphis beastkin,” Xiang had a ‘yeah and?!’ look plastered on his face, “it’s a special kind of feline that can generate its own demonic energy. I can’t use it, but I do produce it. The link helps stabilise me, and provides Kat with extra energy.”

“Right...” said Xiang, drawing out the words. He had a lot more questions he wanted to ask... it just didn’t seem like a good idea to follow through with it in the end. He wanted to keep the mood from souring at least a little longer. Yang wasn’t going to be happy when she was untied. Then again. Maybe that was a reason to ask more questions. Delay the inevitable.

“Do you think there will be any issues introducing Lily to Yang? If there will be... well... no I don’t want to put words in Lily’s mouth,” said Kat.

“Um... no? I mean... I don’t really understand why there would be? I’ll admit I was a little hesitant she’d be a liability but you made a good point about her stealth abilities simply from being able to transform. It should be... well... maybe not fine but we’re all going to get it in a few moments when I release her...” grumbled Xiang.

“We could just... not?” offered Lily.

Xiang shook his head immediately, “Even if I thought those empowered ropes could hold Yang for an extended period of time Xuena is her best friend. They’ve known each other a long time. She’d do something stupid to catch up to us or make an attempt to save Xuena all by herself to prove she was better and probably fail in the process. Then we’d have two people to rescue or...” the last two words, ‘two corpses’ went unsaid.

Leaving them didn’t really stop the mood from dropping though. With that, it seemed to signal an unspoken agreement they release Yang and deal with that fallout now. Lily transformed back so she could rest in Kat’s arms for a bit as the group headed to the doors. It was far too short a walk.

Kat and Xiang both looked at the big stone doors and winced imagining the seen they were about to experience. It wasn’t hard to hear Yang’s struggles from here. Kat had been specifically tuning them out until the energy in her ears ran out... and avoiding thinking on it afterwards. Now they were at the door though it sounded like a caged badger was on the other side and they were about to enter its lair.

“Last chance to just... not do this?” offered Kat.

Xiang sighed and pushed open the door. Yang’s struggles stopped and her eyes locked straight onto Kat’s for just a second before turning to Xiang, her eyes literally burning with molten gold energy. Xiang met her gaze and held it. This was clearly the wrong decision because Yang did not want to be bound a moment longer. Golden beams shot out of Yang’s eyes and straight into Xiang who raised a hand to block.

The attack wasn’t that strong, but slight burns were present on the back of Xiang’s hand after that. Instead of getting angry though, he just sighed and pulled out his sword. Yang didn’t even blink as he slashed it through her bindings. Yang hopped up and grabbed her fallen weapon before slamming it into Xiang’s side as he stood crouched trying to collect the pieces of his rope.

Xiang didn't even react to the impact until he went flying. No screams of pain, no complaints, he just went soaring back into the summoning room, flying until he hit the back wall with a thud. "THAT'S WHAT YOU DESERVE FOR TYING ME UP ASSHOLE!" screamed Yang. Then she turned to Kat. "You,"

"Me?" said Kat 'innocently' tilting her head and trying to look as fakely adorable as she could. Not a skill Kat had practiced, but that only added to the obvious and grating nature of the gesture.

"YES YOU! ARE YOU GOING TO HELP US OR NOT?" yelled Yang.

Kat lightly scratched behind her ear, wishing for less sensitive healing. She could practically feel her ears regenerating. Lily was not so lucky, and had to bury her head into Kat, letting her ears get smooshed between Kat's stomach and arms. "Yes,"

"IS THAT ALL YOU'RE GOING TO SAY?" 'said' Yang.

\*She really needs to work on her volume control. I mean is all the screaming really necessary? Also, where is Xiang. He better get his ass back here because I do not want to deal with all this yelling. Actually, are you alright Lily?\*

[I'll live. Probably]

"Yes," said Kat with a grin, that may or may not have been a little cheeky.

Yang glared at Kat and her eyes started to glow again. "Oh look I can do that too," said Kat shoving demonic energy into her eyes letting them glow her own purple.

Yang growled at Kat. Not any words, just growling. Kat didn't really know what to make of it. \*Is she really a person? Or is there a chance she's actually just a bunch of wolverines in a trench coat?\*

[Kat you take that back. I won't have you insulting wolverines. They are very interesting animals and the name of a few comic book characters.]

