

DEMONS 911

Chapter 911 Somebody Bust out the Pink Panther

Once Lily had recovered it was beyond easy to sneak into the manor. The windows around the top of the main hall were all just left open. Presumably to allow for the smell to leak out. With wings, it wasn't even hard to get up there. No fancy tricks just a bit of flying. The main hall served as both an entrance hall, and a classroom. It had what were basically chem lab benches set up around the room with a large podium at the front and an oversized desk. Along the walls were equipment not too unlike those you'd find in the modern day, if you had the skill to recognise them.

Lily padded along the floor, looking around carefully for more guards or inhabitants of the manor but wasn't seeing anyone just yet. This room seemed to be more for lecturing then serious attempts at alchemy, but it was very bright. Lily couldn't rely on the usual darkness to hide herself if someone wandered by so she kept her ears listening for any sounds. Sadly, the mansion almost certainly used sound dampening inscriptions around each room. Both to keep sound in, and prevent it getting out.

Lily checked one of the two doors on the right side of the room. A quick look under the frame showed a dark room filled with shelves. A quick transformation later and Lily was pushing it open. Inside was a basic storage room with rows and rows of ingredients laid out for the taking. Lily wasn't sure how valuable they were, so she just relayed things back to Kat who was still pretending to be calm on the outside while her emotions boiled under the surface.

A better look revealed that there was another door at the end of the room, certainly just taking her back out to the main hall, and a number of doors across the top of the room alongside a thin balcony. Lily was wondering why there was no stairs only to realise the obvious. *They're cultivators. A one story jump is child's play for them. Though... why is there a set in the main hall? For cleaning staff perhaps?*

Lily decided to follow one of these new doors instead. The main room did have other exits but it was just so large with mediocre places to hide. The desks weren't great places to hide, too reliant on blocking sight lines and it was so bright that standing out in the open was just asking to be spotted. Another check, and door opened later and Lily found herself standing in a bare hallway with a rather lavish carpet over it. Silenced her footsteps really well. Glancing into the closest room, Lily could see it was a lab of some kind. The fact that it wasn't locked... well she was starting to question the security in this place.

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There wasn't anything interesting though. It was just a basic chemistry lab with a fantasy bent. An even quicker check of the other rooms in the hall revealed the exact same thing, with only one of them having anything unique at all. It was as furnace that seemed to be currently simmering away. A quick check with Kat revealed it was a pill furnace. She was told to just leave it. Interrupting the pill formation process could result in anything from basic dust, to a large explosion and they were trying to be sneaky after all.

Lily made her way out of the hallway and back to the main room, now at the top of the staircase.

*Hmm... were do I want to go. I can head back down... or I guess I can just check on the other stuff

upstairs?*

Lily nodded and slinked her way into the other half of the building. Lily almost hissed out when she finally met someone. Well 'met' was perhaps a bit of a strong way of phrasing it.

Peeking under the doors revealed a messy room with box strewn everywhere, a large desk and an undersized bed. There was a person she couldn't see the full details of collapsed at the desk with the lamp blazing brightly right next to the... girl's face? Lily really couldn't make out the details from so far off so that one was more of a guess. The next room was similar, though a bit neater and the occupant had managed to actually make it to the bed. Two more rooms, two more people.

Hmm... I don't think it's worth checking these right? Xuena isn't just going to be up here in a normal room right?

[I don't know? Maybe? Did any of them look like Xuena?]

How should I know Kat! We've never even heard a proper description of her, or at least, if I have I don't remember it at all. Even if that wasn't the case, I can't get a good look at any of them. Most are actually in bed with covers over them so I can't even tell if they're girls or not. The one I am certain is a girl is passed out at her desk. Even that's a guess though because of the long hair.

[Can't you like... smell the difference?]

Kat this place still smells like herbs! Just because I'm inside doesn't mean it's any better. In fact, it's worse. I'm beyond thankful that first freak out seems like a one-time thing because I'm really just not sure what I'd do otherwise. So no. Sadly, I can't tell by scent alone and a small sliver of a room what gender they all are.

[Sorry... um...]

No Kat. I'm sorry... I... I'm still quite frazzled because of the smell. Even now that I've recovered a bit my instincts are telling me quite a few contradictory things. It's safe, it's dangerous, I'm in danger, there's food here. I've been able to just push it all into the back of mind but it's still niggling at me. I'd like to be out of here as soon as possible, but I obviously don't want to MISS Xuena.

[I'm still sorry. I'm a bit agitated as well, for similar reasons I guess. I'm just worried. Um... let me just double check with Ron...] Kat quickly relayed what Lily had found to the group, and Ron gave a nice summation of his thoughts. [Ok. Ron thinks the answer is 'probably not' in any of those rooms. The sect can't afford to insult it's disciples like that, having her live with them even while she's a hostage. Doesn't mean she isn't in the house, just that she isn't going to be in the student dorms. You should be safe to leave without checking them thoroughly.]

Lily nodded and sent back feelings of warmth as best she could towards Kat. They were of course tainted by her agitation, both with a lack of progress and the smell, but it was the thought that counted. Probably. Considering they were in fact, just some thoughts.

Lily moved downstairs behind the podium to find another row of dorms, these ones packed with servants. Double bunks on both sides, with a kitchen at the end of it. Lily just ignored them as well. Xuena wouldn't be in a big group. On the other half of the room though... there was a storage room for non-alchemical ingredients, and one final door. On the other side of it was a set of bars blocking of access to the basement. No trouble for a small cat.

Lily slipped through them without trouble and headed downwards. At the bottom was another set of reinforced bars that were probably much more useful against regularly sized thieves. It was as simple as a normal jaunt for Lily. Not even her horns caused any trouble getting through. The first two rooms on either side were basic prison rooms with a cot, a bench, and a bucket. Clearly they weren't for anyone of note, or temporary at best.

The next room though, Lily could hear something. Sliding up to the door she found it was wooden with an access window at the top. Transforming she peaked in to find a nicely furnished room. Alchemy equipment on one end, bed on the other. The floor wasn't terribly clean and it was an ugly, stone thing but the furnishings were quite high quality. The room was actually about twice the size of the ones upstairs, perhaps a bit larger and filled with alchemical gadgets. The most important thing though... was a teenage girl.

She seemed completely unbothered by her incarceration. She, Xuena hopefully, was hunched over the desk and scribbling into a journal. The lamp by her side was shining on half of her face, and she was wearing clothes that seemed nice enough. Really, the only thing that stood out to Lily as a bit of a problem was the fact that both her feet were chained together. Sure the chain was padded to keep from harming the girl, but they were thick, heavy metal things. Heck, they were as thick as Lily was long.

Guys? I think I might have found our girl. She looks like this...

Chapter 912 To Speak or not To Speak

Lily

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Lily tried her best to describe Xuena... but it turned out Xuena was a rather striking figure. She had pure white irises surrounded by black sclera that seemed to shine, defying their nature somewhat as well... black sclera. Her hair was a soft, pale blue that was cut exceptionally short making her look a bit like a snowball from the back. It was presumably cut so short to avoid dipping it in her alchemy work by accident. Her outfit was similar. While Yang went for flowing sleeves and loose pants, Xuena's outfit seemed defined by the word 'tight'.

The sleeves had just enough give in them to allow for a full range of motion and not a single thread more though they did cover her entire arm. The cuffs were buttoned around her wrists to prevent them sliding up and down. Something else Lily didn't notice, but wasn't really looking for, was the obvious stitching at the join near the torso. It was made to easily be ripped away should something toxic get caught on the sleeves.

Xuena's pants were actually two layers. The first was a skirt that extended until just passed her knees and then underneath was a set of what looked like supple leather trousers underneath. Her shoes, now that Lily was looking again, seemed to be part of the chain shackles around her legs. They were heavy metal and leather things that kept Xuena's feet close together. It wasn't impossible to walk, but it required a sort of waddling motion to move.

Her skin was very pale as well, making it look like it was bathed in moonlight instead of the magical lighting that was trying to imitate the sun. Her lips were blue, but she didn't seem cold. The fact she was a prisoner seemed to imply they were naturally that colour. It was a nice, sky blue and contrasted

strangely with her completely normal tongue, when it was poking out due to concentration. Her nails were another strange thing. They seemed to be just... missing. Perhaps an accident in her childhood?

[Ok yeah, Xiang and Yang are saying that it's almost certainly Xuena.]

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Right so what do I do now? There's no way I'll be able to get those cuffs off. I might be able to sneak in through the viewing window. It's just some crossbars over it... but I'm not entirely sure I'll fit because of my horns. I'll need... well honestly just looking at it I'd guess we'll need you down here Kat. I'm mostly just wondering if I should be trying to talk to her now...?

