

## DEMONS 951

### Chapter 951 Roxy's Backstory

Kat discussed the specifics of her abilities with Bruce and Roxy for a while before the topic was finally brought back around to how the pair of them met. Roxy took the chance to answer, "We first met when we were both babies. Neither of us remember it obviously, but we have some pictures from all the way back then. I was adorable as a baby,"

"Of course," interjected Bruce.

"Of COURSE" harumphed Roxy, "I was the most adorable baby you ever did see I tell you!"

"I'm sure Vivian would love to hear you repeat that," laughed Bruce.

"Oh, Vivian was cute too, and I love her but I'm telling you, know better baby then me!" sniggered Roxy. Kat felt her eye twitch slightly, and was rather confused by that fact. "I wish I had some pictures so I could show you that I really was adorable. No matter. See, Bruce's parents, my mother and father in-law, were big into real estate. They managed to make off with a lot of money and a huge plot of land for themselves.

"They built a fairly modest house, though it was somewhat extravagant for the time, and had a massive garden that required constant maintenance. That's where my own father came in. He jumped at the chance to work on such a prestigious garden, especially when it included a place to stay and a consistent wage. Now, Bruce's parents had him later in life, and my own parents are a good fifteen? I want to say fifteen years younger. Anyway, my father, Ronaldo, had a little cabin on the grounds. The bottom floor was half a kitchen while the other half was all the gardening supplies. It did not smell good at all.

"Eventually, with a stable job, and... technically a house, he proposed to his own sweetheart Perenelle, and accepted. So Mum and Dad worked in the garden, Bruce's parents, Byron, and Tiffany, lived in their house when they could but were mostly traveling around for work. They were building it as a retirement home for themselves from what I heard. Anyway... eventually they decided to settle down and have a proper family.

"Now, if you ask our parents... there was a big party the day Tiffany found out she was pregnant and I was conceived that very night. I don't know how true that is, and considering Bruce and I are born about a month apart I'm of the opinion that it was probably just luck. Whatever the case, it meant that Perenelle and Tiffany were pregnant at the same time and they got a lot closer.

"So of course it was just natural that little Bruce, and baby Roxy would play together right? Well that's what our parents thought and we HATED each other. I don't really know why. Every time I asked my parents they'd give a different reason. Maybe Bruce looked at me funny, maybe I bit him-"

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"You're still biting me," chimed in Bruce.

"The kids don't want to hear about what we get up to in the bedroom Bruce," retorted Roxy.

"You brought it up first," said Bruce innocently.

Roxy rolled her eyes, “Regardless of my husband’s weird fetishes,” “Oi!” “we didn’t like each other as babies. Or maybe we did and the hatred built up later? As I said the story changes whenever we ask about it, even to this day. Though my own parents have passed away, and Byron left us a few years ago. Tiffany is still alive and telling tall tales. I’d worry for her memory actually, if she wasn’t already in the habit of just making things up,

“Still, I do remember that it continued all through our teenage years. I thought Bruce was a stuck up idiot that thought he was too good for everyone else. I know now of course that he’s a shy teddy bear with all the social graces of a brick...” Roxy trailed off for a few moments as if waiting for Bruce to retort but he just nodded slowly, as if what Roxy said was the simple truth.

Roxy sighed, “Things started to change when we ended up working together. See, we both went into real estate like Bruce’s parents, though for different reasons. Bruce can tell you his reasons,” Bruce actually pouted at being volunteered for this, “but for me it was because I saw that as the best way to make money. I never really enjoyed the work, but I knew that Tiffany and Byron were successful so I wanted to follow in their footsteps. I don’t want to pretend that they ever treated me poorly, I don’t think Bruce and I would have gotten together if that was the case...

“But I FELT like that little gardener’s girl. We had a tiny house that smelt like shit. I mean that literally. Half of the supplies in the downstairs rooms was actual shit and the walls didn’t do a great job of keeping the smell out. We had so many fragrant plants around the house to try and combat it and honestly it didn’t work that well. Our house was tiny, and only the fact we had a second floor for bedrooms made it seem like we had any spare space.

“I used to get teased at school, plenty of people saying that the smell of shit never really washed off. I was always the little girl that Bruce’s parents took pity on and I HATED it. Now, I was already in an antagonistic relationship with Bruce so I don’t know how things would’ve changed if that wasn’t the case but it felt like a compounding issue. Bruce’s family had everything I wanted. Money, prestige, love. Not to say my family didn’t love me of course, but they were ALWAYS busy.

“My father loved his work, and while I don’t fault him for that now, it did mean he never really took a break. For him, working with plants was his break from the hellish jobs he did beforehand. For my mother, it was a constant battle to keep our clothes in working order, keep a few things smelling nice, and constantly acquiring food from the nearby farmers because it didn’t keep properly in a house with piles of shit in the cupboard. It meant that I spent more time with Bruce’s parents, and sure I love them like my own now, but I resented that fact.

“I am glad I never wanted to be Tiff’s and Byron’s daughter, but I did want my parents to be around like Bruce’s. I saw them as the goal in life, so of course I went into real estate straight out of school. I saw it as the pathway to a good life. Now, it turned out that I really had a knack for it and I eventually managed to do well, but it was a large risk. I didn’t invest properly into other interests. Still, I did well and it was killing me a little bit.”

Roxy shivered a bit. “I believe I mentioned that I was good at real estate yes? Well I was, and I still am but I hated it when I was younger. I’ve mellowed out and it isn’t so bad anymore, but it was practically eating me alive when I was younger. Bruce though... he was barely managing things but he was having a

blast. He'd take up work pro bono, he'd lose time on a sale and get bad cuts. I'm pretty sure he would've been homeless for a bit if his parents weren't so loaded. He never lost his smile though,"

Roxy turned and gazed at Bruce, nothing but love in her eyes, "That's how I fell for him. He let me see the joy in the work I'd saddled myself with. Let me reconnect with my parents, though that's a bit of a different story, and welcomed me into his own family. It was wonderful. We became close friends and then more... though I'll admit that took a bit. I was a bit of a blushing maiden back then. My mother was always making plant puns about it,"

Roxy shivered again, "Trust me, there is only so many ways you can hear jokes based on 'my daughter wants to get pollinated' and not have a few nightmares as a result. It's weird, and I'm forever grateful I didn't pick up Perenelle's sense of humour. Urgh... it was horrible and I think it might have set back my confession to Bruce by like... six months at least,"

Roxy paused sucking in a deep breath, "I guess that's how we both met and eventually wound up together? I'm now a bit curious as to how Bruce will explain his side of things. It's been a while since anyone has asked... and most of our friends either aren't interested or knew us from growing up together," Bruce shifted in position and looked around the room, clearly of the opinion that his wife had adequately explained things. There was no reason to go on and on about his own experience right? Well... he found a bunch of women with expectant looks on their faces. One of which, was his wife. There was no getting out of it.

#### Chapter 952 Bruce's Turn

Bruce sighed and said, "You're really going to make me do this aren't you?"

"Well I've already told things from my perspective, so now it's your turn. I didn't even talk about our first few dates, where we got married, our honeymoon. Even if you've got nothing unique to say, which I very much doubt dear husband, there is still plenty of things you can touch on," said Roxy with a haughty tone.

"Fine if it matters so much to you all," Bruce said with a resigned sigh. He didn't pay much attention to the emphatic nods from all sides. He was surrounded and that was that. "I guess I'll start at the beginning as well. For as long as I could remember I also hated Roxy. I don't know why either, and I was around for most of the silly stories our parents would tell to try and explain it well...

