

DEMONS 881

Chapter 881 The Sylvie Interlude PART 2!

I have been called back to write more. I wish I could say that it is because the previous letter of mine was beloved by all. Alas, I am writing this before my first letter ever sees the light of day. Perhaps a second writing from me will simply inspire anger and frustration? I do not know. I will never know. I do not know how to feel about that piece of information. Am I simply being asked to write these to throw out into the void? To be burned on a fire? Will they be read?

I suppose these are pointless questions to pose in a letter I will never get a reply to. A letter that, if someone else is truly reading this, will know all the answers to these questions. Perhaps not though, perhaps these questions have made you think, and maybe that is better is it not? I tried to spend my first letter telling you about my day and in some ways I failed, while in other ways I succeeded.

It is more a glimpse into my head at a given moment. It was quite the struggle to hold my thoughts in place, to pin them in my mind so that they could be written across this sheet of paper. It is not how I normally feel, or rather, it is bit a moment of feeling for me normally. To stretch it all into a letter prompted a few extra questions. Though it took restraint. Even with the rambling I did in the first one, in truth, my mind wandered far more then the paper would suggest.

Not too far of course, I tried to keep the letter to what I was experiencing, what I was feeling. I think I did it well enough. Perhaps in the future I will return to my attempt at writing a proper day in my life. Leave most of my thoughts out of things just to keep it moving. Perhaps I would include the things that feature most prominently in my thoughts. Perhaps I will just focus on what I think will be important.

Yet once again I wonder, who am I to say what is important? I am not the reader of these letters; I can never know what it is like to take in the information I am presenting. Do my wild musings amuse you? Does the fact that I consistently move around the main point and rarely address it cause anguish and suffering? Perhaps I am thinking on this to much. It is just a letter after all.

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Yet is it really just a letter? I am attempting to give others a window to my soul, so I do not know if this could ever be called 'just' anything. Then again, do we not so that others will know our thoughts? Everyone word is their own little pathway to the mind of the speaker. It is not really so different here on paper. Then again, I had a plan for this letter and yet I am distracting you with philosophy. I will have plenty of time for that later. For now, I plan to answer questions I am sure I would be asked.

The first question on everyone's mind, I am almost sure, is what I think of Kat and Lily's budding romance. You might argue, that this is not your first question, yet I find as people age, romance is so regularly on their minds that it almost never leaves, not fully. I wonder if I will receive the same fate? I nearly wrote 'doomed to the same fate here' but I do not consider it a negative fate for myself. Lily does seem so much happier with things as they are now, even as Kat tries and struggles to understand her knew situation.

I suppose that is my first thought. For Kat, not much has changed, Lily is just as important as she has ever been to Kat. I do not resent the place she holds in Kat's heart. Despite my intelligence and maturity

I am a child to Kat. She is more or less an adult to me. The dynamic is completely different and I quite like Lily. Should I call her sister Lily? Perhaps, but it does not feel correct to me.

I suppose what I most feel is gratitude. It may not be nice to say the rest, but I feared that Kat would either end up alone with nobody to care for, going to work and operating simply by doing what is asked of her. The other option I foresaw for her was to simply slide into Gramps role at a much younger age. Gramps is dear to me, but his death cannot be too far on the horizon unless Kat intervenes.

Yet I do not think he would accept. Gramps has someone to visit after he dies, and he would not stay on this world without her. He may continue on without trouble when life is finite. Yet if he was offered more. It would be a poisoned bargain to him, I suspect. So what I like most about this arrangement is that with rigorous study Lily was able to find a way to be bound to Kat forever in a perfectly reasonable looking manner. I do not mean to criticise this move, simply to imply that Lily is likely not particularly sane. Of course, I also do not mean this in a bad way, everyone in this house is lacking in sanity. Including Kat. Even if she is perhaps the strangest and most normal of us all.

I was a bit surprised by Lily's confession. Not that she would choose Kat as her life partner. It was clear as day that Lily would stand by Kat's side for their entire lives if she had the choice, as a friend at least, if nothing more. This insight seems to be solidly confirmed now with her choice of race. The thing Lily did manage to hide was that she was a Lesbian. I wonder if that is because I did not know what signs to look for, or that she had eyes only for Kat and it was easy enough to hide those reactions. Kat clearly did not notice though the reasons for this are much clearer to me than my own blindness.

Now, I have spent more time than I planned to on the first question. Though I guess that is now the nature of my letters. The pattern has repeated itself enough so I will commit to only one further question for this letter. Maybe there will be another in the future? Maybe not. Yet if there is not, what would make for the best final question? Actually, let me go muse on this for a bit on my own. I do not wish to fill my remaining words with just answering the question of what question to choose. That would be silly, and not a question I intend to waste letter space on.

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After a full five minutes of thought I have decided to speak on my adoption, and how I feel about it. I did not share my full thoughts with anyone, and I do not plan to. I suppose it would surprise many, Kat included that I feel rather mixed about the whole thing. While I may have played up the desire to be adopted somewhat, it is true I wanted a proper family again. While I did achieve that goal, my family is now anything but proper.

Perhaps I should step back. For all my mixed feelings not a single one of them is negative. I simply wonder what it will really mean for me in the future. I am still learning how to treat everyone in the house. Kat has always shared an odd position as an older sister figure that is almost my second mother. Now I really do have one and Kat is almost never here. Yet I know it would be worse had we not left. Kat would still be gone and I'd have nobody to help fill that gap.

As lovely as Vivian has been, what I think has helped me the most is meeting Callisto. It is an odd look into a potential future for me. She and I are not the same of course. Yet, when comparing so many

people I have met she is by far the closest. What is important though, is that she is happy and I can see myself in her place in twenty years' time. What this means, is that I have a place to aim. I am not quite so lost in the sea of potential that has the future. I know, that should I ever fall from my path completely, Callisto will be a beacon of answers.

It is not perhaps the way I wish to live, in my wildest of dreams. Yet it is a life I could see being filled with happiness. Sometimes I wonder if that might be more important. To stand at the top of the world, inventions and companies flowing from my fingers. Yet, are those not same strings I might use to puppet them also ropes to tie me down? Callisto invents, she is smart enough to make more money than Vivian if she so wished. Yet she does not so wish. She wishes to be a maid. To make enough money to pay Vivian rent, and she is happy. So many adults never seem to be happy, and I pray I never lose the ability. The fact Callisto has so clearly retained it gives me hope. Hope that I can see the answer if I ever do forget. Happiness can be found in strange places.

Yes. A lovely note to end on.

Chapter 882 Forest Floor Medical Services

We're now back to Kat and "friends"

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Kat's group headed off not long after Otiss. Xiang did try to walk by himself but when Kat nudged him lightly in the back with her tail he fell over. Only the fact Kat was ready to catch him stopped his face meeting the floor. With solid proof of his inability to walk, Kat threw him into the snake head and ignored his desire to be let down. Apparently he wasn't willing to risk jumping down while she was moving and Kat used that to her advantage.

From there, the journey was rather boring, though a bit frustrating for Kat. If she was completely unburdened, it wasn't even a day away. With the extra weight it was stretched out to just over one. Yet with the snake head's size, the journey was stretched to an awkward four days.

See, the water stream they were heading for was from an aquifer. Seemingly quite a large one. The closer they got the more trees started to spring up. It was like an oasis in the desert yet as they got closer the trees were packed in tighter. The space between these trees was no longer enough to allow for an oversized snake's head to pass through without issue. There were some arguments about just leaving the snake behind again, but she was ignored.

So through a combination of throws, demolition and considerable effort on Kat's part, they made it through. It just took 3 full days' worth of work to get through. Well, that wasn't quite true, Kat rested on the 2nd day, yet unlike her fellows she didn't sleep at all the other nights. Kat tried not to be annoyed with things, but really the temptation to burn the snake with her flames and then shatter the frozen pieces was growing stronger as the days wore on.

No matter how much they might be able to sell it for Kat was starting to think it just wasn't worth the additional effort. Sadly, when she tried to discuss this for a second time, part way through the trees, Xiang and Yang were really in no state to argue with her. They were getting more and more out of it as the purple spread through their eyes and legs. A few of the bubbles popped during transit and Kat had

to spend even more time freezing the poison and throwing it out of the snake in a hopes she'd avoid making things worse.