Lily waited, trying to fit herself into the shadows in the nearby cell. Lily thought it was working quite well, and just closing her eyes and curling up a bit made it so she wasn't really showing off anything other than her black fur to the world. Even the little bits of purple around her horns seemed to fade when she was trying to hide like this.

[Ok... um... this might take a while... everyone is sort of just... arguing about it? Yang wants you to talk to her, maybe relay some messages, Xiang wants to keep everything nice and stealthy, Ron thinks that while the chance Xuena has a device for recording sounds in Xuena's room is low. He ALSO believes that it's getting late, or rather, early, and that it'd be best to not tell her anything until tomorrow when we're actually breaking her out which...]

[Well that just led into a whole 'nother round of arguments because now they can't decide when the best time to attack is. Ron is trying to push for later, especially because it's better for him and his men, but Xiang and Yang aren't overly comfortable with leaving Xuena there for an extra day. Um... how does she seem to you?]

She seems fine? I mean... if she didn't have the shackles on I'd say she looks completely normal? Well no her appearance is weird by human standards but I mean... she doesn't have any bruises I can see. Though she's quite covered up. Certainly doesn't look like she's in pain but she isn't really moving... she's just writing at the moment so it's hard to say. I think she's fine?

[Yeah... I don't think I'm going to repeat that. Chances are Yang would just get more worried. Um... what about you? Are you fine like... hiding out nearby for a day? Or I guess just till tomorrow night?]

Yeah I think so? I'll probably just find a nice corner to sleep in. Maybe take over one of the cots and hide under the shitty pillows? I doubt I'd be found if I did something like that and if I WAS found I'm all but certain they'd just think I was a normal demon cat. Granted they might try to research me or something... but I don't think I'd be in any danger any time soon.

[You know... I don't think I like that answer very much. Seems a bit risky now...]

Oh Kat it'll be fine.

[I'm not really having a great time imagining all the ways you might possibly be experimented on Lily.]

*Kat, I am quite willing to bet, and I suppose considering the circumstances I AM betting my life, but I AM willing to bet that the worst likely outcome is a few minor non-invasive tests before being handed

off to a young relative as a pet by whoever catches me. That's all of course assuming you don't just bust down the door like a minute after I get found.*

[I'm not that quite THAT fast Lily]

Well, once again, I'm willing to bet on that one. Though I'll also say that restraining yourself is probably the better idea. Still, I think if push came to shove you'd be able to move a lot faster than you think.

[Ok, fine you're probably right. If you did get hurt I'd turn into some unholy fireball of swift vengeance but I don't like how much you're counting on it either.]

*I'm not counting on it at all though Kat. I really do feel safe here. I might be in enemy territory but remember, to them I have no cultivation at all. I'm not a threat, I'm a weird kitten on the edge of being a cat. Plus, this mansion is owned by an alchemist not a biologist. I doubt they have the knowledge to properly investigate me. Plus I'm adorable.

Cultivators so far are all about prestige and pride. The idea that they found a unique species that has never before seen, and then they treat me like a minor prize by handing it off to a child. Well... I suspect that's exactly what their pride would force them to do. I can't be a familiar, I'm too weak for that. A unique pet though... very fancy.*

[I don't like that you're making sense here Lily.]

It's simply reasoning Kat. Plus, think of this as practice for when I eventually become combat capable. I'll be participating in fights WITH you eventually. If you can't even stand the idea of me safely sleeping in enemy territory what will you do if we end up in a fight together?

[I don't like how you're trying to spin this...]

Would you rather pay attention to the argument going on at camp?

[So how would you contribute in a fight? Assuming you get your strength up?]

Lily grinned. Kat wasn't going to call her bluff; they both knew it. They enjoyed speaking with each other far too much to bother with whatever nonsense was going on around Kat. Lily did use the chance to carefully reposition herself under one of the pillows. If she was going to keep chatting with Kat, might as well keep at it until they both, or more likely just Lily, fell asleep.

I think a sort of... ranged artillery/utility type of thing? I'm not all that large so... maybe anchor my shadow to one of your shoulders? Maybe just the top of your head? Sit there and then start throwing spells at people. I'm not sure if I'll have things that can boost you, but if I do that would be another thing I'd use. Actually... I wonder if I could just hide in your shadow and cast from there? That's probably a bit higher level but perhaps... very useful.

[That would be nice. If you were safe in my shadow, maybe like... not mine but say my outfit's shadow? Maybe hide in a shadow cast by my sash or something? Wherever is safest. Then we figure out a sight sharing trick... and you could use my vision to cast spells from a defensible position.]

*Yes exactly. As much as I might like the image of casting powerful spells from the back line, I know that you'd be forever worried about me getting hurt if I wasn't right next to you. I also know I don't want to

be just a princess in the library. What is that saying? 'Better to be a warrior in a library than a librarian in a war?'

Chapter 913 Yang Would Do That. Yes.

Lily

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Lily woke up a bit early for the breakout. It seemed that everyone had continued to argue all the way until sunrise, making the whole argument rather moot. Apparently Yang was genuinely annoyed at this. Kat wasn't sure if Yang had gotten too caught up in the argument, or was failing to argue well enough to get her point across. Lily slept through it all, as well as most of the day. Whenever she started to stir, Kat just sent soothing waves of calm down the link and Lily went back to sleep. No sense in getting up and being tempted to do something foolish.

Now night had well and truly fallen and Lily was making the first move. She hopped up, balancing precariously on the lip of the viewing window and tried to stick her head through the bars. Lily was careful, and when she felt her horns touching the edges she pulled back without making a sound.

Hmm... can I... Lily focused on her horns and tried to retract them... to no success even after five minutes.

Lily tried again, realising the obvious mistake she'd made. This time Lily focused not on having them retract, but the fact her human form didn't have them at all. The horns slowly started to vanish when Lily locked that mental picture in place. It was... dreadfully slow. She had to sit there, awkwardly, feet bunched up and leaning slightly against the side of the frame to stay steady.

It was terribly uncomfortable as well. Like sucking your breath in continuously even after you need to breathe. It took an agonisingly long time before Lily could stumble through the gap, head now slightly smaller without her horns. Lily felt her balance was completely off as she hit the ground, just barely managing to right herself, but still noticeably hitting the floor. Xuena didn't react at all, and in Lily's moment of hesitation her horns sprung back into place alongside a sharp pain. *Oof. Note to self don't do that again any time soon. Or maybe practice?*

Lily let a shiver trail down her spine at the idea of needing to practice something so unnatural feeling. Useful it almost certainly would be but... it had been such an unpleasant experience. Perhaps the only reason it was of practical use would be for other stealth missions. If she could hide all of her demonic features Lily would look and feel like a normal cat to most people. It would be an edge... an edge Lily wasn't quite willing to go without when she thought of it like that.

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With newfound confidence Lily transformed and then made a knocking sound on one of the nearby cabinets. Xuena turned slowly, then spotted Lily and practically jumped in place. The pair stared at each other waiting for the other person to say something first. After a while of just staring, Xuena was the one who asked, "Um... who are you and why are you in my bedroom?"

Oh I can't let a comment like that go. "Bedroom? Yang told me you were in a prison cell... well I suppose there's no accounting for taste..." said Lily trying to go for wistful sounding.

Xuena didn't rise to the bait and ask the obvious question. Instead, she reiterated "Who are you and what are you doing here?"

Lily sighed, "I thought that was obvious, I'm here to rescue you on behalf of Yang,"

"I don't believe that," said Xuena. "The chance that she'd trust anyone other than herself with my safety is so tiny it might as well be a single snowflake in a blizzard. Not to mention, it really isn't that hard to find out my best friend's name and use that to give you extra information. Now, who exactly are you? Or who are you trying to be? If that question makes you feel better,"

This isn't nearly as amusing as I thought it could be. Xuena was just... sitting there. Without a care in the world. *I wonder if she thinks the security here is good enough that nobody who isn't part of the sect could get in? Or if she thinks the chance that I'll do something bad aren't all that high? Um... hmm... Kat any ideas?*

[Not really. I'm currently flying somewhere above the town while waiting for the other two to get into position. Despite pointing out that I could fly everyone out if it was just Xuena and the two of us, Yang insisted she'd come along... and Xiang wasn't going to be left behind so... yeah...]

Clearly she knows Yang well. "I really am here to get you out, and Yang's working with me as well," said Lily trying to seem as honest as possible. The fact it was the truth should help, but perhaps starting off the conversation with a joke was in poor taste.

"Right... let's say I believe you. What's Yang doing right now?" asked Xuena words laced with suspicion.

"Being an idiot," answered Lily reflexively. Except... once Xuena heard what was said, she just made a 'go on' gesture instead. "See... I'm connected mentally to my girlfriend and we can break you out without any troubles. She can even fly with a person. Just ONE person though. Yang wasn't willing to just wait in a safe location so she's heading here as well, with Xiang, if you remember that guy,"

Xuena groaned and slammed her head into the desk. "She would do that wouldn't she!"