"But as I grew older and spent less time around Roxy my hatred faded to apathy. It's not like I could remember why we didn't like each other, and when we got into primary school Roxy and I spent barely any time with each other. Just a few meetups where we pretended to get along for our parents, though we know now they were laughing at how proper we pretended to be in front of them. Perfectly aware of our distaste for each other.

"I still didn't think much of Roxy until we started to get into high school. We just ignored each other... but Roxy started to get bullied pretty frequently. Now, I didn't like her, and I wasn't going to go out of my way to defend her. I was no paragon of justice, and in fact for a while I started to feel somewhat vindicated. That other people also noticed Roxy wasn't a great person, that she was annoying and proud. Her nose always in the air, looking down on the rest of the class for being dumber than her.

"Which was not the case... and eventually I started to notice what they were really SAYING about Roxy. See... I probably wouldn't have thought twice if they were talking about her being stuck up, or about her being a bit frigid towards people. The fact that she looked at everyone like they needed to be scraped off her boots didn't help matters at all,"

"I wasn't THAT bad Bruce," retorted Roxy.

Bruce just rolled his eyes, indicating what he thought of that statement. "Regardless of how deserving Roxy was of that treatment... when I started to hear people talking shit about her for being poor, for smelling horrible, for being the daughter of a peasant. All these things that she couldn't control. Well, then I started to take a bit more notice. Still didn't like Roxy... and she'd hit me for saying this back then... but I pitied her a bit,"

Roxy, deciding to make a point, stood up and slapped Bruce hard in the back of the head, "Indeed. I would've hit you. Probably in the nuts. Aren't you glad I've mellowed out and only gave you a light tap to the skull?" Roxy said with a fanged smile.

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Bruce just shrugged it off and continued, "Yes, see. Point made. She was a bit violent when pressed, but it took more than nasty words to get her to that point so you didn't see it often. I think the first time I saw it escalate to that point was when someone threw mud at Roxanne's back during lunch one day," Bruce couldn't help but laugh and Roxy raised a hand a second time. Bruce just held her gaze for a few seconds before continuing, "She found the person who did it, picked the poor boy up and threw him down into the mud pile he'd just used. Stomped down on his back and asked why he did it.

"Poor boy ratted out one of the queen bees of the school. What was her name? Chelsea Learnin?" Bruce looked up to Roxanne who just shrugged, "Eh, we can go with that I guess. Roxy then went to hunt her down. She was in class at the time. The teachers just watched as Roxy burst into class, grabbed Chelsea by the back of her uniform, and dragged the girl outside. Didn't even try to stop her,"

Bruce was chuckling and even Roxanne had a smile remembering this particularly moment. "What she did was dragged Chelsea over to the mud pit that the boy was still in... think his name was... I wanna say Steve?" Roxanne shrugged again, "He wasn't too bothered until Roxanne threw Chelsea down into it with him and said 'now you're down and dirty together, you can fuck each other instead of trying to screw me,' hilarious I tell you.

"Roxanne did get detention for it. The vice principal watched the whole thing... but she also watched the whole thing. She happened to be walking around the grounds at the time, and just... let it happen before informing Roxanne that she had a week's worth of detention,"

"Mrs Oldton was AWESOME," interjected Roxy, "She had me in detention with her and we just spent the week watching movies in one of the classrooms. I just had to promise not to tell anyone what I was actually doing other than 'detention'. She said it was 'to let their imaginations run wild' and the longer I refused to answer, the stranger the rumours got. It was SO worth it,"

Lily looked scandalised at this, "What?! You basically got away with just dragging someone out of class?"

Roxy nodded, "Yeah pretty much. As I said, Mrs Oldton was really cool and took no shit from anyone. If I had to guess, she watched the whole thing starting with Steve throwing mud on me. She gave them detention as well, but they had morning detentions instead. I heard them complaining about how much cleaning she made them do so... yeah. Oldton probably watched the whole thing, including me just going into the class and grabbing Chelsea."

Lily tried not to laugh, but the image was just too funny. "I can't see anyone getting away with that sort of thing these days..."

Roxy nodded, "Yeah, much stricter regulations on teachers these days. Teachers can still have favourites... but going to quite that extreme... well that'd be a risk. It'd either end up on facebook, or maybe the courts if they thought they could bring a teacher up on some charges for something."

Bruce decided to pick the story back up there, "Indeed. Not something to do these days... but it was the moment I decided Roxanne was... well..." Bruce paused to glance at his wife, "please bear in mind I was a teenager at the time... but I thought she was 'super hot' at the time. I don't know why, don't ask me. I didn't have a proper crush on Roxanne because I still didn't like her personally, but it was the day I sort of... woke up to realise she wasn't that annoying little girl my parents forced me to spend time with anymore. She was a woman that could kick ass. Boy did it give me some awkward feelings for years to come..."

"You still have those feelings!" returned Roxy.

"Ah, but they aren't quite so awkward anymore," shot back Bruce.

Roxy just shrugged and gesture for Bruce to continue. He did so without complaint, "That was about the gist of it for the rest of school. It didn't really know what to think of Roxanne after that. I certainly didn't hate her, and she was very nice looking, in fact, she was the best looking girl in school... but I still wasn't fond of her personality. So I dated a little bit as I finished my schooling, then I started to work in real estate after school and that had me travelling around a bit.

"The girl I was dating at the time, who happened to be called Tiffany like my mother, wasn't all that fond of the fact I never seemed to have time with her. She essentially saw me having all this 'fun' by myself even though I was doing my job. Not well if you ask Roxanne, but I was helping people find good places at good prices and I felt good about myself. Well, this meant that I didn't think Tiffany was 'important enough' which was silly. I still lived with my parents, and so did she.

"I spent pretty much all of my free time with her that I could, but I worked whenever I needed to taking days off in the middle of the week. She got an apprenticeship under the local tailor and was busy every day except weekends. So we just didn't have the chance to really talk. Anyway, eventually there was a bit of a blow-up over it...

"And we split. I didn't fight all that hard to keep in touch with Tiffany because truth be told... without the constant proximity school forced on us... I just didn't care to keep that spark alive you know? I still tried to spend time with her... but it always felt like an obligation. Well, doesn't matter. She's happily married now and so am I, so it worked out..."

Chapter 953 Roxy and Bruce both!

Bruce trailed off, letting the silence hang in the air until, “Well go on? Where’s the rest of the story?” except it wasn’t Kat or Lily who said it, but Roxy.

Bruce turned to his wife and raised a confused eyebrow, “What do you mean ‘the rest of it’? You where there for the rest of it. I went over my childhood, if briefly, into my teenage years where things started to change in regards for my feelings towards you, and even talked about my last girlfriend before we got together. Though, perhaps I could’ve been a bit clearer about the fact I broke up with girlfriend Tiffany years before we got together,”

“Yeah, but I’m talking about the other stuff I mentioned when I asked you to go over things,” said Roxy with a grin, “Our wedding, our honeymoon, basically everything that we did together after we started meeting up. I didn’t talk about it much, and I expect you to go over it now,”

“Roxanne, you where there for all of those events, and you also like to hear yourself talk. I’m perfectly happy to leave all of the recounting to you,” insisted Bruce with a frown.

Roxy just shrugged and pouted at Bruce, “But I wanna hear you talk about it!”