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But none of that mattered for the moment. Kat was able to drop the damnable snake head on the edge of the small pond. If she had to crush a few trees to make room for it... well... that's really there fault for being in the way isn't it? Kat strode over the water, placed Lily down on the bank carefully and dove in. She couldn't really feel the temperature change, but it was completely clear water with barely any plants in it. Kat could feel herself being pushed downstream, the rush of water coming from a crack about twice her height was quite noticeable.

Kat could ignore it with ease, so she swam around for a bit and drunk some of the fresh water before climbing out. Lily's eyes bugged out slightly. Kat apparently did not care in the slightest that her outfit was clinging everywhere. Lily wasn't quite sure how that made sense when normally things just slid off Kat's skin... but she was willing to bet it was Succubus bullshit. Probably works because it's more erotic this way.

Kat, completely unconcerned with the minor bout of gay panic and magical confusion she was inflicting on Lily got to work ringing out her clothes, tightening them around her in places that truly were coincidental. Frankly, it was lucky Xiang was too out of it to even crawl out of the snake's head. Lily might decide he didn't need eyes if he was watching the scene in front of her. novelnet.net

After Kat was done with that, and Lily had a bit of water to sate her thirst... as opposed to trying to sate her other thirst, Kat got to work dragging the two cultivators out towards the water. She was not expecting them to fight so fiercely when they were exposed to the sun. There was hissing, spitting and attempts at scratching her. They were fighting like caged beasts and so Kat threw them back onto the snake's tongue. Nothing they did actually hurt her, their nails not even so much as leaving a line on her skin... but the behaviour was concerning.

"Hmm... Lily thoughts?" asked Kat.

Lily transformed and turned to Kat, "I don't really know what we're supposed to do. I mean... is sun actually bad for them? I know they're quite sensitive to it right now but is it actually going to cause them issues? Or is it just that they think it's going to be a problem,"

"Hmm... might be causing them some pain but I doubt there's anything to worry about other than a nasty sunburn for the pair..." offered Kat.

"I see. Well in that case I think it might be best to take them out anyway. We need to start washing them off and popping those poisonous bubbles on their legs," said Lily.

"Hang on... I don't want there to be much "WE" in this Lily. I do not want you poisoned because you got a bit of muck on you trying to help these pair," grumbled Kat.

"Kat, I can use a stick or something I don't have to get close..." revealed Lily.

Kat still couldn't help but frown, "Perhaps that sounds fine to you... but if the cultivator who made this really is so sadistic I wouldn't be surprised if the popping causes the poison to fly out quite a ways."

Lily frowned at being sidelined like this but nodded, "Fine, just... I dunno give me something to hold the water in I guess. We shouldn't be dumping poison into this river in case it causes more problems,"

Kat nodded and Kat got to work. The first thing she did was knock down a few more trees to make something of a lean-to. Kat was glad for the large rock near the pond and managed to use that to brace a few stripped branches that she then covered in smaller branches with leaves. Finally, she used all the leaves she stripped off the first lot of branches to make into something of a bed.

With that sorted out, Kat then extended her work slightly to make a smaller version of the lean-to that could really only fit the top half of someone. It was exactly what Kat wanted. She dragged the two uncooperative cultivators over to it and stuck their heads under. They still fidgeted a bit, but they weren't kicking and screaming like a toddler that had just lost its favourite toy.

Kat dug out three large grooves, one on either side of the poisoned pair, and one in between them that all led to a pit Kat was making progressively larger to catch the poison. Just to be safe, Kat also froze some water and placed them around the furthest edges of the grooves to make sure the poison didn't go so far. A frozen bucket with a bent stick for a handle to avoid freezing Lily later and they were both ready to begin.

It was... not pleasant work. The poison had gathered in larger amounts. The bubbles under Xiang's and Yang's skin could not be anything close to comfortable for them. It almost looked like there was something growing in them, but a few popped poison bubbles later proved that to be false, praise be. Kat was also proven right about the velocity of the poison. It seemed to change. One moment it would at best get on her hands, and then all of a sudden it was flying into the ice barriers she'd made.

Kat was always careful to wash both herself and the cultivators off after every time she popped something. Sadly, they still seemed to gain light purple splotches that resisted Kat's attempts to remove them without violence. Cutting the skin away might help... but that was a really extreme idea Kat wasn't ready to entertain.

For Xiang and Yang... apparently the actually popping of things wasn't too bad on them. It was only when the ice cold water seeped into the wound that they started to twitch a bit. Xiang had enough wherewithal to sit up just a bit and nod at Kat before falling back down again. Yang just groaned and tried not to move too much. Clearly she did understand she was being helped, and Kat was thankful for that. Needing to tie them down would be a pain.

Once Kat had cleaned and washed off all the bubbles that could be popped right now, Kat was surprised to find the pit she'd dug nearly a quarter of the way full. She stared down at it with a large frown. "That's not good. There's no way I got that much poison out of them. Is it... is it multiplying? Shit... of course it is. That's what it does inside people after all... dammit. How much of a worry is this?"

Chapter 883 Rivers of Poison

As the days wore on it became crystal clear to Lily and Kat exactly why those bubbles needed to be popped and clean. After being at the pond for two days they were nearly constantly working to clean off new bubbles as they formed. Kat even had to work through the last night without sleep because resting the night previous had the pair wake to find their cultivators' legs covered in gunk from the few bubbles that did pop, with the rest of their legs covered in bubbles.

It was constant work at this point. Kat also had to waste time digging a larger hole for the poisonous runoff. What seemed to be perhaps the worst part of the poison was that it kept expanding, constantly making more of itself more like a virus than a poison. At this point Xiang's and Yang's legs were more holes than legs. Only their cultivator physique prevented them from collapsing completely.

Lily brought up the idea that it was actually worse for cultivators. There was no way a mortal, like Palo's father could have survived something like this. Just the blood loss alone was already enough to kill a normal person twice or three times over. In addition to that, depending on where the poison actually sat in their bodies, well, Lily suggested the fact that they both still had working hearts that hadn't exploded was a minor miracle.

The only thing in those two days they got out of their cultivators was Xiang throwing a rock out of his storage ring. Kat nearly backhanded it into pieces reflexively. Part of her wanted it away, and part of her wanted to let all the dust fall over Xiang for throwing something not just at her, but specifically at her face. Despite that, Kat realised what was going on when she reflexively slowed time down somewhat.

It was a big lump of rock salt and a grater, though the grater was hidden behind the rock and Kat nearly missed it. It was missing large chunks from its pock marked surface, likely from grating off salt. Kat managed to catch it carefully and only lost a few small loose chips of salt that were only just sitting on the rock anyway. After a minor back and forth with Lily, Kat went and looked for a large dead log and then 'carved' out a spot for the salt to rest and then left it behind the poison lean-to where hopefully it wouldn't get any poison on it.

Things took a turn for the... strange perhaps, early in the morning of the fourth day at the spring. It was still dark out, and the sun had not yet risen, Kat was standing her second lone vigil and feeling it wear slightly on her mind. The constant attention the cultivators required made it hard for her to properly relax. Only the lack of anything mentally or physically strenuous helped reduce it from, aggravating to bearable levels.

So when Kat went over to check for more bubbles to pop and found nothing on Xiang's legs. She paused. Kat bent down carefully, making sure to avoid getting the poison on her shoes. It might not hurt her, but if it got spread around that way it wouldn't be good. She examined Xiang's legs closely first. It was full of dried blood and had noticeable purple lines running through it like cracks...

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But the only liquid she could see was some weeping from the wounds. No poison in sight. Turning around, to view her other patient Kat found Yang was the same way. *Hmm... I don't really know what to do here. Palo said to pop and wash all the bubbles until the legs explode then add salt... but there are no more bubbles and the legs haven't exploded. Do I add salt now? Do I wait? What is the reason for waiting? I don't know! Hmm... I guess I'll wait. With Yang not wanting me to apply any salt to her wounds I suppose I can see the difference.*

Kat continued to watch over them both until the sun peaked over the horizon and Lily stirred to find the situation, "Take a break Kat, I can watch them. I might not be able to touch them, but I can keep an eye on them for a couple hours at least," said Lily.

Kat's lips thinned at the offer as she glanced at the nearly completely still cultivators. Compared to the strange ramblings, tossing and turning as well as errant jitters, they were nearly corpses. Still, corpses didn't tend to be much hassle so perhaps that was for the best. "Sure Lily. Thanks for the offer. Just... even if you don't know I'm needed please wake me" Lily nodded and Kat headed over to the makeshift bed to lay down.

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"KAT!" yelled Lily right after Kat's ears picked up something that was a lot like the sound of a cork popping out of a bottle.