"Well considering she is doing just that... yes, yes she would," responded Lily.

"Urgh... ok I'm more willing to believe you now. Is there anything I need to do?" asked Xuena, eyes fixed on Lily's.

"Um... not overly much? You just need to make sure you've got everything you want to take with you. I can carry some stuff in my bag," Lily jostled the bag in question, "and as long as there isn't too much stuff in it, when I transform it'll disappear. Other than that... well we'll need Kat to get those chains off you. We'll be brute forcing them though. So... we'll need to be ready to run,"

Xuena grimaced but gave a sharp nod. "Um... hmm... what do I want to take..." Xuena stood up and slowly walked towards the centre of the room as she eyed all the shelves. None of the ingredients were worth much. That had been the whole point, she was to try and refine better recipes from common things. Xuena had indeed made an improved healing potion from the garbage in her room. It took a lot of skill in exchange for about half the cost in ingredients. Possibly not worth it, but just the proof she COULD come up with something like that was worth a lot.

That meant notebooks. Xuena shuffled slowly back over to the desk and grabbed her main notebook before Lily interrupted, "Do you want to just point things out?"

"How much time to do we have?" Lily just shrugged in response to Xuena's question. "Then... no I think I'll do it myself," Xuena continued to walk around gathering a few books here and there until she had four of them. Xuena wrapped the lot in one of the outfits nearby and threw on an extra two coats knowing that ice attacks were in her near future. When it came time to hand them over... Xuena's arms shook slightly until Lily just held out her bag, the contents had been emptied into Xiang's storage ring.

Lily quickly tested everything would work, causing Xuena to have a minor panic attack for a moment when she thought Lily was about to just run away with the books. Lily's transformation back to human removed those fears pretty quickly. "Um... what now?" asked Xuena.

Lily shrugged, "I guess we just wait for the signal? I don't really know how close everyone is. Kat's above, but she's watching Xiang and Yang trek across the mountain so we know where everyone is. Ron and his crew are probably off robbing the sect blind and with your stuff bagged I think we just need to hurry up and wait,"

"Who's Ron?" asked Xuena with some concern.

"Some thieves we ran into. We managed to get some cultivation masking pills or something, and they really wanted them. So the Ron tried to bully them out of us... and when Kat forced his hand we ended up... not really teaming up but... making use of each other? Ron and his crew are robbing somewhere else in the sect, making use of our escape. Technically, they might get caught and we'll be the ones making use of their blunder but well... they know we have to kick down some doors and break your chains so..."

Xuena nodded, "I get it. They got the better end of things... though... why are you and your girlfriend helping us?"

"Oh? Did that not come up? Kat's a demon and I sort of count as her familiar?" answered Lily.

"Wait... why would you think of her as your girlfriend if she's enslaved you like that?" asked Xuena. There was no malice in the question, just genuine confusion. Lily's eyes though, they went wide and despite being in human form her nails lengthened to a sharp point as she hissed in response.

Xuena backed up, showing her hands and trying not to trip over the shackles around her legs and Lily fought off the anger. "S-sorry," said Lily through gritted teeth. Still angry, "but she was my girlfriend FIRST. And the only reasons he agreed to this whole thing is because I wanted it. To be by her side forever..."

Chapter 914 Knocking On the Back Door

Kat

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Kat pretended to crack her joints. Pretended, because it simply wasn't possible to get her body to make those sounds anymore. It wasn't exactly something she'd investigated, but it had to be either something about being a demon or her regeneration. Apparently cracking your knuckles wasn't bad for you per

say... but people had opinions about that sort of thing. Perhaps being a Succubus was all it took to remove it. Whatever the case, Kat had to cheat by clicking her fingers rapidly instead. Which was also a real pain to get right. Kat's body had a... distant relationship with friction and physics in general. It was rather weird clicking for her was closing to abusing air pressure then letting her fingers snap naturally.

That nonsense wasn't really important right now though. It was finally go time. Yang and Xiang were nearby, just outside of the compounds limits in the direction they were choosing to flee. It was a weird angle that ended up close to the inner sect, but apparently, they were trying to make it seem like a double bluff. In Kat's hand was the pill she'd be giving to Xuena, and the wall was below her. Kat herself rested comfortably on the edge of the roof.

Lily. I'm going to first smash the wall, then the floor, which is Xuena's ceiling. Is everything ready on your end?

[Yup. I've just given Xuena the heads up and she's ready for this to go down]

Ok. I'll be carrying her the first bit of the way when I hand off those pills. I want you in her arms when I get down there, so I can just scoop you both up. I'm not sure when I'll be breaking the shackles, but probably around the time we catch up to Xiang and Yang. I'll have to slow down for them at least, so it won't be a problem.

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[I'm all good chief! Xuena isn't as good at hugs as you are but for now I'll make do.]

Kat suppressed a light chuckle and got ready. It was go time. In one swift motion Kat jumped down from the house and kicked the wall on her way down, using her wings as stabilisation. The inscriptions holding the house together tried but they really weren't designed to hold off attacks, certainly not from someone of Kat's physical might. The wall exploded and Kat rushed in after it, not taking any time for the debris to even make an impact with the opposite wall.

Slamming her heel down to shatter the floor, Kat then used her speed to pull herself down using the hole in the floor. It broke off in another head sized chunk, but she was down. The door holding Xuena in was kicked off its hinges, into the hallway of course, and Kat grabbed the two girls, along with a couple extra clothes, before jumping back up, letting herself exit through the holes. The reason for kicking the door out was to hopefully confuse investigators a little more. Sure the exit hole was obvious, but Kat had landed in Xuena's room. Why was the door also kicked open? It might not keep people busy long... but as Ron said. Every moment counts.

Kat wasn't even paying attention to her surroundings as she charged forward. Xuena was gripping her kimono, and left tit, for dear life. Kat simply pushed that pain off to the side. It was minor at best and sure Xuena was using her full strength as a Rank 1 cultivator... but it was all reflexive. She wasn't actually trying to do damage. It was distracting enough for Kat to plough through a shed and two bushes before paying more attention to where she was going, but her wings were strong enough to shield the weaker two from random, unenchanted shed debris.

Xuena clearly wasn't paying enough attention to anything right now so Kat had to give up on passing off the pill which... Kat wasn't exactly sure how bad that was. Hopefully not too much of a problem. It wouldn't take long for her to rest a bit. Soon, Kat managed to find Yang and Xiang's hiding place, and

blitzed past them. Kat didn't let up at all and simply sped onwards for another few seconds getting a good deal of distance before stopping. A large trail of destruction followed Kat. Her steps causing small but noticeable craters as her demonic energy failed to have enough time to stabilise the ground a bit for her speed.

Kat stopped herself from moving when she found a large, compact boulder that took the majority of her speed. If it was pushed back slightly and into the hill well... that's not really Kat's problem now is it? "Xuena, I need you to take this pill now. I get it was all very fast, but we need to stop any Qi based tracking," said Kat softly, and, after a moment of thought, with her relaxation aura.

"No, not till I know you aren't planning anything," said Xuena firmly, hand still around Kat's breast.

Kat twitched and tried not to point out that it was far too late to be looking for plots. That or the fact she was being molested, technically speaking. Having your tits grabbed by a pretty girl might've been nice for Lily, but Kat found no enjoyment in it, just a good deal of pain. In fact, Lily probably wouldn't enjoy the feeling either. It was just unpleasant. "Ok fine, watch those trees, use your cultivation and LOOK at Yang when she runs passed. I can overtake them again, but you need to take your damned medicine. I mean, aren't you an alchemist?"

Kat handed the pill over and Xuena studied it once it was dropped into her hands. Lily used this as a chance to escape and rub herself against Kat's face. *Yes yes, you did a good job and you're adorable. I'll give you a kiss when we're taking a break. Sound good?*

[I want you to do so much more than that...] Kat waited a moment. [OH NO! I did not just... I just... no I... I mean I do just... Um... sorry I... no. I'm not getting carried away by these instincts and this adrenaline high. I will take the kiss please.] Kat gave Lily's nose a light boop, causing Lily to sneeze.

While that was going on Xuena managed to determine the main ingredients in the pill. They were... not great. Sure Kat was probably telling the truth, that it would hide her from trackers, but it was also deadly. If the dosage was wrong, regardless of what Kat THOUGHT it was... it would in truth be a crippling poison. If anyone wanted to take out Xiang, Yang and her, this was the way. Just one pill... and their cultivation could be ruined forever.