Bruce’s frown deepened as he realised that while it was true Roxy liked to hear herself talk, and would normally take the lead in pretty much all conversations she could... embarrassing him was still one of her favourite subjects. He was also pretty sure that Roxy was fishing for compliments a bit. It was a necessity when it came to talking about how they ended up together after all.

So a large part of Bruce wanted to brush her off. If it came down to it, Roxy would give in and tell the story herself. She wanted the grandkids to hear their story, and he was including Lily in that umbrella. Despite that though... while she would tell the story herself... it wouldn’t really be winning. Certainly not the ‘war’. So Bruce sighed again and pulled himself up, mentally readying himself to talk about how they got together.

“Right... well after my break-up I wasn’t interested in dating anyone at all. I just didn’t see it as practical anymore. I was busy, they would probably be busy... it just didn’t seem worth it. During this time though I’d still see Roxy occasionally, both because we worked together and also because I’d see her when I was staying with my parents. Unlike me though, she managed to get her own place pretty early on into her career, taking a loan out for it and everything.”

Roxy preened at this admission, clearly quite happy with the fact she’d moved out of home before Bruce, who was perfectly fine to stay with his parents. Especially after his relationship fell through. Despite the looks, nobody actually interrupted Bruce, “This meant that I didn’t see all that much of Roxy in truth. Especially not compared to when we were back at school.

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“Things started to change a few years into work. There was a period of... I think it might have been a full month? I can’t quite remember if I let it go the full month before I said something. Every day that month Roxy was looking worse and worse. At first it was just little things that I only noticed looking back. Her hair wasn’t quite done perfectly, then her makeup got a lot thicker... but also less expertly done. Then even that couldn’t hide the fact she had large bags under her eyes. Finally, what tipped things over the edge for me, was that time she tried to chew out one of the interns for sneaking up behind her... when it was just a poster on the wall.”

"Wait, we agreed never to talk about that!" interjected Roxy with an annoyed look on her face.

"Strange... I seem to remember, not moments ago, you insisting that I tell the story of how we met... could I be mistaken?" asked Bruce 'innocently'.

"Now hang on here. I wanted to hear you talk about our wedding! Not make me look bad!" retorted Roxy.

Bruce shrugged, "Our wedding was fine but honestly it wasn't anything special Roxanne. I loved you, and there was only one place we could've gotten married. My family garden that YOUR father spent his life working on. It was the perfect place and it was wonderful for the ceremony... but the day was standard and the fact we had to make space for so many people meant that it was the worst the garden has ever looked. The honeymoon was much better, and I'll touch on that... but most of it isn't for children to hear about," insisted Bruce firmly.

"Fine," admitted Roxy with a pout, throwing her hair as she pointedly didn't look in Bruce's direction for a few moments.

"So now that I have permission to continue," said Bruce with a grin, "I saw that and I took a few seconds to really take it all in. It was late at night, I was working overtime I wasn't being paid for, even though I could've been... and so it was just the two of us in the office. I had this... moment of understanding that nobody else was going to help Roxanne, and she clearly wasn't going to help herself... so I asked her..." Roxy groaned, "I asked her if she wanted to visit her Mum and get some cookies,"

Roxy buried her face in her hands as Bruce continued, "and she said 'My mother's cookies taste like shit!' I asked 'how can you say that' and she replied with 'because she keeps leaving the sugar in with the manure' and I started laughing, she started laughing with me... we both laughed together... and then she passed out. Dropped right there in the hallway, straight onto the ground."

"Obviously knowing where her home is, or at least where her parents lived, I bundled her up in a spare blanket, chucked her in my passenger seat and drove us both to my parent's estate. I dropped her off, still wrapped up in a blanket, to Perenelle, and said 'She collapsed at the office. I'm forcing her to take a week off. You're responsible for her' and then left. But of course... being the nosy guy that I am... I kept visiting after work. Every day for that week I forced her to have off.

"Roxy pretended to be upset at the treatment for the first few days... but by the end of the week we were actually talking and that was the start of our friendship. It wasn't sexual yet, not in the slightest. I wasn't looking for love and... I was perhaps a bit bitter about how things ended even if I knew it was coming with Tiffany... as for things on Roxanne's end..."

"I hadn't dated anyone. I didn't think I had time. I only had eyes for money and what I could do to get closer to that goal. Thing is, I always wanted it to be MY money. If I married into wealth then it wouldn't really be mine... and if I was dating someone, I'd be spending that money... and eventually I'd be giving them half of everything. I was telling myself I didn't need or want a husband. Sure men were attractive, but did that knowledge actually get me money? Nope." Admitted Roxy.

Bruce nodded, and took up the retelling from there, "So between the two of us it took a while to move past that. Really our parents helped... and hindered. They joked about it for a long time, and we kept

refuting them but eventually the truth of the matter won out. While our parents did joke around about it, they were quite careful to make sure it was never a pressure to get married to each other.

“Eventually we did date, and marry of course, but that’s not a surprise. The honeymoon, other than the main activity all couples do, was also our chance to get out into the world. We’d never left the country before and my parents paid for the whole thing. We had a lot of money, and like... six months off. So we travelled nearly the entire globe, stopping wherever we felt like and really taking in the sights. Mostly superficial stuff but it was all just so... different,”

“It was during that trip that Roxy and I learnt what we wanted to do with all our money. Roxy of course, still wanted to be rich both for herself and for any children we might have, but I already had that money, in many ways, and I needed to know how to spend it. My parents used it on their garden and house, keeping them both looking exceptional and up to date through the years. I never realised just how much money they sunk into it, even while they were still making more money.

“For us though, we wanted to travel and buy places we liked, both to stay, and to rent out. It gave us a way to essentially ‘excuse’ the travel while also looking for wonderful places to set up houses. Sometimes we built, sometimes we bought, but always we picked great locations,”

Chapter 954 Transition Chapters are hard

Time passed smoothly, even though plenty of things happened. Lily spent what time she could practicing, but her parents were not very pleased with the idea of her spending all her days hanging out with Kat. It was fine before when Lily came home from school every day, but now that Lily was away, for potentially months at a time, they were less keen on the idea that she’d be glued to Kat on her days off. Sure Evaline and Harold were away that one day Lily would transition to essentially living with Kat. Today, was not that day, nor was tomorrow, or next week. For now, they were taking what time they could get with Lily.

When Lily wasn’t hanging out with her parents, she was practicing her magic. Lily wasn’t entirely sure if she was making progress. Her constant failures on Earth seemed to imply that she wasn’t making any further progress... until one day she managed to summon a tiny scrap of paper. Lily was quite sceptical of the paper when she first saw it, unsure if she’d actually managed to summon something, or if it was just a bit of fluff that looked vaguely paper shaped.

Kat was called over, and after utilising a bit of demonic energy Kat found out that the paper, small as it was, happened to be a perfect square and nearly perfectly flat. That second part was likely just due to the fact it was stuck to the end of Lily’s finger though, and not an indication of how the paper was originally summoned. A bit of back and forth between Lily and Kat to confirm it was in fact paper, and that it was square lead to them watching it closely for a full thirty minutes until it vanished before their eyes.

Only the fact Lily had been smart enough to put a glass over the paper to prevent it blowing away let them stay confident in the fact that the paper had vanished as it was supposed to instead of say... blowing away in the wind or getting caught in someone’s clothes. With confirmation that Lily was actually able to do magic, albeit very poorly, her training doubled in intensity. She was spending less time with Kat, and Vivian’s parents, and more time training.