\*Indeed. My apologies.\* Sadly, while Kat managed to suppress her laughter, the smirk that formed on her face in response to Lily's quips wasn't so easily hidden. Yang seemed to think Kat was mocking her. She was right, but Kat certainly didn't want to broadcast that fact. "Something funny huh?" asked Yang.

\*Praise the SUN. She isn't yelling anymore.\* "Perhaps. Thank you for saving my ears, I'm glad you know how not to yell all the time," said Kat.

These words didn't improve Yang's demeanour at all. She started winding up for an attack right as Xiang managed to get back to the door. "Enough!" he barked firmly. "We were looking for a demon summoning circle. We were lucky. We found one. We have a demon. We have help. Do not test the help Yang. Do you not want to find Xuena?"

Yang glared, "Of course I do! But what does it matter? She's under contract now, we're her boss,"

Xiang sighed. "Yang. Even if that was true, AND that's how you would treat your workers... nothing in the contract said she had to protect YOU in fact, she could attack you and be on her way without consequence, she just needs to find and save Xuena," Yang froze at those words and slowly turned in place. It was actually a little impressive to watch seeing as she did it all with just her ankles while holding her weapon raised.

“What?”

## Chapter 850 Cultivating a Travel Plan

Kat and Lily were feeling odd about the lack of popcorn, especially considering the show they were watching play out in front of them. Yang was going off about ‘Cavorting with demons this’ and ‘strict contract procedures that’ she obviously hadn’t worked with a demon before and likely just heard stories. Seriously, some of the conditions she was suggesting be added were downright ridiculous. Though Kat and Lily did have to suppress their laughter a few times.

‘No eye contact for more than 5 seconds’ was a personal favourite of Lily’s. While for Kat it was ‘No watching them when they sleep’. Personally, Kat and Lily thought Yang’s suggestions said a lot more about her as a person than it did about them. Part way through Xiang gained this intense look of ‘please somebody save me’ while looking pointedly at Kat and Lily. He was politely ignored and eventually Xiang’s face gained a look of resignation.

Kat and Lily had no desire to get into that mess, and the only way they could see to disrupt the argument would be to refocus Yang’s attention towards them. Not something desirable in the least. Kat was deciding to treat Yang like a particularly belligerent toddler with a slightly higher IQ and wider vocabulary. Just let them tire themselves out. Kat was not accounting for cultivator stamina. At some point Lily ended up changing back to human form and leaning on Kat. Mostly just to see if anyone noticed. They didn’t.

It was a full THIRTY MINUTES LATER when things looked like they were calming down. Lily had taken to practicing with her first spell, and was just barely managing to summon a magical circle. It didn’t cast anything yet, but Lily was pretty sure it was just a matter of time. Kat messed around with her fire. She would summon it from various points on her body and then try to move it all around her skin without stopping or going over the same areas before letting it dissipate behind her. She managed to graduate to two flames at once, though she didn’t quite manage to keep them completely separate. Focusing on two independent things at once was still difficult as a demon. More possible certainly, but Kat was lacking in training.

Yang finally let out a long huff, and just glared at Xiang. She still wasn’t pleased with what she saw as a thoughtless attempt at a Contract but she’d mostly said her peace and Xiang was apparently familiar enough with this that he just... didn’t react. That wasn’t satisfying at all, so Yang just huffed at Xiang and started to leave.

“Come on, we’re wasting time. We should be heading towards Xuena already,” yelled Yang at half the normal volume. Perhaps that was actually her speaking voice.

When Xiang dropped in behind her Kat and Lily followed. “So... are we actually heading off?” asked Kat.

.....

Xiang shook his head, “I doubt it honestly. It’s probably late afternoon by now and I think we’d all prefer a roof over our heads when we can get it. We also have to work out the exact route we want to take...”



“What are our options?” asked Lily while glancing at Yang to see if she was paying attention. The answer was... maybe. Yang did seem to react to the question, slowly ever so slightly... but she didn’t seem to notice it was an entirely new person asking said question.