Oh sure, Xuena might be able to fix it eventually... but not with no cultivation of her own to do the alchemy. That being said... Xuena also watched as thirty seconds later Xiang and Yang sprinted through the clearing, Yang pausing for half a heartbeat, only for Xiang to keep dragging her forward. That confirmed, assuming Lily was telling the truth and they'd both had a pill of their own, that it wasn't instantly fatal, or crippling... and Xuena really had no other choice but to follow along.

Xuena was broken out of her thoughts when she felt a sharp tug on her legs, and then she heard the screeching of metal. Kat had wrenched apart her cuffs when she wasn't paying attention. "Ok, here's what's going to happen now. I'll catch up to Yang and Xiang, drop you off with them, and then keep running. I'll be making as big a mess as I can for a while, trying to lead them away. It won't be for long though. I'm fast yes, but I'll be making tracks for them to follow. Then I need to catch up with you all again just in case you're found. Lily, you'll be with Xiang,"

Lily transformed and pushed a cheek out, "I know I know, but kiss first?"

Kat rolled her eyes. Lily was being a bit cheeky and while Kat did love that... well... Lily deserved something that was both a reward and punishment. Instead of bothering with Lily's cheek, Kat used her tail to pull Lily against her, squishing Xuena who was still in her arms and kissing Lily full on the lips, letting her tongue slide in for just a moment before backing off.

Xuena went bright red, mortified at what was happening in front of her, and Lily did the same a moment later when she regained her whits and realised what had just happened in front of someone who was basically just some random stranger to her. Lily went bright red and transformed to hide her embarrassment before diving into Xuena's arms. Kat just grinned at the scene and waited for Lily to properly settled before kicking off the boulder and into a run. Catching up to two cultivators would be easy. Leading the rest on a goose chase? Perhaps a bit harder.

Chapter 915 Grumpy the Honourable

Kat could feel Lily's displeasure along the link as Kat sprinted away from her. Sadly, it was a necessity. Someone needed to make a less obvious but still clear trail through the forest, and Lily needed to be near the cultivators so Kat could find her way back. After all, hiding from Lord Icy Prick's subordinates was the whole point of the pills and this little distraction. Kat had made sure to drop Lily and Xuena off just in front of Yang a second time before heading off on her own. Kat had turned off, heading directly away from the inner sect and leaving broken branches in her wake.

It was a simple matter to use her wings to alleviate some of the destruction her passing naturally caused. It was meant to look more careful, a better attempt at stealth than before. Not too good of course, if Kat simply flew over the terrain, then no trace of her passing would be left at all for the poor trackers. Ron had of course added one final addition to the plan that Kat and co really hadn't thought about. Clothing.

Kat was carrying old clothing from everyone in the group except Lily. This was why Kat had used up some of her limited time to liberate some spare clothes that Xuena had chosen to leave behind. Sadly Xuena's room didn't have any used clothing, everything seemed to have been promptly clean. This meant her scent was by far the weakest of the groups when it came to Kat's distraction. In the end, Kat pretended to lose a bit of torn cloth to one of the trees. Xuena wouldn't be complaining, she'd chosen to leave this outfit behind after all.

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Kat had been running for twenty minutes when someone dropped down in front of her. It was a woman; she had a large halberd that was longer than she was tall. Probably not the best weapon for her... but she was about Kat's height and seemed confident in her stance. She was also glaring at Kat a lot like Kat had walked up and then dumped the woman's lunch on the floor or something, "Why are you looking at me like I just ate the last cookie in the jar?" asked Kat with false confusion.

"I am annoyed at being led on a wild chase through the mountains, not even an HOUR after I finally get some time to sleep. I have been on guard duty for three days, and I just don't have time for whatever nonsense you foolishly believe you can get away with!" hissed the woman. Kat was going to dub her 'Grumpy' for now.

“Right... well... see the thing is... I kinda have to? Made a binding promise you see so... I could defeat you... maybe kill you... or you could just go back to sleep?” offered Kat.

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Grumpy scoffed, “As if My Liege would be so merciful as to leave me alive if I failed in my task so spectacularly. If I must fall, let it be in battle with my honour intact!”

So... Lily... do I just kill this girl? Apparently if she fails it'll be worse for her so...

[I mean... I guess? Is there a reason not to?]

I mean... besides the whole 'murder wrong' thing? Not that I can see. She seems quite confident in her chosen course of action and wants to die 'a warrior's death'.

[Oh, in that case don't bother going easy on her. Finish things up as fast as you can. That's the only way to be respectful.]

Ok! Now, Kat could tell there was something else that Lily wasn't saying... but she was willing to believe. On Lily's end of things, she knew that while what she said was mostly true, it was also a great excuse for Kat taking out the woman quickly and with minimal risk to Kat herself.

“Have it your way then,” said Kat with an almost lazy sigh before speeding up explosively. In just a moment, she was in Grumpy's face. The woman didn't hesitate to bring her halberd down to try and meet Kat's charge head on, using Kat's momentum to skewer the approaching demon, while still be ready to react when Kat dodged. Kat of course, did not dodge. At all.

Two things happened in the same moment. Kat's hand reached forward, obliterating Grumpy's ribs and punching her heart to pieces. On Kat's end, the halberd swung down until it impacted Kat's bones... and went not a single step further. Blade chipping instead of bone. Grumpy let out a bubbling, blood filled cough and said, “I n-never s-stood a chance... did I... y-your off-fer it was... genuine I t-take it?” Kat nodded, “H-heh, w-well... my only regret is t-that I was not stronger. May I be h-honoured in my next I-life,”

Apparently Grumpy used the last of her strength to throw out that particular piece of wisdom and collapsed dead on the ground the moment she finished speaking. “Cultivators are fucking weird...” grumbled Kat as she looked at the woman's corpse. “I mean... really. What am I supposed to say to that? You fought well? I regret nothing as well? I will remember you? Like seriously! What is the correct response here? I don't know your name, and the emotion I currently feel most strongly is CONFUSION!”

Kat gave Grumpy's cheek a few quick pokes to make sure she wasn't just playing dead to no reaction. Her eyes were very clearly devoid of life. Kat shook her head again. *Lily. Cultivators are weird and I don't know how to deal with them.* With that thought sent Kat continued to run, this time, limping somewhat, slicing her shoulder a few more times to leave behind noticeable black blood for at least a little while to feign injury.

[What do you mean? Did you get her?]

*Oh yeah I did that. Wasn't even hard. Then she was all 'Oh, you do actually have honour? Good thing I kept mine. Also I only regret that I wasn't strong' and like... what the heck am I supposed to say to that?

Or feel exactly? I mean she's very dead now. Didn't even give me the chance to reply. So all I'm left with is a good deal of confusion about the whole thing. I mean... she wasn't a bandit, but she was somewhat responsible for kidnapping. Yet... that seems to be somewhat normal here? She was also pretty scared of Ice Prick and failing him... but I think more like... as a self-worth thing? Like the shame of failing her liege was the problem? Not what he'd do to her exactly...*

[I don't really understand what part of that was a question Kat. What do you want me to say?]

I think I just want to vent really. It wasn't a hard fight, I'd guess she was Rank 2 and managed to catch up because of how long we stood around doing nothing but... well... Rank 2 or not she needs a heart to live.

[I'm sensing some resentment over the last time you got stabbed in the heart.] Quipped Lily.

I mean maybe? I don't feel all that strongly about it I don't think. Well, not towards the fire guy anyway. It was a good fight and I don't have anything against him for that. Not-Xiang afterwards however... well I am a little pissed about that one, but it's more for the attempted murder of babies.

[Oh right that was a thing... yeah... cultivators are weird.]

Eventually Kat got bored of slicing into her own shoulder. A thought that, yes did make her realise that just because cultivators were weird, did not mean that she was any closer to normal. This then lead her to consider some of Lily's actions recently... and couldn't help but feel Lily wasn't all that normal either. A brief ponderous on if Kat was weird because she would one day turn into a demon, or weird because she was now a demon was completely shattered by the realisation that Lily, as a human, decided binding herself to someone else permanently for all of eternity before she turned twenty meant that humans could be weird as well.

This all meant Kat didn't need to fake surprise when she was surrounded by the next group to catch up. This time there were three of them, but all much weaker than Grumpy. "Surrender?" Kat offered. Instead of witty banter like Kat had hoped, they just charged at her weapons drawn. So... so slowly too. To avoid revealing her own ice powers, Kat just summoned her fan and cut all three down in a single stroke. Kat couldn't help but feel a bit of pity for them. Fools really. So hung up on the fact she didn't FEEL powerful to their senses.

Have you guys seen any signs of pursuers?

[Not yet. I'm keeping my ears peeled but we managed to find a river and we're just sort of following it for the moment. Keeping as quiet as we can and using it to completely disguise our passing. Or... attempting that anyway.]