It was only when Kat physically pulled her out of the backyard and started to scratch around her ears that she'd give up on her training. Lily would insist she was resting at her parents house when they got her to visit and that she NEEDED to train. Kat ignored these arguments and just kept petting her until her resistance crumbled. A few kisses might've been used as well... but Lily got very embarrassed at the implication. Teasing her about it was just too easy and really not all that amusing. So Kat and Roxy didn't mention it.

Callisto spent most of her time with Sylvie, reading the rules for CoG and trying out a few 'example turns' to try and understand how the game is played. During the nights, when everyone else was asleep Callisto did her regular cleaning and managed to finish up what loose ends she still had with her projects before too long. Callisto had already prepared to spend a good deal of time with Sylvie following her birthday, she just hadn't prepared for something like CoG.

It was turning into a massive project and Callisto had actually gone out to buy a second folding table to setup in the room they'd held Sylvie's party to spread the board out on. Even with that, it still didn't properly fit on the two tables. It was... manageable but a number of pieces and card decks were spread out over a few chairs in the room to deal with that little fact. Kat had taken a look into the room at one point and couldn't help but stare at the boards in awe, and horror. Kat promptly ran out of that room, wanting nothing to do with something so complicated.

Callisto also managed to convince everyone to play a round of DDK just to give Sylvie a break from thinking about CoG. It was proving a bit tough even for the two of them. It was clear that CoG was designed for people with a lot more time than your average human as well as the ability to speed up your mind. It was still doable, and Sylvie LOVED even just the little bits she'd manage to uncover... but it was still a bit much even for her. Callisto managed... but mostly because she didn't need to sleep. That really helped her keep up with the whole thing and support Sylvie when the younger girl got to a confusing part.

DDK was... fine. Callisto got completely destroyed as the Demon King. It wasn't even close, despite Callisto managing things rather carefully. Everyone was able to understand rather quickly why the game was popular... and also why the Demon King was never expected to win. The whole thing was stacked in the hero's favour and with a full team it just wasn't hard to take Callisto down.

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The only consolation prize for Callisto was that she managed to avoid a 'total defeat' and dealt some damage to the hero's kingdom, robbing them of a perfect victory. It didn't feel particularly well earned though and nobody was all that interested in playing a second round. Instead, they played a few different card games to pass the time together.

Vivian was pretty busy while her parents were over. Because she wasn't warned beforehand, Vivian still had a two projects running and spent her time in her office, designing room mock ups, pieces, and making calls to suppliers while occasionally going out for a drive to look at the locations in question of meet with clients. Vivian was rather annoyed that she couldn't properly spend time with her family, but understood she had no choice... especially because Roxy had almost certainly planned it this way. Vivian had given herself the day off to have fun with Sylvie and was booked up with plenty of projects after that day.

This meant that Vivian couldn't put anything off. She didn't even have time to take an extra day off for family time. Just the one lone day off she always had. The second and sometimes third day she managed some weeks were but distant fond memories. Everyone was accommodating about it. Not holding Vivian up at meal times. Letting her do her work in silence... and letting Vivian hug Sylvie, Kat and even Lily when she was finally done with work for the day to make up for all the family time she was missing.

Lily had been particularly surprised when Vivian captured her on the third day of Roxy's stay. Vivian had just snuggled into Lily's hair and bound the younger girl tightly with her arms. Refusing to so much as budge. When Kat came by to help possibly free her girlfriend, she was instead added to the hug pile. Sure Kat could technically break out with her physical strength... but her will was weak. She couldn't do that to Vivian and so into the hug pile she went. Though Lily felt it to be much less awkward when Kat was bound up as well.

Sylvie spent what time she wasn't being hugged by Vivian or learning the rules for CoG hanging out with her grandparents. Roxy and Bruce were both happy to tell stories of their time abroad... well... normally it was just Roxy. Bruce followed her around like a faithful Labrador, but didn't actually comment on things all that much unless Roxy prompted him. He was happy just to sit and take in the atmosphere.

Kat would regularly sit in on these stories as well, something Sylvie appreciated. The ten-year-old was very happy to be spending so much time with her older sister figure... even if the call of CoG was strong. Story time became a very frequent activity while Roxy and Bruce were here... and it might have even sparked a bit of interest of travelling in Sylvie. It was hard to tell... but she did at the very least read through one large travel guide, so perhaps that was a sign of things to come.

Roxy and Bruce mostly just did whatever they felt like. For Bruce that was almost always whatever Roxy was doing. Roxy split her time between telling Sylvie stories, and grilling Kat on her own journeys. For them, the most interesting part about being a demon seemed to be the ability to visit other worlds. Sure power was nice... but the ability to travel to a completely unique location once a week? Why... that was something they'd be willing to pay an awful large amount for. Did already in fact.

They did not however, find a practical way to do something like that. D.E.M.O.N.S was rather clear that if they went on a Contract with Kat they were bound to help Kat with the objectives, and that was if they were even allowed to go. Lily was fine because she was basically a familiar, and the pair needed to stay together. Roxy and Bruce then tried to find out if they could become demons and of course the answer was no. It was something many hoped for, many had tried... and all had failed. So that particular dream would go unfulfilled.

Chapter 955 Departure... but not for ME

Eventually Roxy and Bruce decided to leave. As nice as it was spending time with everyone... after a few weeks of hanging out at Vivian's house they were clearly ready to move on. They'd spent so many years travelling around that even the idea of spending a month in the same place was daunting. Especially when that 'place' was a small unremarkable town.

Roxy was actually much more mature about it than Bruce. Bruce, despite his quiet nature, wasn't willing to admit to himself, let alone others, that spending so much time in one place was really grating on him. Roxy however knew what the issue was, and started preparing to leave. Even if she had to drag Bruce

metaphorically kicking and screaming along the way despite the fact he was the one getting more frayed by the day.

For Roxy, this had been a nice change of pace from her current life. Adventure called to her, and she enjoyed going around the world. There was still so many places they hadn't experienced and that was her life. She understood that. She craved that. She loved that. Roxy also understood that you needed a break sometimes, and visiting Vivian, a familiar face, a familiar town. It was all very nice...

But it was not who she was at her core. The idea of settling down in a small suburb had been destroyed long ago. The smouldering remains of those dreams had used to fuel a new dream, one that she still held close to this day. The idea that she could see the world. That there were new things around every corner, and that there wasn't enough life to see it all... but she could damn well try. Unlike Bruce, she did not mourn the loss of her first dream, to make money then settle down with a big house and a nice garden.

That was a dream born out of desperation, or at least that's how Roxy saw it. A dream built by a child who had not experienced the world. As an adult though... Roxy still dreamed. She dreamed a new dream that she felt could sustain her until time started to take its pound of flesh. Perhaps then she could settle down. Perhaps she would never get the chance. The idea of not attempting it though? That was sacrilege.

For Bruce though... he was in it for the beauty. The wonder. He travelled because he loved Roxy, and he loved to see the all sorts of new, quiet places. Untouched wilderness, city skylines in the morning light. Dusty old graffiti fading away over time. Ancient carvings, and fresh gardens on the plains. She journey did not entice Bruce, so much as the idea of new, peaceful destinations he could take in.

Of course... it was still those new moments that called to him. Rehashing so many old stories for the kids. Waking up to the same suburb. A town he'd seen time, and time again. A strange house filled with oddities... that ran on such a consistent schedule. Vivian's house one was on contradictions but it quickly became mundane. Normal. For Bruce it lost a lot of its wonder in just the time he'd spent there.