In an instant Kat was up and moving, she didn't even check how long she'd had to rest, simply zipping straight over to the cultivators. It was definitely time and now Kat knew what Palo had meant by 'legs exploding' chunks of dried blood, flesh and some muscle were giving way under the torrent of poison that was practically exploding for them legs.

Kat gave a small praise to Lily for remaining safe and watching from on top of their shelter and not anywhere close by. Kat's makeshift barriers didn't quite get everything from the initial blast despite the fact she'd shored them up a bit before Lily had woken up. The poison hissed and bubbled on the grass but Kat ignored it for now.

There was way too much poison to wash away, and Kat was very thankful for the channels funnelling it away, creating a rush of poison to the holes she'd made. *Hmm... not really something a bit of water can deal with. Let's get the salt out.* Kat dashed around to get the salt and the grater. Not even a second later Kat had shorn off a large pile which she wrapped up in her sash. Leaning over the side awkwardly Kat dropped a single grain of salt in the mess to see what happened.

The moment the salt touched the poison it exploded and Kat got a face full of the stuff. Only now it smelled awful, she gagged and stepped backwards wiping the gunk off her face as it dripped, though not fast enough to just get it away from her nose. It was now a vibrant piss yellow and smelled much, much worse. Once Kat could see again she took a look at Xiang to find a moderate sized section on his left around where Kat had thrown the salt was only leaking a bit of poison opposed to a tap on full blast.

Seeing that this strange method was doing something, Kat grabbed a handful of salt from her sash bag and threw it all at Yang before sprinting away as fast as she could. Lily had already taken to the air and made it all the way to the top of some nearby trees. She still hid away on the side that was facing away just for safety purposes.

A tsunami of yellow exploded out from Xiang's position, washing down into the poison gathering pits and filling them quickly. The smell was horrible and Lily was waiting for a bit of safety to fly away. The problem was, as Kat jumped slightly to take a look, that Xiang and Yang's mouths were definitely covered by this garbage. Gritting her teeth Kat sprinted back past and to the lake, gathering a bucket of water as large as she could make it in short notice and then running back, dumping the lot of it over them both.

As the water washed over them, Xiang's body was already looking somewhat better. There was a bit of colour in his face again and his legs seemed to have more skin on them then before. There was only a

few trickles of poison left and Kat quickly threw a few more batches of salt into those last few spots. Xiang instantly started screaming, but the cascade of yellow was a good sign. Probably.

Kat ignored Xiang's pained writhing as she looked over at Yang who was barely moving now that the water was gone. Her breathing was shallow and her legs still leaked considerable amounts of poison. *That... that is not looking good. Xiang is getting... well maybe not better but at least he isn't leaking enough poison to take out a small town. Yang's is still going and I don't know where it's getting the energy to multiply but this cannot be good for her.*

What am I supposed to do? I'm no doctor and... and I'm just really not sure Xiang will get better fast enough for me to get a second opinion. The salt seems to have worked shockingly well despite Xiang's screams as it deals with the last of it. I guess the question is... how worried am I about Yang's yelling? Would I rather she die? Obviously not... just... I don't know how bad this is...

Chapter 884 Yellow Waves

Kat nodded and got to work. It was one thing to say she wasn't going to apply salt to Yang when the consequences of such a thing were much less clear. Xiang was already starting to heal after a generous application of salt and not doing the same for Yang felt a lot less like respecting her wishes and a lot more like leaving her to die. Besides, they hadn't heard a single word from her in a few days now. A minor blessing, but really not worth all the pain.

Kat's first job was making a new place to put Xiang. It was pretty rough, he just needed a bit of shade so underneath a nearby tree was good enough. A small hole and two rows to funnel what little poison was left and Kat was willing to call that good. Kat carried Xiang over and plopped him down, ignoring the slight wincing and groaning he made while being moved, no longer twitching from the salt, but still not the best perhaps.

Then Kat turned her eyes to Yang. *God I don't know how I want to do this. Hmm... guess I should properly prepare.* So prepare Kat did. The first thing she did was gather up a few buckets, though when Lily asked to help Kat refused her. With that in place, Kat started to make larger and larger buckets until she feared for the ice's integrity. It wasn't the best building material and Kat hadn't made them all that thick.

Once the buckets were ready Katt then carved out a small igloo with an 'entrance' to sit over Yang's neck. The idea was to keep most of the gunk off her face and then pull it off once the gunk was somewhat washed away. One final touch was to drastically expand the holes for the gunk. With experience, Kat now knew what she'd need. It was a bit of a rush job, and the once idyllic little brook was pockmarked with large holes and ruts through the ground. It was a necessary evil. So Kat took in a deep breath as she scraped more salt into her stash and moved over. They knew it worked this time, no reason to hesitate. With the igloo helmet secure Kat dumped all the salt onto Yang's legs.

That's when the screaming started. Unlike Xiang, who apparently had a very strong pain tolerance, Yang did not. Or perhaps it was caused by the waiting. Near immediate action may have helped reduce the pain and amount of poison to clear out? Whatever the case, things were not going as well this time at all. The gunk still turned yellow and it rolled off Yang in waves until Kat heard the sound of cracking. SHIT!

Kat grabbed a bucket and dumped it over the rough area where Yang's head was to find what she'd feared, the ice had cracked during Yang's thrashing. *I didn't think she had much strength left! I'd have reinforced the dammed thing if I'd known!* Kat didn't have much time to curse at her mistake though, the yellow gunk just kept coming as Yang thrashed about and quickly covered her face again, muffling the screaming somewhat but likely causing more problems for Kat. Another bucket of water later and things really hadn't improved like Kat wanted.

She had to baby sit Yang's head now, dumping water every time the gunk climbed up to her head. Kat praised her foresight in making sure they were on slightly elevated ground, most of the gunk did end up flowing down past Yang's feet but there was just so much of it that Yang's head was regularly at risk. She was also thrashing about all awful lot, sometimes flipping over completely so her face was in the muck-soaked dirt. Luckily, even in this state Yang was able to realise that a potent concoction of poison, poison by-product and mud wasn't something she should be digging her face into, inevitably leading to her flipping over again quickly, only to forget that listen a few moments later.

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Lily started to make her way over. The yellow whatever-it-was hadn't stopped, but the violent force behind it had left and Lily felt comfortable... well not really approaching but hanging out on the edges and refilling buckets for Kat. The demon was going to need them. So Lily got to work. When Kat noticed her efforts, she moved the rest of them closer to the water.

Kat didn't complain, it was risky but she was glad. Most of the time she would have needed to use filling the buckets wasn't the moving, it was waiting for the water to sink in. Even if she 'scooped' the water in a swift motion the air pressure and momentum made it nearly impossible to fill properly with that method. Still, Lily was putting herself at risk. Not as much perhaps, as the yellow stuff just seemed nasty but perhaps not poisonous... but Kat really wasn't all keen at all to test it on Lily to confirm that guess.

In the end, they had to work in concert for a full half an hour before the gunk was completely cleared away. The screaming had stopped at about the ten-minute mark after Yang's throat had been destroyed. It was just an awkward harsh breathy sound with some gurgling mixed in. Lily found herself actually pushing her new physique a bit. She'd been estimating the water based on what she THOUGHT she could carry. So when she looked away for a second and then accidentally managed to lift a completely full bucket, it shocked her... but only for a moment. There was work to do, and it could be looked into later.

Perhaps that was now though. Kat found herself dumping Yang next to her cultivator buddy under the tree. Another line down to the hole that luckily wasn't collecting any more poison, and Kat dropped down next to Lily, her feet slightly in the water. "I'm so glad that garbage is over!" exclaimed Kat.

Lily drifted downwards and pressed herself up against Kat's side and said, "Yeah... that... it wasn't pretty. Still stinks to high heaven but at least there's nothing else to bother with. Maybe dumping some dirt in the holes and filling them over will reduce the stench,"

Kat shrugged, "Maybe, I don't really know anything about this sort of stuff. Keeping myself is one thing, and keep you safe is another but... well... I didn't see this coming. I mean, I knew the swamp water wasn't GOOD for you, for anyone really. I trusted my regeneration to keep me safe, and I made sure you didn't touch it... but I never really thought Xiang or Yang would have problems like this. I just... I guess I

trusted them both to know enough about their own world to not end up poisoned just for walking through water.