Kat nodded and got back to running. She went about five minutes before spotting something strange. She angled around to it... and was that? Yes it was! Kat grinned at the deliberately caved in mineshaft entrance. She quickly dug into it, throwing rocks backwards with a fairly restrained level of force and making sure it looked like she didn't just blast her way straight through. Once the top was cleared, she tested and found she could squeeze herself through the opening. "Perfect..." smiled Kat as she carefully beat her wings, taking off into the air.

Chapter 916 I Wanna Run Away

Kat grinned as she looked down at the mountain. The cultivators were swarming around like ants. Simply canvassing the areas near their bases and running in what looked like random patterns. It seemed someone, likely Ron, had messed with their communications. If it was Ron... he'd gone above and beyond for their deal. Kat could see very few people were bothering to follow her incredibly obvious trail of destruction.

It had been about half an hour, and there was one team sitting around the collapsed mine she'd baited them towards, another that was investigating Grumpy's death and one final team near the boulder they'd stopped at for a bit. Back in the bases it seemed they were... perhaps trying to look for things that were missing? Kat didn't really know. It looked like they were expecting some sort of follow up, or perhaps they were making sure nobody else was using the chaos to escape... or steal more shit like Ron.

Kat wasn't certain Ron had made it out of course... but it just felt wrong to assume he'd been caught. The lack of proper pursuit following Xiang, Yang and Xuena made it seem all the more likely Ron had made off with some good stuff. A good enough haul that messing with the Ice Prick Sect in a major way was worth it for them.

Kat glanced over at the space she could vaguely feel Lily in. There weren't any obvious signs of their passing, though Kat was rather high up. The sort of little details she needed to track things were impossible to see from this height. Kat's vision was GOOD but not so good she could spot a footprint on the ground, through a forest canopy a multiple kilometres down.

The question is... what do I do now? Kat was drifting slowly in the direction she knew the others to be in... but she was much faster and they couldn't run forever. Sooner or later a proper tracking team would be organised and start heading to retrieve Xuena. *Do I want to make sure I'm in the way of the first few teams? It wouldn't be too hard... but if I stop the first few they'll know for sure that they're onto something. Would it be better to just try and keep the fact they're on the right track a secret?*

*Hmm... maybe I should make an obvious clearing along the path? Before the river certainly... but if I did that... the river isn't actually all that far away. I'm sure that anyone with a decent knowledge of the terrain here would be able to figure things out if I made it so obvious. So... we're back to the issue of taking out the trackers.

I could of course go and bully the trackers that are already out... but that's a bit different to attacking those who attack me directly. Of course... I could take out their legs or something... but I don't really want to reveal that I can fly either? Hmm... I guess I can go over my priorities. Hiding everything is quite silly if nothing is hidden properly.*

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So top priority is making sure Xuena gets away. Xiang and Yang fall slightly below that. Well... Lily takes TOP priority of course but she's with Xuena so I can lump them together for now. Kat ignored the small voice that sounded awfully like Lily scoffing in the background. *Below that... well I don't really care what they find out about me insomuch as it makes it harder to keep Xuena's trail a secret. I think I can at the very least use some of my ice techniques.*

*Considering the fact that this is an ICE SECT, there's no reason they should jump to enemy action if there is a bit of frost on the ground... right? Hmm... I wonder how noticeable it'll be that I didn't make

the ice with Qi. Depending on how Qi works, it could either move into the ice once I leave and be no problem at all... or super noticeable. It seems most people don't really know about demons here so it might not be the first thing they think of... but if they notice something is strange it doesn't really matter if they know what I am.*

[Honestly Kat. I'd say you just keep watch, or maybe duck down into some clearings and rough it all up in an obvious way. Just pick some randomly]

Kat shrugged at the idea and really didn't have anything better to do for now so she got to work. She crashed into a clearing, leaving a massive crater, destroyed a few trees and then froze a patch of ground for good measure before flying up and repeating the process. Sometimes there was more ice, sometimes less. There was one time her fire just sort of... kept going. Kat gave that bit of fire a glare before she moved on.

All this noise and shifting location was playing hell with the trackers. Kat still brought those clothes with her. Having no place to dump them. Occasionally bits and pieces 'broke off' for trackers to find but it wasn't like they could actually get anything coherent out of the beasts they were using to assist in the effort. Hours passed and the things started to settle down. Some people in the sect started to go back to sleep, many remained on guard but just at their posts.

Across the mountain, teams combed everywhere looking for signs of passage. They reported those signs higher up the chain... but the issue was of course that now there was hundreds of people crawling all over the mountain. What small tracks Xiang and Yang left initially were well and truly trampled now. The more obvious path Kat had left originally was still obvious, and Grumpy's corpse made it obvious that somebody had been that way... but with Xiang, Yang and Xuena taking more care things weren't going well.

It seemed that the real trackers were out doing other things. None of them were the type of teams to just sit in the sect, normally much more comfortable in the wilderness and the sect made use of that, giving them a steady stream of missions to keep them working for the sect, even while away. It was a system everyone liked... usually. With Grumpy dead there wasn't any trackers above Rank 1 left in the whole sect.

Kat was almost surprised to see that as the sun started rising, most of the sect's cultivators started to head back inside. There was one fast blur Kat managed to catch sight of dashing between groups and sending them back as they went. Kat had been getting a bit bored of her destruction plan and wasn't caught... but this guy or gal was FAST, faster than Kat for sure. That wasn't a particularly comfortable thought. If they had any way to find the group... things would go south fast.

Kat decided enough was enough. They were pulling back their forces to regroup and it seemed like a great idea to Kat herself. She flew off, taking out two airborne beasts as she went. The first one was easy, but annoying because she didn't want to let it fall. The second was attracted to the first, and choked on the meal Kat shoved down its throat, some resentment in her mind when she did so. Of course, carrying around a dead bird for half an hour only to realise your efforts were wasted was incredibly annoying.

In the end, Kat just threw them both off to the side and continued her journey towards everyone else. They made good time, and it took Kat a few hours to catch up. It was approaching lunchtime when she

spotted them, and they were looking... somewhat worse for wear. There was a difference between travelling at a reasonable pace across a nice road and going all out to get as far away from an enemy sect as possible.

When Kat landed, Yang was actually glowing. She had Lily in her arms, and was absorbing all the light nearby to keep herself running. Xuena passed out the moment Kat came into sight. Not a true combatant like the other two at the best of times, and woefully out of practice due to her incarceration. She'd been close to passing out before Kat arrived... the idea of a strong protector arrive was too much for her fatigued mind to justify it's continued workings.

Xiang was looking pretty good all things considered. There was blood on his clothes that hadn't been washed off, so likely something had attacked them on the way... but Lily hadn't even woken up for it so Kat wasn't too worried. "What's it looking like?" asked Yang as Kat pulled Xuena onto her shoulders like a sack of carrots.

"I think Ron might have done us an extra favour. They were running around like headless chickens for a while and... well I don't want to say 'recently' but I left when some fast guy, likely Rank 3, started to call everyone back to the sect. It didn't seem worth sticking around then," said Kat.

Yang nodded. "Is it safe to rest?"

Kat shrugged, "Probably not but I CAN carry three people,"

"Good enough," said Yang who dumped Lily in Kat's hands and then promptly stopped operating, like dimming like an old lightbulb. Xiang gave a scoff at Yang's collapse, sheathed his sword and then did exactly the same thing. Kat decided just for that, he could go on the bottom. She added Xiang to her shoulder and then Yang on top of him. Lily was laying in her breasts that were held in place by her sash and Kat... well... she was rested enough. Best not move too quickly though.

Chapter 917 Is it All Downhill?

Eight hours later and night was starting to fall. Kat was wondering if she'd made enough progress for the horrible sleep she was inflicting on her companions. Super speed was great, and came alongside a general increase in physique. It was great for fights, great for moving from one place to another... and frankly horrible when it came to carrying passengers. Lily was one thing, she was small, easily slotted into the crook of her arm, and Kat personally suspected that whatever metaphysical nonsense helped her reduce the damage she did with every step and ignore a lot of wind resistance was more willing to help when it came to Lily. She was priority number one in Kat's mind, so it made sense she subconsciously helped out more than normal for Lily.

The same cannot be said for the cultivators. The snake was a pain, and Kat wouldn't say it was easier to carry than her current burdens... but her speed was certainly worse off. See, the problem was. With the snake Kat didn't need to worry so much about jostling people around. The people were either running beside her, or in the snake. Here, they were in her arms and it was causing a new set of problems.

The first, was that she really shouldn't have been petty and put Xiang and Yang on the same side. Xuena was easily the lightest of the three cultivators and as such putting the two heavier ones on the same shoulder was just asking for trouble. Sure there was no perfect way to balance them, Yang also being a

good deal heavier than Xuena, but it certainly would have been better. Really, Kat was singing her tails praising. There was no way she could get up to any decent speed at all without it.