So it was time to leave. He fought his wife's decision fiercely despite knowing she was right... but what cut him deeply was Sylvie's remarkable indifference to their departure. For Sylvie, Roxy and Bruce were interesting people of course. Fun and clearly important to Vivian... but she didn't really KNOW them. They were visiting strangers, and unlike other children her age, recognised the fact that they were going to leave very quickly. This meant they didn't properly settle into her heart. Now that they were leaving... it was just a fact. Their visit was nice, and it was over. Nothing more, nothing less.

Roxy was able to recognise this during her preparations. Just as she was able to recognise that Vivian was sad and annoyed to see them go. Vivian had been so busy the entire 'vacation' that she hadn't spent any real time with her parents and they were already leaving. Vivian understood it was in part due to all the things she'd hidden in regards to Sylvie and Kat but that didn't mean she was any happier about the situation.

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Roxy did take some slight amounts of pity on her daughter. Spending the second last day of their stay in Vivian's office helping her out with work instead of spending time with everyone else. Vivian's beaming

smile at dinner that day helped ease Roxy's own guilt at what she'd done to her daughter. Sure it was Roxy's idea, and the punishment was to make a point... but that didn't mean she was happy about the whole thing. Still, Roxy knew it left a deep impression on her daughter... just... perhaps a bit deeper than intended.

For Callisto the departure was simply a fact, much like it was for Sylvie. Callisto's issue with her own parents prevented her from truly being comfortable in the presence of Roxy or Bruce. She could treat them like pleasant acquaintances, or important friends of her best friend... but nothing more. Roxy and Bruce knew this well and didn't try to push things, so this relationship didn't really shift.

It did mean that Callisto was not surprised at all by Sylvie's similar attitude towards them. Though Callisto falsely believed that Sylvie was imitating her, and felt somewhat guilty about that. She was wrong of course, as mentioned before, Sylvie had known about Roxy and Bruce's departure. She simply had not taken them into her heart. Callisto though, worried that Sylvie's lack of reaction was due to her own feelings on the matter.

Callisto had no idea how to deal with this issue that was in fact not an issue at all. Callisto was sure that if she actually needed to sleep, this question would have kept her up at night. There was nothing inherently wrong with Sylvie's colder than expected attitude towards Vivian's parents' departure... but it probably wasn't ideal. At least, Callisto was pretty sure it wasn't ideal. Her own strange upbringing and lack of issue with the departure was making it hard for her to know exactly what Sylvie's reaction should be.

Lily and Kat weren't any help either. Kat had seen way too many people come and go and the orphanage. Even if Roxy and Bruce weren't gone forever, and could be contacted... so could many of the children and teenagers Kat had said goodbye to. She did not keep in contact though. They were moving on to a new life, and Kat never felt comfortable trying to remind them about where they came from. For Kat, the orphanage was home, and there was nothing wrong with that... but for others, they had their own homes to manage.

So Kat, while slightly melancholy about their departure, wasn't surprised either. It simply washed over her. Sure Kat spent a bit more time with them in the days after the announced departure, she listened a bit more. Committed the moments to memory a bit more stringently... but she didn't beg them to stay. Didn't even try to hint that they could spend a bit more time here safely. She was ready for them to leave, and no tears were shed as the rental vehicle left the driveway.

Lily had some mixed feelings, similar to Vivian. She had forgone a lot of time potentially spent with Roxy and Bruce in favour of practice and wasn't particularly pleased with the trade-off when it finally came time for them to leave. Even with all the time she put end, constantly burning mana and regenerating it... the best she managed was a paper storm made up of confetti sized pieces that did exactly no damage to anything or anyone. Forget scratching Kat's clothes, Lily couldn't even damage a real sheet of paper with her magic.

Well, that wasn't quite true. Lily figured out how to shred paper with a spell, and that technically counts as damage... but it really wasn't what she was after. The 'paper destruction' spell was intended to be a good compliment for summoning full pages. You could summon large pieces of paper, shred them, then

throw all the shredded pieces afterwards. Apparently it was slightly more mana efficient and made for sharper edges.

The fact that it was the only way Lily could damage the paper target she set up was very disappointing. Especially when the paper didn't shred itself into a bunch of small pieces... instead it shredded into ten or so large pieces because the spell was too hard for Lily to cast properly. So even when she was damaging the target, it was because she was using a massive amount of extra mana to deal damage... to a fragile, paper target.

It was the first time Lily started to wonder if perhaps paper magic was a mistake as her first affinity... and that practice might make perfect... but that she was wasting her test. This was further driven home when Roxy and Bruce had no estimation for their next visit. Lily found herself somewhat bitter as she watched Bruce drive away. A few kisses from Kat did help alleviate the problem... even if it hadn't vanished completely.

#### Chapter 956 Sleepy Lily is Adorable I tell You

When a circle lit up beneath her, Kat was actually a bit relieved. Kat had started feeling rather odd after going so long without a Contract. She felt a bit like a kid that had been spotted sneaking into the cookie jar. Despite knowing she was entitled to a break, the fact that she just ended up with one without any further communication was somewhat uncomfortable. So now that it was time to leave, Kat felt the pressure that had been building in the back of her mind dissipating.

\*You know... I wonder if this is the reason we keep getting Contracts so regularly? Is it because demons get a bit weird without a Contract to do regularly?\* Kat wasn't entirely sure of the answer. Shrugging she quickly got dressed and headed downstairs and out the door. Today was one of the days Lily hadn't decided to risk staying the night over, in cat form of course. Because that apparently made it more socially acceptable. Kat knew why of course... but didn't really feel the weight behind that assertion. Despite that, it DID make Lily more comfortable so Kat was in no rush to change things. Poke a bit sure, but not change things.

Kat said her goodbyes to Callisto, the only person who was currently around. It was actually pretty late in the day, but Sylvie was at work, and Vivian was at school. Wait. Kat shook her head, as she realised her train of thought was running the wrong way. It was actually nearly lunchtime and Lily had slept it. Kat blamed the fact that she kept up her practice like a maniac and had completely collapsed yesterday. Evaline had been watching Lily practicing at the time, and put her foot down, it was one of the main reasons Lily was sleeping by herself today. Evaline didn't trust Kat to force Lily to sleep.

She was correct of course, but Kat was pretty sure that Lily wouldn't have pushed to stay up anyway. Kat might not have stopped Lily doing anything, unless it was directly harmful... but even then. Kat knew if Lily begged enough she'd probably still give in. Perhaps Evaline was correct to force Lily to stay the night. Nevertheless, it was time to go on a Contract and Kat was ready.

She even had a brand new backpack that Callisto had made for her. It was small, and easily folded up, with clips on it that allowed it to act either as a handbag or as a small backpack that fit around her wings. It wasn't exactly good for storing things in it, but it was perfect for Lily to ride in, which to Kat, was the entire point.

Lily had also pulled out her old school backpack. Well, it was on the floor of Lily's room with extra close in it at the moment, but it was still prepped. For Lily, it was simply a matter of the nice cloth bag she got from Jara being more of a showy bag that didn't fit all that much then a proper storage device. Lily now had three changes of clothes, a large water bottle, a blanket, a few packets of jerky and a sealed container for after it was open as well as a towel that could be used as a towel, or a second blanket in a pinch.

The blanket was the only thing Lily wasn't entirely pleased with. Due to space constraints it wasn't particularly thick or large enough for two people. Lily would've preferred a sleeping bag, but the only one of those her family had was a large couple's sleeping bag her parents owned. It was old, and even folded up took up nearly as much space as the backpack itself.