“Which... I don’t know... is that a silly thing to think? I’m not their babysitter. They’re my clients... and I don’t think I’ve really had any contracts where I’m just protecting someone mostly from their own mistakes. And that’s what this is. I’m not going to say I should have known or expected something like this. Yet at the same time... I’m also used to the kids that were sort of my responsibility anyway. Even if technically it was Gramps I still felt responsible...

“So maybe this is just an extension of that. For some reason, despite the fact that these two are both annoying... I feel... perhaps more responsible than I should and I’m just not sure how I feel about that. Hmm... I got a bit lost on the way to the point. I guess my real question is how much should I be babying the cultivators? Or maybe just people I work with specifically. Sure they’re adults but I’m basically indestructible. They’re not that much stronger than children would be to a normal adult. So... eh I don’t really know what else I’m saying,”

Lily pulled in a long breath of air. A mistake perhaps, and even though Kat’s scent was closer, the yellow gunk was overpowering it. Lily scrunched her face up in disgust and tried not to retch. When Lily finally recovered she said, “I don’t really know either. I mean, I like the fact that you care quite a lot and it’s never been smothering before... but that doesn’t mean it won’t ever be the case. So... I’ll just let you know if it ever gets to that point. The problem though... the cultivators...”

Lily sighed and continued, “Yang would never have listened. I don’t think she’d have taken really any help you might be willing to offer her. She’s just that kind of person. Xiang... well Xiang proved it when we were walking. He’s not as angry but just as proud and stubborn if not more so. For these two at least... I think you have to let them make their own mistakes. Maybe be a bit more ready to catch them... but I doubt they’ll let you help as much as they should,”

Kat pulled Lily in closer to her body and sighed. “Yeah. Seems that way...”

Chapter 885 On the Hunt

It was early morning in the day after dealing with the ‘explosion’ from the cultivators. Kat and Lily were by themselves running through the forest looking for some food. See, it turned out that not having access to any food in the storage rings might be fine for Kat but not for Lily. Lily had insisted she would be fine, but Kat ignored these protests and forced her to check to see if she could open the ring with her mana.

Sadly, it turned out that either the rings were locked in some way or mana simply wasn’t compatible with them in the same way demonic energy wasn’t. Different energy systems that didn’t seem to play nice with each other. Perhaps if Kat managed to find a world with both mana and qi there would be a work around figured out... but in a world with only qi they just had no reason to even know it was a problem, let alone resources to look into a solution.

In the end, it didn’t really matter. Lily had agreed to the hunt when her stomach started growling rather embarrassingly and she could no longer deny that she was hungry. She did manage to ring a concession from Kat that they’d go hunting in the morning, hopefully giving the cultivators time to wake up. Kat

wasn't quite so hopeful. Perhaps that was for the best, because Kat used the extra time she gained from needing less sleep to make...

Well it wasn't really a tent, it was more a hole in the ground with some leaves for the bare minimum level of comfort. Kat had placed the two cultivators into them and then covered the hole with leaves. Hopefully it would be enough to prevent them from being found by animals. The area still stunk to high heaven so it wasn't like anything would be smelling food. Whatever braved the stink would need to either have no sense of smell, or be really determined.

Kat didn't think there was such an animal in the area. If there was the brook probably would've been home to the largest predator in the area. Really, it was the giant snake head that seemed most likely to attract predators. It was a giant hunk of meat just sitting out in the open. Kat didn't find this to be a problem at all. It had been a pain to get to the brook carrying it, and it was going to be massive pain getting it out. If anything could actually eat the damned thing before she returned, after braving the smell, Kat would congratulate it and send it on its way before the cultivators woke.

That was another thing, they still hadn't woken up. Lily seemed hesitant to just leave them there... but Kat rightly pointed out that the only person who could defend was her, and the only one who was fast enough to catch something to eat... was also her. Lily might have recently been shown that her strength wasn't that of a barely fit human bookworm, but that didn't mean she had any practice... nor had she properly spoken about it anyway.

Then again, the idea of hunting and clawing at something with her hands and feet, or rather, fangs and paws, wasn't really all that appearing. Apparently her human instincts were enough to say that chasing down a deer in the forest wasn't an activity to relish. Raw meat, totally fine, perhaps even preferable as a Memphis. Hunting? Leave that to some other cat. Like the one she happened to be dating.

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So there they were, Kat was dashing around the forest listening for some source of food. They'd past by a few birds but while the pair could justify risking a hunt once, regularly coming back into the forest for more food was probably stretching it. This meant they were hoping to find one large-ish animal to keep them, mostly Lily, fed for a day or two until the cultivators woke up.

After an hour of Kat running around essentially blind, with Lily bundled up in her arms. Kat said, "Yeah... this isn't working. Even if I chase after sounds I here it's really hard to look for specific things and I'm just as likely to be chasing after some animal brushing against a tree trunk as just hearing the leaves scraping together from the wind. It turns out, having great hearing is nice and all, but without really being given anything to distinguish it all from other sounds, it's kinda useless. Any better ideas?"

Lily hopped down from Kat's arms to transform, "Hmm... maybe I can try leading the way? You might have enhanced senses but I'm not sure Succubi were ever meant to be hunters... err..." Lily paused as she looked over Kat and saw no change in expression, "right, I see that flew straight over your head. Do I want to explain..." Kat just shrugged and gave Lily a light kiss on the top of her head, "you're not making this any easier Kat!"

Kat seemed completely unrepentant, "I'm not really trying to make it difficult, you can either tell me, because I like listening to you talk, or you can hide it for some reason. I can tell it amuses you, so it's

probably not something I NEED to know, and it's not that important or embarrassing otherwise I'd feel that as well. So really, just go with whatever gives you the most amusement," said Kat happily.

"Hmm... guess I'll save that one for now. Anyway, I think... maybe following my nose? Or ears or whatever? Maybe with you flying overhead? I just need to get close enough for you to see whatever it is and then dive on it. I doubt anything here could outrun you," said Lily.

Kat shrugged and nodded. "It's better than anything I can come up with so let's GO!"

Lily transformed and took off, running through the underbrush and letting her nose lead the way. For the first ten minutes, Lily continued to feeling the gnawing sensation of uselessness. She wasn't finding anything. She still wasn't contributing to the team. Even if all Yang had done was whine, she did voice her opinions and help decide the path. It wasn't much sure, but it was something. Lily was worried she'd just be leading Kat around for another hour or two until they failed.

Except... at about the fifteen minute mark Lily's steps started to become surer. She didn't quite know what was going on, but she did know she was on the right track. Letting her instincts guide her, suddenly she picked up on a scent, it was deep and musky, with a bit of dirt mixed in. A little strange, but Lily was on the hunt.

She shot off at speeds rivalling, and perhaps surpassing, Kat back when she was Rank 1. To a normal human she would have been a blur as she dashed from tree to tree, using what solid footing she could to increase her speed as much as possible, using her wings to glide slightly over rougher terrain to prevent it from slowing her down.

Kat followed through the air, and quickly worked out where Lily was going. There was another small clearing that contained a pond that probably connected to the same aquifer. It was much smaller, just enough for maybe one or two buckets of water... and there was a moderately sized bear drinking from it at the moment. The bear had thick dirt plates covering its back and would be about a head shorter than Kat if it stood on all fours, but the earthen armour made it much wider, and it likely weighed a considerable amount more.

Lily reached the clearing not long after and was just about to pounce on the thing while it was unaware, drinking, when her mind caught up to her body and she realised what she was doing. Lily's claws dug into the bark of the nearby tree, trying to stop her momentum. Sadly, a speeding Memphis is too much for a bit of tree bark to stop and the area she'd grabbed on to simply ripped off the tree, coming with her.

Lily assumed, mistakenly, that this meant she was going to crash into the bear without any real control. It was even starting to look up at her after it heard the tearing sound. Of course, Lily was a little silly to ever imagine that Kat would prioritise her over killing some random bear. Kat dove down and easily intercepted the fluffy missile, catching Lily, and a good deal of bark in her hands.

The bear roared at them both, annoyed by this invasion of its territory. Kat just hurled a fan at it using her full strength, keeping it closed for maximum speed. Kat's fan tore straight through the beast's head. It wasn't even a contest. The fan in question continued, losing almost no speed and digging itself deep in the earth on the other side of the bear. "Hmm... I give it 6/10 for our first hunt. Now we need to figure out how to deal with all this bear," said Kat.