The next problem was the jostling. In the first hour after they set off Kat was constantly waking the cultivators, either partially or completely. Yang never once complained, Xuena tried to mirror that attitude but couldn't help but grumble somewhat. Xiang made his sleepy displeasure known a few times but ultimately accepted his fate. Horrendously inconvenient? Certainly. Worth messing up the rescue operation for? No he had too much pride to compromise the mission like that.

Still, Kat was regularly waking them up even with the care she was taking, which defeated the whole point of carrying them through the day. They needed sleep and at least some proper rest. So Kat slowed herself down further. Her wings got a workout as well, pushing, pulling, stabilising. Kat made sure that she didn't so much walk as she did glide over the terrain. It seemed like a great technique to perfect in the future. The extra weight actually helped a bit in this regard. All the changes her wings made were muted by the fact she was carrying three people.

The thing that was causing Kat the most concern though, was that they had only just managed to crest the top of the mountain using their odd route. That's right, they were angling, if somewhat obliquely, towards crossing over the top of the mountain. Well, they were more specifically using the valley between two peaks to cross over because these mountains were rather tall in many places, but it was the thought that counted. Still, because of this choice, Kat knew they weren't all that far from the inner sect as the crow flies. Kat estimated she could make it here, if travelling at full speed, in about five hours if she really pushed it.

Now, that estimation was starting not at the lower Outer Sect area but from where she estimated the Inner Sect to be. It also didn't account for trees or the terrain. This was Kat's best estimate if she was to just fly here or run along some magically straight path. Now, five hours was a good deal of time... but on the other hand. Kat wasn't the fastest thing out there. All the trackers had been on foot. If the local horse equivalent could fly or perhaps trot over air... well Kat didn't really want to think about it.

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Kat managed to make it over the hill and then glanced down the side of the cliff. *Hmm... I could probably float with three people. Not well... but if I froze a surfboard perhaps? That could work...*

Kat started working on her idea. She quickly got the basic shape down and then froze it over her shoes. Kat sucked in a deep breath as she looked at the valley they were heading into. It was clear why the ice sect set up shop nearby. Instead of getting warmer as you went down, it looked like it got colder. The ground wasn't covered in snow it was covered in ice. The trees looked more like chunks of stone than organic matter. As interesting as it was to look at though... Kat didn't have time to just enjoy the view.

With a strong kick, Kat left the ground and started to glide over the trees... only to realise she had been kidding herself a bit. The ground dipped sharply here near the mountain top but even that wasn't sharp enough to offset all the extra weight she had on her. Kat hit the ground and praised the foresight behind making a snowboard. She didn't really have practice but she'd used a skateboard before and had supernaturally good reflexes.

Her technique was poor, but all things considered, balancing herself with three people on her shoulder was much easier when she was sliding across the packed ice and didn't need to worry about her footing. She had the heavier of her burdens on back side and was able to turn. This meant she was able to get up to a good clip. It wasn't her max speed, and her gliding technique had been pretty good... but she was moving faster than she had all day.

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Eventually, Xuena started to stir. She didn't complain this time, and was clearly trying to go to sleep... but five minutes later Yang started to wake as well. It wasn't long before Yang's attempts at shifting woke Xiang and at that point Kat decided it was worth pulling to a stop. Her descent had been slowing down recently anyway. The ground had been levelling out somewhat and it was a good enough time to ditch the board.

Kat waited till she saw a fallen stump and slid up to it, retracting her ice and intentionally cracking it over the edge of the stone-like wood and kicking her feet free of the contraption. With a bit of shuffling Kat managed to get everyone off her arms and onto their own two feet... well except Lily. She was still slumbering away but that wasn't really a surprise or an issue. "So how is everyone?" asked Kat.

"While I am... very thankful to be free... I feel rather horrid after that rest. I got better sleep while I was still trapped underground," grumbled Xuena.

"The fact I'm waking up at night is a disgrace against the natural order!" hissed Yang.

"Was it really necessary to have Yang's weight crushing me the entire time?" Yang's glare silenced whatever complaint Xiang wanted to make. He simply raised his hands in resignation and even took a step back. Apparently he didn't want any arguments right now.

"Look, I understand it wasn't a great experience but I've just spent the day running with three weights on my shoulders. I tried my best to make sure it was as comfortable as I could make it for everyone. What I need to know, is what the plan is now. Are you all in good enough shape to do your own running? Do we have a place in mind to aim for? Should I carry you one at a time so that someone can still rest while we travel? I'm fast but not all that fast when I need to worry about three people remaining comfortable enough to sleep," said Kat in a rapid-fire no-nonsense way.

Yang bit down hard on her lip and looked up at the sky. "While I am fine now... I think I'd like to request you carry my body starting around midnight... perhaps a bit earlier. If I can wake with sun and take in that extra energy I'll be much more useful to everyone,"

Xiang looked at Yang with surprise. The fact that she was accepting the offer was a surprise. Even if she had a logical reason for it... it was an admission of weakness he didn't really expect from the angry woman.

While that was happening Xuena was frowning. "I... I'm not sure when it would be best I rest. I'm awake for most of the night working on my research and slept during the day much of the time. It was easier to just ignore my captors taunts that way, and they were unwilling to be so blatantly torturous to disrupt my sleep. I can run through the night and with all this ice qi in the air... even if I'm no combatant I will likely have the best mobility for twelve or so hours."

Everyone turned to Xiang. “Nope. Not doing it. Just because it makes sense doesn’t mean I will!”

Chapter 918 The Blizzard Comes

Xiang sat grumpily on Kat’s shoulders like a kid who was told he couldn’t get any candy at the store. He wasn’t trying to sleep. He wasn’t trying to be lazy. He was ‘the lookout’. That’s what he told himself anyway after being browbeat into letting Kat carry him while they ran. He didn’t feel at all comfortable sleeping for the moment despite the creeping fatigue. They were walking through hostile terrain and the visibility was shit. Yes, the need for someone on watch wasn’t a surprise at all.

Of course, Xuena could use the snowstorm itself to get a good sense of threats nearby and was using that talent to steer them away from the occasional spirit beast on their path. They didn’t have the time or the strength to properly fight them in this sort of weather. It also wasn’t entirely clear, at least in Xiang’s mind, if Kat’s fire would do anything to these beasts considering their ice immunity.

He was partially correct. The freezing effect would be essentially useless but the slow infection of hostile demonic energy would still kill them eventually assuming Kat didn’t manage to cripple them physically before it became an issue. Despite that though... fights would be rather deadly for the rest of the group, perhaps even Lily.

See as time wore on and they got closer (if not that much closer) to the centre of whatever was causing this endless snowstorm the ice started to become more sinister. The snow started sharpening. Instead of small snowflakes drifting down, they were fragile little pins and needles trying to drive themselves under the skin. They weren’t strong enough to so much as scratch Kat, and she was using her wings to protect Lily as well as she could... but a few stray snowflakes did get themselves caught in Lily’s fur. Turns out that it’s a real problem when they repeatedly jab into you. Fur is great until something tiny slips through the cracks.

Xuena was fine. She used the fact they were full of qi to throw them ever so slightly off course and curve around herself. It was somewhat mentally taxing but the constant stream of fresh ice qi she was taking in helped offset a lot of the effort. It wasn’t a perfect system, and Xuena would need to rest at some point but for now it was good enough.

Yang went for her own tactic, she used sunlight to turn up her body temperature, disrupting the snowflakes enough for them to simply melt and shatter against her skin. It wasn’t perfect though, and a few small cuts still appeared on her hands and face, where her clothes didn’t protect her at all. Xiang was in some ways getting the worst of it... and better off in others. He had no supernatural protection from the ice, but his skin was tougher than everyone else bar Kat. It was annoying, but closer to a rain of annoying flicks than true cuts.

After a while... it started to actually started to get relaxing. It was night time, the visibility was horrible. He couldn’t see anything and the sounds of the wind whistling in his ears became soothing lullabies. In the end, he slumped over and sleep took him. Kat readjusted so that he was less likely to fall off the side and then just kept walking.

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Three days of walking and the group was starting to get used to everything. Kat had only taken one break during that time, and even then, it was only because they'd found a nice cave entrance shielded from the wind. They all used that time to eat as much food as they could stomach, well Kat ate a normal meal, and then they passed out for a full twelve hours. Since then they were starting to relax a bit. The constant snowstorm covered their tracks. They'd changed directions a few times randomly to try and throw off any pursuers they had, and they'd managed to avoid combat even against the spirit beasts in the area.

It was early morning and Yang was just waking up on Kat's shoulders when something happened. Xiang tensed, for just a brief moment. His combat instincts apparently the best of them all. Kat's mind slowed the instant she saw Xiang's stance shift. A blink later and suddenly in Xiang's place was a tall, imposing figure backhanding their companion into the snow.