Kat snuck in through the window, Lily had taken to leaving it open just a crack. Kat could use her finger nails to open it but unsavoury individuals should struggle. It also wasn't obvious to the naked eye that it was open at all. Kat smiled down at Lily, who was sleeping on her pillow in Memphis form. Even after Lily had gotten her humanoid form back... Lily mostly seemed to gravitate towards her Memphis one, especially when sleeping. Kat wasn't sure if this was a habit born out of sleeping as a Memphis on top of herself regularly, or if Lily now preferred to sleep as a Memphis.

Regardless, Kat scratched a finger against Lily's cheek. Lily, even in her sleep could recognise whose touch it was, and simply started to purr, while leaning further into Kat's finger. Kat sighed, knowing she was going to have to wake Lily up, no matter how adorable her girlfriend was. Especially considering how late it was. She'd have no excuse.

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Kat started to click her fingers near Lily's ears. Not too close, Kat didn't want to hurt Lily, and a cat had much more sensitive ears after all. It... didn't really seem to be working. Lily's ears twitched every time Kat snapped her fingers, but after a few sniffs, Lily simply settled back down and let her ears follow the sound in her sleep. Kat's scent was much too prevalent at the moment so in Lily's mind everything was all good. It didn't matter that Kat was the one trying to wake her up. Kat was here... and it was all good.

"Lily, Lily wake up," whispered Kat.

A few moments pass.

"Lily, wake up please," repeated Kat.

A few more moments pass.

Kat prepares to yell... and then realises Evaline is home. Hmm... Kat walks out into the lounge room to find Evaline at her laptop doing... something? Taxes perhaps? Evaline looks up as she hears Kat enter the room. The floorboards in the hall creaking somewhat under Kat's weight. "Ah, Kat. It's nice to see you I suppose,"

Kat nodded, "It's good to see you as well Evaline," Kat said ignoring the implications in Evaline's phrasing, "It's finally time for another Contract and I need to wake Lily... but she's not really budging for me,"

Evaline sighed, "That girl... I warned her she needed to rest properly," shaking her head Evaline stood up as she brushed past Kat who was taking up a good deal of the hallway. When Evaline got the door open she just shook her head again, "I'm not surprised you couldn't wake her. She's awfully perceptive even while asleep in that form. She probably thinks you being around means that there isn't anything to worry about,"

"Lily, wake up now," said Evaline. She simply used a natural volume... but there was a force behind it that only a mother could generate. Lily flinched awake immediately, quickly looking around the room for a clue as to what was going on, only to see Kat standing in the doorway behind her mother. [Hi Kat? Um... not that I'm not thrilled to see you as soon as I wake up but what's going on?]

\*Time for a Contract!\*

Lily's eyes went wide before she quickly transformed mid motion. She was diving off the bed and managed to roll into her backpack before transforming again and hopping up onto the bed, then shoot over Evaline straight into Kat's arms. Evaline rolled her eyes at the movements. "Not even a goodbye for your dear old mother?"

[Oh dear. I seem to have made a mistake.]

\*We've got time. I rushed over here and the circle isn't being too much of a pain. Plus... pretty sure I can manually ask to leave from here if I want? Let me just ask...\*

User Kat can indeed leave from whatever position User Kat wishes. User Kat will be forcefully moved if no excuse has been raised and the time limit expires. The Glowing circle serves as both a convenient exit, and a way to remind User that a summoning is occurring.

\*Ok, we're good. You can chat with your mum then I can just summon us straight from here.\*

Lily nodded and transformed, not really taking into account the fact that there really wasn't much space in the hallway, and certainly not between Evaline and Kat. When Lily's transformation finished she was wedged into between the two, with her backpack pushing into Kat's chest. "Um... woops..." mumbled Lily.

Transforming again, Lily ducked around Evaline's legs before transforming a second time, or arguably third time, back to human. Lily shifted the backpack awkwardly, trying to make sure her tail wasn't caught by any of the straps. "Sorry Mum... I sort of panicked?"

Evaline sighed, "Yes indeed, you panicked and your first thought was to jump into Kat's arms. I understand, I'm no longer the most important woman in your life and while that does make me sad, I suppose it is still nice to see you growing up,"

"Muuuum..." mumbled Lily embarrassed, only to be cut off by Evaline stepping forward to wrap her arms around her daughter.

"It's fine Lily. I'm just teasing you a bit. Just know that I'm still your mother and while I support your decisions I'll always be here if you need help. Try not to be away for so long this time alright?" whispered Evaline for only her daughter to hear. Of course, Kat's ears were good enough not to miss it... but well... Evaline didn't need to know that. Lily just hugged her mother back, rubbing her face into Evaline's side.

## Chapter 957 Gilded Cage?

As the flames died down, Kat noticed two things that were a bit different about this summon. Well, in truth she quickly spotted the first, slowed her mind down, and berated herself over the fact it took her so long to recognise the second thing. The first, an less significant item she noticed was that she wasn't the only demon here. No, this time, Kat had been summoned alongside someone else. At the very least, Kat could blame her notice on the fact that the figure was very familiar.

They had purple skin, long winding horns... and well... it was Sue. Kat had spent more than enough time with her friend, for that's what Sue was. Crazy and sex obsessed as she was, Sue had earned herself the title of 'friend' after being good company, and helping out with Sylvie's presents. Sue hadn't really noticed Kat yet.

It was driving home just how much better Kat's abilities were now that she was Rank 3. Sue had barely even registered the fact she was out of the transportation flames, let alone recognising the fact that Kat was beside her. Just to prove a point, Kat kept her slowed time up, looking around for a bit to determine that yes, Sue really was that slow in comparison now.

The second thing Kat noticed, was much more concerning. As stated above, Kat was looking around in slowed time mostly just to judge herself against Sue. That might've been a saving grace in this case. The more Kat examined the room they were in, the more she grew concerned about the construction of the place.

The summoning circle took up the entire room. No, it would be more accurate to say that the room WAS the summoning circle. They were trapped here in this room, and that was just one of the little things that pointed Kat's thoughts in that direction. Besides the fact that the circle continued to the edges and even started to climb the walls slightly, the walls themselves were a white stone with runes chiselled into them. The runes seemed to be dying down in this slowed time, but they may have simply flared when Kat and Sue were summoned and were returning to normal now.

The other problems were just as noticeable. There were no windows. Not a single slither of natural light got into the room. Furthermore, the door wasn't a simple wood construction, no it was a large behemoth of a door that was easily twice as tall as Kat and twenty times as wide. It was a dark metal to contrast with the white walls and practically GLOWED with power. Compared to the walls, which Kat wasn't entirely sure about, the door had PRESENCE.

Personally, Kat suspected that the door would be tougher to get through than the walls. Even if she was underground, like Kat was also suspecting, the door itself was NOT the weak point in the room's construction. It wasn't clear if the door was designed just for this room, but it was NOT opening for anything it didn't want to. Kat noted that it didn't even have hinges, certainly not on this side of the door. In fact, if it wasn't for its shape and the different materials, Kat would've guessed it to be part of the walls.

That's not to say the room didn't look nice, no. Despite these features that screamed 'trap' or perhaps 'containment' the owners of the place really went out of their way to make it seem like they were simply welcoming honoured guests... of all sizes. See, that was the other thing that... well perhaps it wasn't strange considering they intended to summon demons here, but it was not something Kat's mind would instinctively gravitate to.



The room itself had a number of tables and chairs in the nearby areas. The centre where Kat and Sue had been summoned was clear for quite a while, and there was a straight line to the door that left enough clearance to fit a monster truck down it with space on either side for an escort. The chairs and tables though, they were all made to be various sizes and shapes. Well. Most of them.