“The two, or maybe three, options we are looking at are ‘follow the roads’, ‘go for a straight line’ or some mixture of the two. The roads are... from what I know at least... going to take us fairly out of the way. The sect is like... North-North-East of here and most roads run along one of the four cardinal directions only really making allowances for terrain.

“When you take into account just how far away the sect is as well... we’re looking at possibly an extra twenty-five to thirty-five percent extra distance to cover if we follow the roads. Of course, if we follow the roads some, if not all, of the distance can be made up by simply being faster. That’s also not counting any of the river routes we might be able to take. Most of it is upriver though so... nothing cheap would be faster that’s for sure.

“There are also a few smaller issues. Like if we take the most direct path we have to go through ‘The Bog of Ten Thousand Poisons’. There is a path through it... but I’ve heard it isn’t particularly well marked and still quite dangerous. It’s quite large and nearby so we’re basically guaranteed to find it unless we go out of our way to avoid it totally. I’m not really sure what Yang would prefer...”

Xiang snuck closer to Kat and Lily to whisper, “She’d probably complain about wasting time if we went the long way, and complain about the muck if we go for the swamp,” Xiang stepped back, “Are you opposed to the swamp just on principle?”

\*That does sound like Yang. I’m not sure which type of complaining would be worse... hmm... I don’t particularly enjoy the idea of the swamp but the dirt won’t really stick to me. Just you perhaps. I could probably fly us over... stay airborne and watch the other two... though Yang would really complain about that.\*

[I... I guess it depends on how much time it saves. While I’m not necessarily in a rush to get home I’m not keen to leaving Xuena locked up longer than necessary. I can’t imagine how mortified I’d be if she was to ask ‘what took you so long’ and our answer was that we didn’t want to get a little dirty. Though... I will probably stick to Memphis form if we do. No transformations so my actual clothes can’t get dirty. My only concern is... trekking through a swamp is hard. Depending on the size and how far around we have to go. Might be faster to just... not]

“Not really. Just some general concern about the difficulty of making the trek. Just like how the roads might be faster... a swamp... if sufficiently deadly or just slow to get through might mean we are better off avoiding it altogether.” Said Kat.

Xiang hummed a bit thinking on Kat’s words. “I would guess that... it probably isn’t faster. Assuming ideal conditions at least. The road across the swamp is well used enough to be known as a road. It’s on my map and that seems to imply it sees some use. The roads around the swamp exist as well of course... but if they were faster nobody would bother with the swamp road. If you need to go into it you won’t be bothered by the lack of road... and if you are... well... you can use the bypass.”

Kat and Lily both nodded at this. “Is there any other major points we might want to know of?” asked Lily.

“Probably...” said Xiang with a sigh. “There a number of smaller towns and at least one city on the route. The question of if we want to visit them – both how many and how far out of our way we want to go – a lot of the smaller towns would only be worth it to have a roof over our heads... but they are often times a bit off the road.”

[That doesn’t bother you right Kat? I can always sleep on you comfortable. Better than any bed really]

“It doesn’t really bother us,” said Kat as way of answering Lily’s mental query. “The ground is fine for me and Lily can just use me as a pillow,”

Xiang nodded, “Yes I’m leaning that way myself... but once again I’m not sure about Yang...”

“Is it worth accommodating her so much?” asked Kat.

Xiang sighed, “It gals me to admit it... but she is stronger than I am. If it came down to a fight I’d lose. I mean, you’d probably come out on top, but I would lose,”

“How did you tie her up then?” asked Kat.

Xiang waved the question away, “Yang wasn’t expecting it at all. She was mostly just messing around.”

“Messing around... with a giant metal club covered in spikes?” asked Kat with some concern.

Xiang winced. “Yes”

Kat was going to comment but she saw Yang’s heavy nod at the answer. That... that actually bought up a few questions. \*Wait... she CAN here us? I mean... I assumed she could but... why isn’t she complaining about us talking behind her back? That doesn’t really fit with what we’ve seen so far. Even just Xiang saying she might want to stop and rest at the towns should have set of her hair-trigger.\*

[Yeah that is odd now that you mention it. We might need to keep a closer eye on her then we initially thought. A loose cannon is one thing. Predictable. Someone who might only be pretending to be one... that’s a potential problem.]