Kat's eyes widened in fear. *I DIDN'T EVEN SEE HIM MOVE! I had my mind slowed nearly to my maximum!* The man stood casually, at seven feet tall even. He had thin, Van Dyke style facial hair with the hair on his head tied into a neat bun. His robes were flowing around him as if there wasn't a major breeze flowing the opposite direction, and his eyes were a piercing ice blue. He oozed confidence, and fake disappointment at the group surrounding him. "You know... normally this sort of thing isn't worth my... personal attention. Normally I have subordinates who can handle themselves. This time though... well... it IS rather personal,

"You see. I get back from trying to SAVE MY SON, only to find my sect in shambles, my treasures plundered and my prisoners escaping! Perhaps I should have gone after the more powerful ones, the Rank 3 I had locked up, or the group of Rank 2 assassins that thought I was weak... but no. They were all professionals. It wasn't anything personal really, they were paid to attack and they did so. Thoroughly mercenary. You though...

"You came for your friend. I can respect that. I can understand that. I can empathise with that. Which is why I am HERE. You CAN NOT escape me. You WILL NOT escape me. I will not let this fester into some ridiculous bit of drawn out revenge for what you perceive as a poor deal! And really. Was I out of line? I understand if I might've been a bit harsh," the wind seemed to double in speed the snow came in thicker, heavier, "but I was rather annoyed to find out the ingredients I paid for. Bargained for... were used on some NO NAME RANK 1!"

The wind screamed in Kat's ears. She readied herself for the attack, trying to see properly through the snow... and then it ended. "Once again... I apologise. Perhaps I am overreacting but it just galls me... now Xuena..." The man, the Endless Rain of Immortal Ice Sect Leader "was I truly so horrible a jailor?" he said slowly as he turned to face the much smaller ice cultivator. She started to shake under the pressure of his gaze and Kat let her own aura expand, calming and comforting Xuena the best she could.

The Ice Patriarch sent a sharp gaze to Kat out of the corner of his eyes but didn't say anything. Simply waiting for Xuena to answer. With the calming effect working overtime she looked up at him and took in a deep breath to say, "No. It was not so bad,"

The Patriarch smiled as if he'd already known the answer, "I see... I gave you research materials, food, shelter, safety as well perhaps. Was it really worth escaping?"

Xuena shivered not from the snow, but his gaze. "I do not know,"

"You... don't know?" he asked slowly, playing up his confusion and restraining his anger.

"I did not resent being your prisoner. I understood it for what it was. I accepted the damage it would do to my cultivation and the benefits it would bring me in terms of research. I was not happy but I was accepting. Then my friends kicked down the door and dragged me away. I am touched by the lengths they would go, and I now must stand by them as they stood by me. As they trekked across the continent to free me. It may or may not be worth it, but I'd be a shitty friend if I simply collapsed now," said Xuena cleanly.

The patriarch sighed, "I see... it is a shame to hear you say such things. Understandable, but still a shame. If this was a more just world I would simply drag you all back and lock you up again. You are a brilliant mind, even if you're a terrible cultivator. The other two... well once again, in a better world I would use you to ensure their compliance but... well... that would make me look WEAK" He spat the word like it had personally murdered his grandmother.

"If I'm known to show such leniency for something like this... well I'm practically INVITING the criminals of the world to take a shot at me. If they fail so what? They won't die, they can live to escape again and again... you see..." He paused for a moment as Xiang burst out of the snow, blood dripping from his broken draw and sword in hand. The patriarch didn't even look backwards as he kicked out at Xiang, the air pressure alone sending him flying back into the snowstorm. "Sorry... where was I? A fly seems to have interrupted my thoughts..."

Chapter 919 A Proper Monologue

The man tapped his chin a few times, pretending to gather his thoughts as if Xiang hadn't just tried to cut off his neck. It truly didn't seem to bother him. The use of 'a fly' as a descriptor for Xiang... was unpleasantly accurate for the moment. *I thought we weren't going to have to deal with this guy! Isn't that the whole reason I was able to take this mission! Shit um... what the heck do we do in this sort of situation? Keep him monologing I guess? Lily Ideas?*

[Keep him monologing]

...

Fine ok... "You were talking about leniency and how you couldn't offer it..." said Kat hoping to, if not get things back on track at least keep him talking. Fighting already seemed out. He was so much faster than Kat was that letting things get to a fight meant they'd already lost... probably. Hmm... could Xiang in his freaky monster mode win the fight? Kat thought back to the last time she'd seen him and... the answer was no probably not.

The patriarch gave a loud clap, "Ah yes of course. See... I know you three don't have anything on you from my treasure room... but at the same time... the chance that you had at least something to do with it is rather high. Additionally the time it'll take to repair my poor alchemy instructors home and redo the inscription is significant. I can't just let that sort of thing go in good faith you know?

"If things were different I would have loved to properly recruit Xuena to my sect you know? I might've even taken on you as well Yang. I might not have any cultivation methods suitable to take you past Rank 2 but well... if you took up a position as Xuena's body guard or something I'm sure resources could have been arranged. It really is a waste for things to end this way..."

“But we cannot change the world. Though... I suppose I will be a little generous. Do you happen to have a replacement cocoon? I might still have to kill your friends but if you did have one... you could live... and if it works well... I suppose simply maiming them would be acceptable,”

.....

“At this point does it even matter if we had on-?” Yang spat but Xuena slapped a hand over her friend’s mouth.

“I’m afraid you know just as well as I do that those things are exceptionally rare. We don’t have any spare, and you would’ve been the first to know if my family did. I’m also sure that Yang isn’t so disrespectful as to try and free me if she had something like that to trade for my life. That being said... you could simply take us back? Use Xiang and Yang as prisoners for my compliance and I’ll come up with something to heal your son with whatever ingredients you provide...” offered Xuena.

The Endless Blizzard pulled on his beard as he seemed to think the words over. His expression barely changed and Kat just couldn’t bring herself to think he was seriously considering anything. “Hmm... you insist you are more capable than all of my current staff?”

Xuena carefully shrugged, “I wouldn’t want to presume anything of course but you did insist earlier that I was a rare talent with great potential. Perhaps you are willing to believe that I have enough skill and knowledge to fix whatever ails him...”

EB gave a ‘sad’ shake of his head, “I’m afraid that things have progressed too far at this point. Even if I believed you could figure something out you’d need to be Rank 2, maybe 3. That’s also assuming I could ever trust you enough to be in the same room as my son to diagnose him and administer the cure.”

“I’m a professional alchemist aiming to be one of the greatest healers in the world. I would not compromise myself by doing something so low as poisoning a patient. It would cause a heart demon so large I would never recover... assuming I could stick to my dao at all after that. It would shatter me,” insisted Xuena.

EB waved her impassioned statement off. “I don’t doubt that it would shatter you... but your friends courted death at least once trying to free you. You also said you would need to stand by them earlier. If you thought it would be your last chance at revenge... if you decided it was worth the cost... well... I only have one son after all. The risk is too high for me to take...”

Xuena pursed her lips and looked ready to say something when the sound of thunder echoed across the valley. The Ice Sect Patriarch, the Endless Blizzard... showed a single flicker of fear on his face. “No...”

He dashed off towards Xiang, the others following not the movement itself but after effects. They had barely managed to turn to look, and perhaps that was for the best. A blinding flash of pure white light as lightning struck the Ice Sect Patriarch. He was thrown back towards the group singing and burning. The place he had been standing was directly in front of Xiang, who was kneeling on the ground.

That same ground was completely glassed. Snow for a good twenty metres was completely melted and the heat was spreading clearing off more ground. There was no dirt, no grass where the lightning had struck. It had completely glassed over. Another strike, this time aimed squarely at Xiang who simply took it without flinching. “Tribulation clouds!” hissed Yang.

That snapped Kat out of things as she turned to see the Endless Blizzard shakily standing up and looking at Xiang in horror. "Chosen of the heavens..." whispered the winds. Kat was pretty sure nobody was meant to be able to hear that whisper from the shaking man. Perhaps he was too shocked to keep the words inside his mouth, or perhaps the world needed them to be spoken.

Another strike of lightning slammed into Xiang to limited effect. This seemed to snap the patriarch out of his stunned state as he stood tall. "I see... I will deal with that soon but first..."

He flashed over to Kat, in response she managed to bring up both arms crossing them over each other and jumping ever so slightly. She rode the impact as his palm slammed into her arms, the bones creaking and Kat could feel breaking ever so slightly in the moment before she exploded away. Kat pulled herself into a ball, protecting Lily as much as possible when she slammed into the ground and continued to roll uncontrollably.