Chapter 886 Cooking the Catch

They were back at camp, calming down from all the excitement. Well, they were about as far upwind they could get from camp without losing sight of where the cultivators were 'resting' underground. Because of the trees nearby, it wasn't nearly as far away as the demonic pair would've liked but they had to make do. At least the scent was fading. Slowly, but still fading and anything was preferable to the smell when it started. "So... what exactly do you want from this Lily?" asked Kat as used a fan to nail the bear to the trunk through both of its back paws. No need to slit the things throat, considering the head was just gone.

"Err... um... do you know what the best part is?" asked Lily hesitantly.

Kat shook her head, "No not at all. Honestly it's lucky that we saw that documentary in history class that covered how to properly prepared hunted animals. It was... somewhat gruesome when I watched it... I was pretty young... oh wait no that means you didn't see it?" Lily shook her head, "Right well... it was a documentary about how people used to make a living in the past. One of the professions it covered was hunting and the basics..."

"So I know your supposed to bleed the animal a bit... and then cut it in certain ways to get the most useable meat. Avoiding the guts and shit as well as anything else that's just not all that edible... and while my memory means I know most of those steps fairly well... with only a few holes when I just looked away..."

"That wasn't for bears. I don't have any bear taxonomy in my head so... not really sure where to cut? I'm sure the legs are safe, and like maybe stuff near the ribs? Is bear ass edible? I really don't know... so... I'm just letting it bleed over the grass for now and then I guess... I'll probably try and cook a leg? I imagine it's going to be really tough but hopefully my own strength will make that less of a problem. What do you think you'd like to have?"

"Um..." Lily glared at the carcass for a few moments, hoping that her instincts would point her towards the juicer cuts or maybe just the ones that would be best for her... but apparently that's not how instincts work. [Hmmm... maybe it's something I'd know if I was biting into the thing but it seems like...]
"no idea really, I can't say any one part calls to me. If you're going to cook the hole leg... maybe just slice some off for me? You're not going to eat it all right?"

Kat shook her head vigorously, "Of course not. Which... hmm... is maybe an issue? I'm not sure how worthwhile it is having a bear carcass around to attract predators when I doubt I'll want to eat all that much of it. Hmm... problem for future Kat I think. Maybe I'll do really well with this fire pit and cook it to perfection!"

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"Do you know how to cook over a fire?" asked Lily, "I know for a fact that I don't."

"Eh... not really?" said Kat awkwardly with a shrug, "Gramps had a big fire cook out a few times since I was there at the orphanage. An old friend of his apparently went hunting in the woods nearby and brought back... hmm... can't really bring up what it was exactly... might not have been told. So... if I was paying attention I would know..."

“But the first few times I was too young to pay attention, and when I was older it was more or less my job to watch everyone, make sure they didn’t run off or stick their hands in the fire so I really wasn’t paying attention to Gramps at all. I know just enough to know that the whole rotating meat with a stick over the fire is pretty close to the truth. It helps evenly cook the thing... but I’m sure there’s more to it. Probably some spices of marinade applied first but... we work with what we have,”

Lily spent a bit of time practicing her magic while Kat waited for the carcass to drain. With such a large whole it didn’t take long, so Kat simply sliced straight through the back leg she chose. Kat got vaguely the right area, but with her strength the fact she hit bone part way through really wasn’t an issue at all. It was good enough, and there was no guts going anywhere so she’d call that a success. It did fall weirdly off to the side now it wasn’t suspended by both feet, but it didn’t fall so that was fine.

Kat then spent a bit of time taking the skin off, with a good deal more care than she used to remove the leg itself. Once it was all off, Kat took a glance at everything before finding a branch that was just a bit longer than the leg was and using the sufficient application of force to shove the bone out and replace it with the branch she’d just picked up. A few more damaged trees later and she had a basic setup for roasting meat. Just turns out she’d forgotten to actually make a pit for this. And she had no string.

So Kat got to digging. With the fire pit now in the ground, Kat was able to bury the wooden sticks and use the surrounding dirt to keep them in place instead of using some clothing as string. Kat did, reluctantly she would add, duck back to the main campsite to grab a more of the wood that had been laying around... only for the smell to travel with her somewhat. Those logs were promptly frozen with demonic fire and shattered.

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It was a few minutes later and the fire was burning, a few trees were missing their branches, and Lily had finished her slices of meat and was leaning against Kat in human form, using her both as a source of comfort, with Kat’s tail wrapped around her of course, and as a heat block because the fire was really going. For Kat it barely registered, and despite some initial worries, the meat seemed to need that extra heat.

As Kat twirled the stick slowly in her hand to keep the meat cooked evenly she asked, “So how is your first real contract so far?”

“Real Contract?” returned Lily.

“I just feel... this is a bit closer to what things should normally be like. Sure the tournament was familiar as well and not too strange... but you slept through that one and the weird romance/detective mission we had to go on after that was... very much not typical. This contract seems like a much better representation of what normally happens... though we have already been here a week which.... Well we can get to that later,” said Kat with a soft sigh.

“I... well I don’t know? I haven’t been all that useful and I’ve slept away a lot of this one as well... and when I haven’t been sleeping we’ve mostly still been travelling. I certainly feel a lot more useless this time around. Even if presumably I’ll have a big role when we actually get closer to Xuena and I can sneak around better... eh... I guess I’d feel a lot worse if I didn’t feel like I was making progress with my magic. Even if it seems like that’s starting to stall a bit...”

Kat nodded, "Well I'm glad it hasn't been too uncomfortable,"

"Kat, I'm complaining yes but I'd much rather been around you then doing anything else. So even if the journey we're on at the moment is a little shitty I'm never going to actually wish to be somewhere else. I'd like that to be clear and on the record for you photographic memory" said Lily firmly.

Kat leaned back, bending around so she could give Lily a kiss on the cheek. "Thanks Lily, that means a lot you know? I was hoping you were still happy with the choice to be bound to me, even if I know that was for other reasons. It did have some far-reaching consequence. So... yeah as long as you're still happy with things it's all ok. What about how long things have been taking though?"

This time it was Lily's turn to shrug, "I don't really know what you want me to say Kat. I've been chafing a little under my parents' scrutiny. Even if they're much happier with our relationship now, and I forgive them. Really I do. The thing is though... it doesn't undo basically two whole years of hating my best friend who YES I did have a crush on. It really soured things in a more general sense between me and my parents so..."

"As bad as I feel saying it, and despite how much better things are now, I'm still happy to not be spending too much time with them. Then on the other side of things, I'm not as close with Sylvie and Gramps as you are. It's questionable for Callisto and Vivian but I know you're not too sure of how that is either so... I guess it doesn't bother me much at all and I feel a bit bad that's the case?"

Chapter 887 Yang WAKES

One more day passed. After chatting for a bit, Kat and Lily split up to do their own thing. Lily continued practicing with her paper magic and by the end of the day her circle was looking a lot more solid. Kat on the other hand dug one large hole and then connected all of the poison, and poison by products, together in that one deep hole. Kat made sure it was easily three times the size of the gunk she needed to add. Once it had all flowed down into it, she got some dirt and made it extra compact and mashed it all together until it was a bit more than a snug fit for half of the hole. Then she slammed that into the wall and made a second one, closing it off from the gunk... mostly.

Once that was done Kat just piled on the dirt. If the dirt wall she made held, or she just managed to get enough dirt down before it cracked to keep it all down there, Kat managed to cover the entire thing without any liquids leaking up to the top. Kat had also made sure to dig the hole pretty far away from the river, so that was hopefully not going to be a worry. Kat was a little surprised she hadn't hit the aquifer, but it seemed to be very deep down so it was fine. She then used the remaining dirt from her hole digging efforts to fill in all the other holes and then just spread it around randomly, trusting nature to sort the rest out.

Once that was done, Kat moved Yang and Xiang out of their holes and did another simply lean-to. Xiang was placed under it... and Yang was placed on a bed of leaves off to the side. That was the subject of some minor debate as to if Yang would appreciate the extra sunlight or not. The poison seemed to be out... so they took the risk. It was one that would pay off too...

Because the next morning when Kat was cooking up some more bear, the last one had been... gritty and not great but at least edible. This time Kat had mashed it all up into a mince then found a stone that she threw into the fire to let hit and used it as a makeshift grill to make bear patties. It was a test run, but

the smell seemed to be an improvement. The bear wasn't too bad either. It was certainly better to cook while that horrid smell had been covered up. There was still a hint of it, if you breathed in a bit too deeply, but Kat was proud of her efforts.