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Without fail, there was always at least two chairs for a normal sized person. Sometimes they also had a little side table next to the chairs, other times they were basically high-seats so that the humans could sit at the 'big tables' without issue. The tables themselves were all the same design. A fancy wood carved table with a garden of flowers carved into the table top and a thick layer of varnish to keep it all level. All the non-standard chairs? Well they looked perfect for a number of demons Kat had seen.

The easiest design to pick out where the large half dome chairs that were clearly for beholders to rest in. There was a few different sizes, with the largest being perfectly sized for a medium sized car. There was of course quite a few that were simply chairs, but large... but another interesting design was the one for Lamias.

Kat wasn't entirely proud to admit the fact it took her a few minutes of staring at the large pillow on the floor, wondering why they'd not just have another set of chairs for beholders... only to realise, it's probably for the Lamias that prefer that kind of seating. Though of course, the strangest furniture Kat managed to spot was... somewhat hard to explain, even if it was obviously for shadow demons.

It definitely wasn't a chair. Calling it a chair would imply there was something substantial to sit on. Instead... it was a box with a concave section that folded into something that vaguely resembled a chair... while also containing a slightly raised painting of a single chair that fit in well with the curve. It wasn't raised much, not even a full fingers-width... but it was noticeably raised.

\*Is that even appropriate for shadows? I guess I never really thought about how they'd rest. It's never really come up. Can they use normal chairs? I mean they must be able to right? I also know that they can pull themselves off the wall, they aren't confined to them. Hmm... yeah this is definitely weird. Thoughtful perhaps... but weird.\*

Furniture wasn't the only thing spread out over the room though. There was also a number of plants that rested as centrepieces for many tables. Well, a slightly closer look revealed they weren't real plants, just carved plants that had been painted multiple colours. Kat wasn't entirely sure why they went that route instead of using real plants. Perhaps it was for allergy reasons? Maybe they didn't want to accidentally provide a demon with something they could use to escape? Kat didn't know.

Further complicating that question, was the fact that alongside two walls, the back and left wall, was a large buffet table. One seemed to contain only meat, and the other only had fruits and vegetables. There was a third, smaller table with sweets on it off to the right but it really was tiny. Where the two buffet tables were completely filled wall to wall, and it was a BIG wall, the sweet table had one cake, three cupcakes, a candy bowl that was only half filled, and a bar of chocolate.

Next to the sweets table was a second table with a few drinks on it. Two teapots, one for a normal sized individual and one three times the size, a water jug, a barrel next to it on the ground, and finally a pot of coffee. Though for some reason the coffee was only in normal size portions.

On the one hand, it was clear that no expense was spared when it came to furnishing the area and providing food for any potential gluttony demons. It was all very nice to look at and at least somewhat enticing... but Kat could tell that it was also very much a gilded cage. The most telling part of the latter perhaps being the fact that there was no summoner in the room. Someone had managed to pull Kat and Sue into this world without even being there to greet them.

\*I'd really like to ask Sue what the best course of action is but I'm not sure if just dropping back to normal time is the best idea right now. Lily would also be great to get advice from... but her mind isn't fast enough for this. Dammit. What do I do? Everything in here seems to be a way to get whatever they summon to relax or at least feel somewhat comfortable. I just wish I knew if it was because they're trying to make a good impression... or if there is some other magical reason.

I mean, it's possible that this is all just to keep the a demon trapped in this room... or even just slow down any escape. It's one thing to break out of a flimsy defence that's been degrading over who knows how many centuries. It's another to dig through tonnes of rock and dirt when there is nice seating and free food on offer if you just... hang around or whatever. Hmm... \*

#### Chapter 958 Sue, with the Keys to Knowledge

Kat let time return to normal, no closer to understanding exactly what was going on. Instead, she decided to pretend nothing was wrong. Especially if they were being watched. She didn't spot any cameras... but if there wasn't a spell for remote viewing she'd eat her shoes. Kat turned slightly, and threw her arms out wide. Sue, was of course attracted to the motion in the corner of her vision.

Kat could see the moment Sue recognised who it was, her eyes lit up and she dashed into Kat's arms. "Kat! It's so good to see you! Is Lily here? Did Sylvie's party go well? I mean, I got your message that said it went well but I want details!" cheered Sue.

Kat laughed as Lily hopped out of Kat's new backpack to settle on the two Succubi's shoulder, letting her rub her face on Sue's for a bit. "Oh hi Lily! It's good to see you too!" smiled Sue. "It's so nice to know who I'm working with on a Contract, and doubly so when I actually like them! You wouldn't believe how many times I've had to work with people I dislike. I mean, at least I know them. It's better then being all awkward around a strange, but this is so much better! Though... I do wonder what we'll be doing,"

Sue continued to ramble as Kat laughed and they separated. "It's good to see you as well Sue. Sylvie's party was good, though as I mentioned in my letters to you and Kamiko it was sorta gate crashed by Vivian's parents. Which... well it wasn't really a problem it just complicated things for a while. Vivian's parents are lovely, and I got along with them quite well... though I'm not sure if they were totally happy with how things turned out..."

"Why is that?" asked Sue.

Kat sighed, "Well... they showed up randomly as a bit of punishment for Vivian, adopting two people without talking to her parents about it. I mean, they send letters but Vivian didn't even try to call about it. This meant that Vivian was busy for pretty much the whole visit... but I think that just made Roxy and Vivian sad more than anything. Then there's the fact that they had the whole 'magic is real' thing to deal with..."

“And they were rather unhappy with the presents they got Sylvie in the end. They got something for her to make bracelets but... well... they were expecting a somewhat intelligent 9 going 10-year-old but they got a genius with more interest in high level physics textbooks. Apparently, they thought Vivian was exaggerating Sylvie’s intelligence a bit...”

“Ouch,” winced Sue.

“Yeah... so... that didn’t go well. Plus CoG was a big hit with Sylvie so instead of bonding with her grandparents she just spent time figuring that out with Callisto... which is fine... but Sylvie’s also pretty pragmatic. So when Sylvie just casually waved them off at the end... they took a big hit of emotional damage. Honestly, while Vivian did get punished, Roxy probably came out slightly worse in the exchange because Sylvie was treating them more like... hmm... visiting dignitaries they like then family?” explained Kat.

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“Yeah I can see how that’d be a pretty big blow to the grandparents. I still think it was worth the visit for them. It’s the first time you all met up right?” asked Sue and Kat nodded a ‘yes’ in response. “See, then I’m sure they were happy just to meet you all. Though... I’ll admit it sounds like it didn’t quite go to plan for them, that’s just life.”

“I suppose it is,” said Kat slowly as she took in the room quickly. Seeing no sign of anybody, Kat decided to just ask. “Do you know what’s up with the room? Like, it’s clearly a trap... or well sort of. We can’t get out... but there’s a bunch of comfortable chairs, free food and it all certainly looks nice...” Kat trailed off without much else to say.

“Ah... well... I’ve never been summoned by someone with the money to splurge on a room like this but my parents have told me about them. The basic idea is to take our measure,” said Sue.

“Right... but why?” asked Kat.

Sue made a ‘so-so’ gesture, “Eh a little of this, a little of that. Mum explained a few reasons to me. The first one is that, you can summon a demon but the more specific you are, the more it costs. It turns out that it can, in some circumstances at least, be cheaper to summon and dismiss a demon without even attempting to contract them a few times rather than make the summon specifically find the demon they want,”

“I thought we wouldn’t get sent on missions we’re unwilling to accept?” replied Kat.