Back in the clearing, Endless Blizzard raised a hand to strike at Yang only for the tribulation lightning to strike him again. He bit back a curse. He couldn't help but consider if there were TWO chosen of heaven or if destroying the little sunlight welp would count as interfering. He didn't know, but he wasn't happy about either option. "You are a pair of extremely lucky women right at this moment..." he whispered menacingly at Xuena and Yang. "Though... you know what they say. Lady Luck always has her due..."

Over with Kat, she was trying to ignore the feeling of her wings popping back into place after being slammed into the ground multiple times during her role. It didn't take long, it was a common injury she was getting far too use to... but it was an issue. "Lily... I need you to stay here... safe-ish... while I go back in," said Kat with a sorrowful tone.

[Kat you can't! I... I don't think you can win this one...]

"That's ok Lily..." Kat said with a hiss as she felt the muscles in her arms springing back into place. "That's not the mission. It's to make sure that Xuena gets away from the ice sect. We thought we were safe... and we were wrong. Still... D.E.M.O.N.S won't let me die and ice isn't really an issue for me,"

[Kat please don't do this. Don't make me stay here without knowing what's going on...]

"Well Lily... would you rather be in danger where I need to constantly get hurt to protect you?"

[That is NOT FAIR KAT!] Lily hissed mentally as another strike of lightning sounded from where Xiang must've been. It was actually quite far away from what the pair could tell.

Kat just gave a shrug, "I'm afraid that I don't really think this could ever have been fair. Plus, with your safety on the line I was always going to or say whatever I need to. I'll use any excuse I can to keep you safe. Especially when the danger is so obvious. In the end... I trust this won't be fatal to me. Then again... while I might not be willing to die for others... for you it's a different story,"

[Well... what if he finds me here?]

"Without qi to track you? Without any proper skills for tracking? If I had to guess he's abusing the fact he can see using the blizzard. So if you stick to the massive crater that's been left behind... you'll be safe. And if you're not well... god help him if he tries,"

Chapter 920 Ping Pong

Kat felt like she was burning despite walking through the snow. Leaving Lily behind, but risking her further would have been nearly impossible to even contemplate. Wisps of purple flame leaked from her mouth in place of frosted breath, the tips of her horns gained a slow, flickering fire that seemed to disappear when you looked at it the wrong way. Her tail traced lines of purple that faded into the snowstorm. Kat's eyes... Kat's eyes were set with steel. They burned purple and looked like two amethysts had glowing in the light.

When Kat returned to the clearing, the patriarch, who still hadn't introduced himself properly, the prick, turned to phase Kat with a raised eyebrow. A second joined the first when Kat was revealed to be unharmed and summoned her weapons. "Strange... I suppose you have a thick skull. I'll need to hammer in the lesson this time,"

Kat's weapons were useless, before she could react, they were kicked out of her arms. With a crack of thunder Kat was slammed into the ground. The ground lost, ice built up for decades cracking under the blow and simply allowed Kat's body to bounce up. The patriarch wasn't so foolish as to believe Kat had been taken out by just that so he kicked her in the ribs sending her flying off to the side.

Only to appear behind her, foot reeled back for a kick strait on her wing joints. Not a snap yet, but a pop as it was forced out of position and Kat flew forward slamming into a tree with her face, causing her to pinwheel around. Kat was able to gather enough of her wits to think about halting her furious spin only for two shoes to slam down on the back of her head, forcing her to be buried in the ice.

Kat didn't even had time to flail as the ice sect patriarch used her position to line up a single powerful kick directly on the bottom of her sternum forcing what little air she still had out of her body and sending her flying into the clearing, again. Kat's legs caught a tree this time but the extra momentum meant it shattered against her heels, though the spinning started up again.

Kat wasn't having a fun time, doubly so when an elbow impacted her right in the stomach, sending her flying towards Yang. Kat didn't think, she just reacted. Despite all the damage she'd sustained Kat managed to abuse her flexibility to shift around Yang, bringing her stomach up and allowing herself to fly over Yang instead of slamming into the sunlight cultivator's head.

Kat was slammed into the ground once more, this time she felt something in her back slipping out of place before another crack of thunder rang out in time with the shattering ice. The ice prick stood on the edge of the hole clapping. "What reaction time from someone as weak as you. Sturdy body as well. I had so been hoping to find out what would happen if you collided with your friend. Would I be struck by more tribulation? Would you? Would it attack both or neither? Would this open up a chance for me to beat you to death with each other?"

.....

That last one was certainly a grim picture and Kat really hoped the sect leader didn't have a chance to test his theory properly. Her body felt like one big bruise but the fire in her heart hadn't dimmed at all. She had regeneration for the bruising and despite her wobbly steps her back had healed up completely by the time she pulled herself back to full height and simply glared back at the patriarch. "Is that why I'm not being hurt by the tribulation? Is it because you feel so little effect from my strikes? Perhaps... perhaps more testing is required..."

Kat didn't like the sound of that but before she could properly ready herself, she had a glancing blow land on her horns. It was clearly an attempt at a well-rehearsed blow to the temple but her horns got in the way. The held up well though, and instead of going flying, Kat simply staggered, attempting to return with a fist of her own, blazing with a bit of fire for good measure.

The sect patriarch didn't like that at all. Kat's arm was yanked forward just as she felt a knee connected with her stomach. What breath she'd managed to regain while standing up was swiftly removed once again before she was grabbed by the colour and thrown back towards the two girls, Xuena this time. It was an easy thing for Kat to curl her legs up to avoid clocking Xuena in the face... and just as easy for the sect patriarch to appear beside Kat in that moment and kick her again.

Kat flared her wings barely stopping in time for Xuena to duck. Even with Kat's efforts she still flew forward a few steps past where Xuena had been. Two heavy chops slammed into Kat's wings popping them out of their sockets and dropping her to the ground. Amidst the cracking ice, Xuena disappeared, melding her presence as best she could with the snow that now blanketed the area in piles around the crash site.

What am I supposed to do? I mean I'm just buying time at this point. Not a surprise at all, but a disappointment for sure. Do I want to set myself on fire? I could yes... but Ice Ass here isn't really escalating at all. Just having his fun batting me around. If I force him to take me too seriously, he might actually bring out his own weapons or techniques. I'm quite certain if it gets to the point, I'll have no way to fight him...

Which really... is quite the issue. Hmm... do I let my mind slow down enough to speak to Lily? No best not. She'd just worry if she could see what's going on. What can I do to turn this around though? I can't think of anything... perhaps I should put power into my aura and try to keep him... well I doubt I could manage CALM exactly but perhaps I could manage to stop him getting any angrier?

"Tut, tut," tutted the Endless Blizzard, "I suppose I shouldn't be surprised you aren't cooperating with my experiments but that's a real shame. It's such an unique situation after all. I mean, I haven't ever been in the position to interrupt a Chosen's tribulation before. It's certainly different to what everyone else goes through. Why, I could have taken out at least two of you, probably all four!"

HAH! GET FUCKED. You haven't noticed Lily! "Something to smile about? I suppose I can correct that issue," Kat was once again kicked around the place. It was actually getting a bit dull. Kat also felt like she wasn't losing nearly as much demonic energy as she should be fore regeneration. Perhaps the scary part was that it was becoming a bit mundane. The urge to smile again was growing, just to see what he'd do in response. Despite talking himself up, he hadn't drawn his weapons at all.

It's probably some stupid cultivator thing right? 'You are not worthy to face my blade!' or... or... 'My secret technique is not for weaklings such as yourselves!' something equally dumb like that. Sure I might also be hiding my techniques, but it's because I'm near certain showing them off would only make things worse. He's just trying to humiliate me to pass the time and I have absolutely no compunctions with letting my pride take a beating instead of everyone else here.

Kat felt a brush of air and then a sharp crack of lightning behind her. The kick went off course and she found herself ploughing a long line into the snow as she rolled instead of flying into a tree, the ground or just a secondary kick. Kat managed to pull herself out of the snowbank she'd created rather swiftly to

spot Lord Ice Ass gritting his teeth and kneeling on the ground. His hair was frizzed up and the edges of his cloak was damaged. One foot, the one in front and presumably the one he'd been trying to kick with looked like it'd been stuck into a fire.

The shoe had melted into his foot slightly with the robes that had once been covering his leg burnt off completely. Any leg hair he might have once had was long gone revealing only a patch of black ash. The patriarch hissed at the retaliation he'd just suffered, presumably from trying to kick Kat into Xiang.

Serves the bastard right I guess.

The Endless Blizzard let out a long breath, adding to the snow in the immediate vicinity as he breathed life back into his foot. The shoe cracking off under the icy gale and revealing a now unharmed but uncovered foot. "I suppose that would have been too easy. I got complacent, I'll admit... but the tribulation is about to end... then it'll be fair game!"

Kat just glared from the side, unbroken, and despite the beating, looking just as fierce as when she'd walked back to the battleground.