Just as the sun was peaking over the horizon and the first bit of sizzle was happening on the makeshift grill, Yang wrenched herself up into a seating position. Eyes still closed. Kat glanced over at the cultivator wearily and watched her for a few moments. Robotically, Yang stood up and stretched her arms out while facing the direction of the rising sun. Then a frown crossed her face. Kat wasn't quite sure what she expected once Yang frowned. Perhaps opening her eyes, or starting another rant. Maybe just screaming? Passing out wasn't off the table...

None of those things are what happened. Instead, Yang ripped off her clothes in one extra swift motion, abusing her cultivator strength to make sure they were very much gone from her body and left in tatters. Kat just stared slack jawed at the sight, glancing over at Lily to see her reaction... but her girlfriend was sleeping through it. *Right... well... out of respect for the sleeping and the whatever-the-fuck Yang counts as... WHAT THE FUCK YANG! I mean... surely you could have just taken off your clothes normally if they were such a hassle? Was the spectacle really necessary?*

Kat warily glanced at Yang out of the corner of her eye for a few moments. Not really wanted to get a face full of Yang in all her 'glory'. It might not have been entirely inappropriate, it certainly didn't DO anything for Kat sexually, so despite having a girlfriend... it probably wasn't an issue. Didn't mean it was something Kat wanted to see either though, and getting caught staring would just be bad all around.

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So Kat just went back to her grill and watched it cook. When she tried to flip the first one, it was stuck to the rock. She couldn't help but slap her forehead. Of course it's like this. Now I need to go get more bear fat. One trip for what Kat was 90% sure was bear fat later and Kat was attempting her second patty. Hopefully this would be more successful. There was plenty of space on the rock still, even if you ignored the area occupied by the stuck and quickly burning piece.

Just as Kat was flipping her second attempt, suddenly Yang flashed brightly. Kat reflexively raised her arm to block the light even if she didn't need to anymore as a demon. Yang had apparently turned herself into a light bulb. It was weird though... Kat could see Yang pulling in the sunlight at a ridiculous rate, it was actually warping the shadows nearby. What made it doubly odd is that while Yang was glowing, sort of... she was also taking in all that light so it made her really weird to look at. She was an odd mixture of bright and dark patches that seemed to swim around her body.

Kat just turned her attention back to the grill after about twenty seconds. Didn't want to burn this one after all. A few minutes later, while Kat was celebrating her heat resistance in the face of not having any tongs, Yang stumbled forward and the movement caught Kat's eye, just as she thought it was over for Yang, the girl managed to catch herself and return to standing. Then with a quick shake of her head Yang's eyes gained focus and they spotted Kat, who had turned back to the cooking once it was clear she was fine.

Yang marched up to Kat and stood right in front of her, across the fire pit. "Hello Kat, I see you are cooking food. What exactly happened over the past few days? I feel much better now, yet I see no one

else is up and about. Did the salt not work for Xiang?" Yang paused, and looked at Kat's gaze which remained locked on the burgers. "Why are you not looking at me when I'm speaking?!" hissed Yang.

"I can look if you want but I doubt you really want me to right now," said Kat calmly, still not looking up.

"I hardly need you to tell me what my wants are. Now look at me properly so we can have a conversation," insisted Yang firmly.

Kat sighed and raised her eyes, right to Yang's crotch which was very much head level. Deciding that wasn't going to fly, Kat strained her neck to meet Yang's eyes, "Is this better Yang?"

"Yes indeed. Now, despite it being a little chilly, this is a nice place. Could you explain what happened while I was out?" said Yang, rather obliviously.

Kat sighed again. Guess I'll just rip that first bandage off. "Yang, it's chilly because we're next to cold water coming up underground, there is a nice breeze at this time, and you're naked," said Kat. Yang felt like she'd just been knocked on the back of the head.

Kat could see Yang's eyes change as the gears in her head continued to turn and make sense of what Kat was saying. Horror dawned in them as she glanced down to see, she was in fact, naked. "WHAT! WHY DIDN'T YOU PUT ANY CLOTHES ON ME!"

Kat sighed, "Yang, the clothes that were on you are over there," Kat pointed off towards the tattered remains of Yang's clothes that were now blowing away, "For some reason, you, in your half-conscious state, ripped them clean off. So I will not be taking flak for this,"

Yang's mouth opened and closed a few times before she sprinted off behind the trees. Presumably to put some more clothes on. Kat decided the meat was probably cooked enough, slid it over to one of the smaller rocks she'd cleaned for use as a plate and started to take bites from it, not bothering to wait for it to cool down. *Hmm. Tastes a bit better then before... much nicer texture... probably cooked a lot more evenly as well. Needs salt definitely... but I really can't look at salt the same way at the moment so I'll make do without until a can properly quarantine that memory. Hmm... I'd give it a solid edible/10. Much better then yesterday.*

Yang came stomping over and glared at Kat. "What?" asked Kat in 'confusion' was she took another bite of the patty. "Did you want one?" The glare only intensified.

Chapter 888 Yang's Book of Poison Words

It turned out, despite Yang's pouting that eventually she caved because the food smelled nice to her. Perhaps the fact she hadn't eaten in days, but Kat liked to think she'd cooked it all well, ignoring the taste of it when she tried a second one, risking the tiniest bit of salt as well. Kat only gagged slightly at the start, and forgot about it afterwards. Probably wasn't worth it because the meat definitely still needed more salt but it was enough for now.

Lily was quickly woken by the smell of cooking meat and made her way over. She took some of the raw stuff when she saw Yang chomp through her fourth patty in just as many minutes, which was actually her sixth considering Lily missed the first two. Kat even had to do up some more mince but it wasn't too much of an issue for someone of her speed and strength.

When the meal was finished, Kat finally asked, "So do you want to know what happened for real or not?"

Yang sighed, "No, no I do not... but Xuena would kill me if I didn't take the time to catalogue a unique poison for her and how it was treated. So I guess I'm going to have to ask you to tell me despite my displeasure,"

Kat wasn't sure how to react to that statement until Yang pulled out a light blue notebook with 'Yang's Sickly Poison and Stupid Mistakes for Xuena'. Kat felt the book strike a cord in her heart. It was the kind of dumb name that she could see Lily coming up with for her notebooks on occasion. It was also a very best friend to do. *Shit. Do I actually think Yang is an admirable person now? ... No she's still a bit of a cunt but she has a best friend too. So while I don't like her much more... I will make sure Xuena manages to escape safely. Even if I have to take some risks.*

With that in mind, Kat started to explain, "Well I'm not sure how much you remember so I'll start right at the beginning even stuff you likely already know..." Kat started from the beginning, explaining the symptoms for Yang mostly, and touching on when Xiang seemed to have difference symptoms. This continued easily until Kat got to the more gruesome details involving the poison after they'd been at the brook for a few days. Then when Kat started to go into the salt... Yang's hands were shaking.

Yang actually had to go up and vomit behind the tree. Apparently Kat's detailed recount brought up lost memories of the smell, "That... oh god that really happened. I... I can't believe you managed to get through it all while taking care of us both... ugh..."

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"If it makes you feel better, know that both Lily and I have better senses than you," added Kat.

Yang shivered. "You do know I don't wish harm on people right? I mean... I wouldn't wish that on anyone!"

Kat raised an unamused eyebrow, "I stand by what I said," Yang retorted, "I don't wish harm on people. Sure I yell a bit... and people are regularly idiots but to inflict something like that on someone... I don't really have the stomach for it and I hope I never will. Cultivation is a tough rode but... well... this whole thing has really been a step too far I think. Especially when you consider this was apparently just the diluted stuff.

"I'm not sure what the sect could have possibly done to justify this particular poison masters ire. I mean... a whole sect subjected to this? I already mentioned that I can barely comprehend that sort of thing for enemies... but to take out an entire sect with it... I just don't know how someone could ever think that sort of thing is acceptable..."

Do I point out she probably gets sexual satisfaction from arguing? Hmm... no she's just barely recovered. Maybe point out it's possible? "Sexual Gratification?" suggested Kat aloud.

Yang looked mortified for a second before pausing, letting the gears turn in her mind and consider the idea a bit more seriously. "Gods I hope not. That... that sort of thing isn't something you can properly reason with," *we noticed Yang* "and if they're already at that stage... they've obviously decided it's

worth it... and if it's worth it to them... damn hard to talk someone down from that sort of position. I think I have a new least favourite cultivator type."

"What was it before?" asked Lily, returning to human form in Kat's lap just for a moment to ask the question.

Yang glanced down at Lily before looking away, "You guys might think it's silly... but I sort of had a grudge against moon cultivators. They haven't even done anything but I thought for quite a long time that they were my biggest counter. So I researched pretty extensively about them for years to try and make sure they'd never be an issue for me..."

"It was only much later when Xuena asked me why, and I explained, that she also explained. Just how stupid that was. They aren't opposites at all but complimentary elements. They aren't terribly effective against each other sure, but the sun cultivator is no better or worse off. After that... I didn't really have any major issues with any one type..."

"Until now that is. Fuck poison cultivators," hissed Yang.

Lily, deciding this was too good a chance to miss transformed again, "But poison cultivators and medical cultivators are basically the same except with an attitude difference."

Yang didn't even hesitate for a moment, "That little bit of attitude makes a massive difference to me. Xuena, despite being an iced focused cultivator is also a medicinal based one as well. Did you really think I would walk right into that trap?"

Now, Lily, unlike Kat, could lie in this situation... but she was so much more interested in seeing how this went. "Yes. Yes I very much did," this time Lily stayed human for the follow up.

Yang scrunched her face up for a few moments. The temptation to yell building but she pushed it down. "Why?"

"Huh" mumbled Lily. "Well I expected you to fly off the handle at least a little bit. You seem to take any chance you can to get into an argument, and the only way for you to be doing that so consistently is either you're not smart enough to understand basic concepts, which I doubt, or you go actively looking for arguments and then use your intellect to keep those arguments going. It's the only way."

"Is it really that obvious?" asked Yang surprised.

"Wait... I was right?!" choked out Lily.

"Why did you ask that if you didn't think you were right?!" said Yang, stepping up a bit in volume.

"Well... I mean... I thought I was probably right... but I thought you'd just deny it, either convincingly or unconvincingly and I'd go from there... just admitting it... that wasn't really in my cards," said Lily.

"You do realise that self-reflection and understanding are important for cultivation? It's quite hard to advance more complex things if you don't know yourself well enough. Sure I don't always reflect on everything, but it IS a rather large part of my personality," explained Yang.

Lily could feel her mind shuddering as it tried to process this. "But... but why? If you know and you are fully aware... and willing to admit it... why?"

“Oh I wouldn’t admit it to just anyone,” said Yang easily, “but I trust you enough at this point to not spread it around. You’ve mentioned quite a few times you could just leave me to die but you obviously didn’t, Kat even risked my ire to make sure I healed better. To answer the other part of the question, because I really do enjoy it.

“I can’t say I know why I enjoy it precisely, but I do very much enjoy it, and I use it to annoy a lot of people I don’t like. I’m still not really a big fan of you both... but it’s also quite clear you’re devoted to each other so... I’m willing to give you at least a bit of a peak behind the curtain,” said Yang.

“Why does that last part matter?” asked Kat confused.

Yang sighed and said, “I suspect Xiang is destined for great things. Perhaps it’s just female intuition, but I can practically FEEL the strings of fate binding him tightly. I want to ride that wave. I just assumed you were both interested in him and faking a relationship to get closer at the start. Oh, and he’s hot.”

“Is he?” asked Kat and Lily at the same time as they glanced over at Xiang.

Yang slapped a hand over her face. “Why did I ever think you pair were competition at all when you do stuff like this. Maybe I really am slipping a bit with all this anger to miss signs this blatant. There’s easy to spot and then there’s a punch to your face...”

Chapter 889 Xiang Shakily Returns!

With the shocking confirmation of Yang’s true nature, the conversation moved on. They ended up discussing their own respective childhoods and some random anecdotes along the way. This kept up until later in the afternoon when they heard a great gasping, like that of a dying fish attempting one last time to live. Looking over towards Xiang however revealed that it was in fact, just the cultivator waking up.

He saw all three of them sitting around near a dimming fire and stumbled his way over, collapsing into the tree that was... well it was somewhat nearby at least? Xiang was at least ten metres away from the rest of them but it was the thought that counts. “Are you alright?” asked Kat, trying not to be too loud... but with how out of it Xiang was, she erred on the side of caution and it ended up closer to a yell.

“Mrghmln” mumbled Xiang.

He was not ok.

Kat sighed and went over to the water, making one more bucket and gathered up the water then walked back over, and stopped beside Yang. “Do you want to do the honours?”

Yang’s eyes shone with mischievous light as she took the proffered bucket like she was being handed a small child. She then immediately hurled the water straight at Xiang’s face in that same motion, transitioning to anger in a flash. Xiang spluttered as the water covered him. He glared up at Yang, still pale and shaking somewhat and said, “What the heck was that for?” though the shaking in voice revealed he wasn’t anywhere close to back in full form like Yang was.

“Your half asleep ass managed to flop down at a tree so far away from where we were all sitting I had to make sure she still had a brain in there. It was touch and go for a while, and frankly, the data is still

inconclusive considering you're asking stupid questions like that. Perhaps more tests are required," said Yang 'sincerely'.

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"I'm recovering from serious poisoning, you can't expect me to be on my feet and in... in... um... prefect? Prefect condition!" said Xiang.

"I'm sorry to say it's, perfect. Perfect condition. A state I exist in, and you can only hope for. Now get up off your ass and join us around the fire. Maybe if you managed to pull yourself together a bit more Kat will even be nice enough to cook food for you," said Yang as she strode away.

Xiang glared at her as she retreated but got up shakily and stumbled his way over. Yang, this time, had sat closer to Kat and Lily, and Lily was back in Memphis form. So when Xiang stumbled down onto the ground, after travelling in a straight-ish line, he was clearly separated from the group. His stomach growled but he resolutely held his head up high. Not willing to admit to that.

"So Xiang, now that you're recovered, where are we going next?" asked Yang, ignoring how uncomfortable Xiang seemed at the moment.

Xiang of course grit his teeth and pulled out the map with no complaints. "Well, I guess we should try and work out where to sell the snake head first. There's... not all that many cities large enough that I'm sure we could find somebody who was willing to buy it. There's one about five days journey this way," Xiang drew a line that ran roughly East-North-East but Kat wasn't entirely sold on the 'five days away' thing. "it's not too far out of our way. The only issue is that it's probably the smallest of the nearby cities that are 'large enough'.

"If we had in the other direction, there's the largest city of the bunch. We'd be seriously back tracking and have to head through the nearby town and follow the road past it this way," Xiang showed a road heading West nearly perfectly. There were quite a few things that they'd pass by but it would eventually lead them to a large city. "It's maybe six days," Kat looked at the long line of road and decided. If it WAS six days, that was just her running, at full speed, night and day, with nothing weighing her day, "but it's in completely the wrong direction so I'm not particularly keen on going that way.

"Which leaves us with the final city. It's... vaguely in the right direction. We have to head North-North-East or follow the road East, then North, then East a day or so once again. It's vaguely in the right direction but we'll be pretty far off course if we actually go there, slowing our journey down. It's the 'middle size' of the options and is built overlook a huge lake that is said to have formed when a water cultivator slammed someone else into the ground. All the water qi in the area produces spouts of water or something... so... Yang? Thoughts?"

Kat jumped in though, "I'm afraid I'll have to step in for once. I refuse to do anything other than run on the roads. It's too hard to make my way through forests with the damned snake head," said Kat firmly.

"Why?" asked Xiang. Clearly he was still missing a few screws from the poisoning and hadn't yet found them again.

"Xiang... it's simply too large to slip through trees, I can't fly with it, and I'm not so tall I can just carry it above the canopy layer. I have to either look for large gaps between trees, which can be quite rare, or I

need to use it as a battering ram to topple trees in my way. Neither are great, but both slow me down considerably. Even if we had the fastest straight line route to Xuena, the trees would slow us down so much we could go on a hot spring vacation while taking the road and still get there faster. It really is that slow,” said Kat.

Xiang frowned, “Why is toppling the trees slow?”

Kat looked over to Yang and gave her a look that said ‘you actually like this idiot’ and Yang could do nothing more than look ashamed of her life choices in that moment. Was it worth it? She didn’t know. She hoped so. But it was not looking so great in this moment. Yang quickly decided to blame the poison. Probably safer, and less taxing on her mind. “Xiang I’m not so strong I can carry a multi-tonne snake head and fell trees in a single attack while also keeping top speed.”

“Right...” said Xiang.

“It seems the city by the lake is what it has to be then. We can’t waste the time it would require to backtrack for the other one, and the smallest city, NONE OF WHICH YOU NAMED, is closest but only in a straight line and that’s cut out. That sum it up Xiang?” asked Yang.

“Right...” said Xiang.

“Blame it on the poison. Blame it on the poison. Blame it on the poison,” repeated Yang rapidly under her breath. When that didn’t work she changed it to, “Think of his abs. Think of his abs. Think of his abs,” something that only gave her marginal comfort. So she went for the big guns. “You had to rescue him from the spiders. You saw everything. Even flaccid it was a monster. You will never be sexually frustrated in your life if you can snag him. With that and the fate strings, it’s very worth it.”

I really wish I didn’t have super hearing right now. I did not need to know that about Xiang. Or about Yang really. Frankly none of it is information I need or want to know. It’s times like this when I really start to dislike having a better memory.

[I know what you mean. My hearing is more than good enough to hear that as well. At least we can share in our misery rather than having to suffer in silence. I mean... is it really worth it?]

Lily, you made drastic changes to your body, and maybe soul, to accompany me forever. I’m not sure you’re really in a position to judge even if we didn’t want to hear that sort of thing.

[It is COMPLETELY different Kat. Sure you’ve always been hot, and even before I knew you I thought you were the best looking girl I’d ever seen... but that wasn’t what gave me a major crush and sold my heart to you. It was all the times you defended me for no reason other than the fact I needed that help. It’s your personality that makes you more than just a pretty face, and into someone I’d do practically anything for. Yang is going about this in completely the wrong way if she wants to be happy.]

I’m not sure she does want happiness from this arrangement though right? She wants power and is willing to overlook all of Xiang’s flaws for both, power and apparently good sex.

[I still think it’s a shitty deal.]

I suppose it must look that way to you. You got the beautiful girl with a great personality as well as the power and sex... eventually of course.

[KAT!] Kat of course couldn't keep the grin of her face. Teasing Lily was so much fun.

Chapter 890 Travelling the Long Road

*Travel Log. Day One

The journey is more tedious than anything else. Navigating my way through the trees while Xiang looks smug and Yang, despite the previous friendly conversation, mocks me for my efforts. It is not a huge deal, but it doesn't bode well for the start of the journey.

Travel Log. Day Two

Nothing interesting happened. Lily tried to teach me how to play mental chess but I just don't get it. Perhaps once we're better at communicating mentally Lily can fashion a mental chess set to play. I still do not care for chess, and even hearing Lily's thoughts and moves during the process doesn't help me beat her. She was able to disguise them somewhat by just swamping me with potential moves. It's neat, and I play along even if the ones she wants to pick are pretty clear.

Travel Log. Day Three

Still trying the chess thing whenever Lily is awake mostly just to hear her talk. I'm not sure if she realises that's all I'm after, but I think the chances are high because she's been giving more explanations and making them rather long winded. I hope that last part of the comment didn't come across as negative. I adore her explanations.

Travel Log. Day Five

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Chess is dead long live checkers. Apparently even Lily's saintly patience for me could not last when teaching me to play mental chess. This is still difficult, but I can see myself enjoying it one day. Granted, that's largely due to our own joined and obscenely long lifespans... but one day!

Travel Log. Day Seven

I saw some people I think were bandits today but they didn't attack. A large part of me wanted to go bother them for being bandits but Xiang and Yang vetoed me... and I wasn't entirely sure they were bandits anyway.

Travel Log. Day Fifteen

Haven't seen any water recently and the others are feeling it. Perhaps I can figure something out with me demonic fire? I can definitely make ice with it... but I wouldn't count on it being safe for Xiang and Yang. Lily would probably be fine though.

Travel Log. Day Twenty-Seven

We should have reached the city by now. Perhaps we took a wrong turn somewhere along the way? Xiang insists we did not and he is in charge presumably so we're listening to him... but my doubts grow.

Travel Log. Day Fifty-Three

My worries were well founded. No sign of anything nearby and we have missed the city by a quite some time certainly. I still carry around the damned head and the fact it hasn't decayed yet is a miracle.

Travel Log. Day Two Hundred and Seven

It has been so long. Will we ever get home? I've seen strange things on this journey. Plant that pretend to be grass and then swallow prey whole. A mushroom that makes things shrink when they eat part of it. A dancing mariachi band. How Mexican music got here is beyond me. Maybe another translation gimmick? Food was a bit scarce recently as well so we had to go on another hunting trip lead by myself and the awesome Lily!

Travel Log. Day-*

[Ok Kat, you've had your fun. I feel like things are getting a bit out of hand at this point. It's only been a week.]

Lily! You're awake! Lily was indeed awake, and telling the truth. It had only been a week since they'd left. While most the things Kat had said, at least at the start, were quite true, she'd started messing around from day five onwards. The mental construct thing was actually something they'd been practicing when Lily was awake while travelling. It wasn't going all that well, but it was something to do when they weren't chatting.

Kat was also quite wrong about the bandits, thinking she'd only seen one lot. There were quite a lot more bandits on these well used roads than they'd seen. Quite a few thought she was just a strange carriage for a wealthy merchant, only to realise upon closer inspection it was a woman carrying a giant snake head. That shut down many plans of looting right then and there.

See, here, banditry was an art. You needed to rob enough people to get worthwhile amounts of money even just to keep people fed. Bonuses was nice, but for weaker bandits' food was what mattered. For the stronger ones, they needed more and more to fund their arms and armour as well as greasing the palms of nearby town bureaucracy to ensure nobody all that threatening actually got called in to look for them.

On the other side of things, no money was worth dying. The needed to try and determine who looked like a cultivator and who did not. The smarter ones that stuck around quickly realised the less people in a group the more likely they were to be cultivators. A group of three that was also carrying a GIANT SKULL might as well have had a neon sign pointing at the group that said 'Powerful Cultivators Here' so they stayed well out of sight. Not every cultivator would bother bandits like them... normally being a waste of time...

But some were desperate for their own coin, and killing bandits was a great way to justify taking the ill-gotten gains afterwards. Most bandits were not ignorant to this fact, nor the fact that some truly gullible fools really did go around hunting bandits 'for the good of the people'. Now it was an ongoing argument amongst bandits as to if they really did it for the started reason, for the praise and adulation of random towns people, for the ladies, or men, they'd snag that way, or perhaps it was to take out their own sadistic urges on 'acceptable' targets. No true consensus had ever been reached.

On the more legal side, Kat and the gang had run past quite a few other travellers. It normally wasn't too hard for Kat to get out of the way. The trees, if there even were any, didn't tend to grow too close to the

road and so stepping off of it for a bit was perfectly fine. Oh that was actually another thing, these roads were a lot sturdier than the first one she'd been on and could handle her weight plus that of the carriages. Perhaps it was the carriages that warranted the tougher stuff in the first place.

When they passed, it was pretty regular to get a few stares. It's not every day you see a young woman carrying a snake head the size of a large shack. A few wondered how someone like Kat could kill such a thing. The rest would smack those few in the back of their heads and point out the small spiderweb cracks that appeared under Kat's feet when she stepped on a weak bit of stone, revealing just how heaving something like that was, and then further explaining Kat was able to outrun many of their horses. That was how.

There was only one more thing of any note during their trip, it was on the fourth day late at night after they had set up for the night. Lily had taken to spending as much of the night awake as she could to practice her paper magic. The reason for this, was because she could always sleep during the day but practicing magic needed her not to be moving quite so much, and the extra concentration didn't hurt too much either.

It was when Lily was about to sleep that something new finally happened. She'd tried to summon up paper so many times that it was practically burned into her mind. She didn't even consider changing her summoning method, this one called to her in a way only two others did, and even then it wasn't even close to as strongly. She was about to call it a night and she could already feel her eyes drooping...

But then her spell 'failed' and she felt a piece of paper slap her in the face. Lily was about to just throw it to the side, not even thinking much of it in her sleepy space when Kat sped into her and swung her around in a circle. "LILY YOU DID IT!"

"I did?" said Lily confused and rather unconvinced.

"YOU DID. Lily your spell worked!" said Kat cheerily.

Then it all clicked in Lily's tired mind. "I... I did it. Wait... I did IT! Hahahahahahaha" As soon as Lily finished laughing Kat pulled her into a toe-curling kiss, mostly for Lily's benefit but it had the desired effect. Lily's emotions practically exploded with joy. The combination of Kat's kiss and her success buoying her emotions to new heights.

Then Kat got hit in the back of her head with a stick and they both paused and turned. "Look I get you're both happy, Lily did something cool or whatever... but it's the middle of the NIGHT. Now SHUT UP" growled Yang before leaving them to their own devices.