Sue nodded, “Indeed but just because we can do as asked by the contract, doesn’t mean we’ll do everything they want or complete it how they want it done. Say... they need someone killed. So they summon a demon capable of killing X person, but instead a nice, quiet assassin demon like a Succubus or a Shadow, they get a follower of Wrath that’s perfectly capable of killing the person in question... and the rest of the city.”

“Right... but wouldn’t it be better to just... be a bit more specific?” returned Kat.

Sue shrugged, “I don’t know if it happens often, but Mum said it CAN be better, not that it usually is, or that it’s a good idea. There are other reasons as well though. It’s always good to know the temperament of the people you’re working with. Know what levers to push. Take the food for example.

"It's split based on meat, and fruit. If I only ate fruit dishes they know that I'd be happier with fruit. So to subtly insult me they might provide me with a meat side dish, or they might offer me some rare fruit if I complete the contract and then an extra task on top of that. That being said, it'd also tell them if either of us were Gluttony aligned demons. We'd just go and eat everything and call that good,"

"I still don't see why this is worth the effort," said Kat, Lily nodding as well.

Sue however, sighed. "I guess it's not something I really understand either Kat but summoning a demon is a HUGE investment. I'm talking like... anything between 'fancy new car' to 'new house' all the way up to 'bankrupt a country' type of money. If you're summoning demons, especially if you're summing a LOT of demons, building a nice room to figure out how best to phrase the contract is worth a lot of money.

"Like... let's take the assassination again. If they find a demon that's seems to be in a good mood, they might press for 'Kill X person, Y person and leave Z person unharmed' but if the demon in question is grumpy they'd have to settle for 'Kill X without being seen'. Plus, this room can be reused. As nice as the furniture is, none of its enchanted. The food is clearly well prepared, and it smells nice but it's mostly mundane food with no magic in it. The room itself I suspect is indestructible, but even if it's NOT, as soon as a demon showed they could break it down, they'd be banished. The risk of letting them get out in that case is much too high,"

\*I guess I never did think about how much a demon is worth to people. We're expensive to hire clearly... and... well I suppose I never thought what 'expensive' meant when it comes to a multi-dimensional scale. It makes me wonder how much it cost Minor's mother to have me guard her. At the time I didn't think too much about it... but it might've been a good portion of the country's wealth.\*

[Perhaps. I mean, you were just Rank 1 back then so it might not have been too bad... but I see where you're going. You were using a more 'Earth human' style of determining what was expensive. Heck, you might've been judging it all as a, no offence, 'teenage orphan' instead of someone who takes high level mercenary contracts in distant lands.]

\*Weird way of phrasing it... but I do see what you mean. We're the nuclear option in a lot of circumstances. You don't summon a demon for casual stuff. Though... I do wonder why I was summoned for the tournament if that's the case.\*

[You were just Rank 1 originally so that definitely helped. Plus... it might be specifically because Thyme is running it this time around and that they COULD do it before new rules came it. It might be a net less in money once everything is all said and done, but the grand prize would be worth it. Plus, it was a short notice thing remember? Something kept happening to their final member.]

\*Indeed.\*

Chapter 959 Apparently we do Self-Help Now

"So... should we be hiding from the recordings?" asked Kat.

"Eh, it doesn't really matter. The summoning circle should disrupt spells that record voices. They can see us, and maybe lip read? Not sure about that second one but they definitely can't hear us," explained Sue.

"Why? That seems specific... or at the very least not a coincidence," said Kat.

“That’s because it IS. Dad talked about it once, apparently it’s to stop people trying to make Contracts over long distances. This way they can’t make a flimsy Contract but stay far enough away that they’re hard to find. People need to be nearby to make a Contract. Well, I’m not sure if they NEED to but things certainly make it hard for Contracts to go through if they aren’t nearby,” said Sue.

“Right...” said Kat slowly. \*I mean... that makes sense... but I feel like I should’ve been aware of this before. Then again... every other time I’ve been summoned by someone directly in front of me.\* “Well... whatever,” Kat decided just to move on to other topics. If Sue wasn’t worried, it was probably fine, “What have you been up to since we last met?”

Sue waved a hand at Kat dismissively, “Well, unlike some of us, I kept up with shorter term but more regular Contracts. Nothing fancy, and likely nothing you want to hear about. Sure I could start teasing you about it, but with us being watched I wouldn’t want to make it obvious how easily you and Lily can be flustered. Might also be best if Lily doesn’t show off her human form just yet.”

“Nothing special at all?” asked Kat again.

“Kat... you seem to have developed a bit of a warped version of Contracts because of how different yours have been. Add into that the fact that you’ve gained strength very quickly...” Sue paused for a moment to sigh, “I’m not sure what I feel about that fact. It’s not something I’d be interested in, but somehow I do still feel a bit envious. Regardless, I get summoned, once a week, for something my Summoner things is a weird sex thing.

“It’s normally something I’ve tried before, and that’s a shame because I’m not even a century old yet. Most of the time I get summoned by men, but considering my own preferences I’m not suggesting that men are more likely to burn money for a good night of sex. Sometimes it’s more of course. Sometimes I get a date out of it, sometimes I don’t. Sometimes it’s one guy trying to show off his stamina, sometimes I go through a few rooms worth of people...

.....

“But I’m not going on grand adventures that span weeks or months. I don’t get friendly with most of them, and the Contracts that take more than a day are the exceptions not the rule. Summoning a Succubus for sex is expensive, but not ruinously so because of how many Succubi are interested in the work. Or well, it’s more accurate to say they summon ‘someone to sleep with that’s X gender’ and the portal does the rest.

“Which is still expensive, don’t get me wrong, but a lot of rich people are willing to pay big money for a courtesan to warm their bed for a night. The prestige of summoning a demon for it, is decently high in some worlds and my missions are basically never dangerous. Take your last mission for example. There was a risk of fighting a Rank 4 combatant. You did in fact, fight a Rank 4 combatant.

“If I had a mission where I ‘risked’ meeting a Rank 4, it’d just be to sleep with him, and wouldn’t be considered any more dangerous than sleeping with a mortal. Plenty of people with more power than sense summon a demon to warm their bed. Now, I could go into the specifics, I don’t mind that. In fact, it’s something I do with the acquaintances I used to call friends before I met you and Kamiko...

“And sure it’s nice to gossip... but it’s all so shallow. They don’t really care about how much I enjoyed my outings, it’s all about how well I retell the story, or hearing about odd specifics like how large the guys

junk was, or how many times he was able to finish. They don't even care about the fake date missions except for the finale most of the time," Sue paused and winced, taking a step back. "Sorry... I didn't mean to unload that on you,"

Kat skipped over and pulled Sue into a hug, "Aw it's fine. I don't really know why you felt the need to unload like that, but it's fine with me. I thought you enjoyed the work? That you were proud of it?"

"And I AM" said Sue with a huff. "I'm not ashamed of myself. I enjoy what I do... but I just... maybe I'm burnt out when it comes to talking about it? It just... it feels kinda pathetic you know? To brag about bagging this or that guy when it really is just a job. It's like bragging about how much money I made from every summon, but instead it's bragging about how good the food was. Metaphorically speaking."

"I feel like that's exactly what a Gluttony demon would do though..." suggested Kat carefully.

"You're not wrong..." murmured Sue in agreement, "I don't know why this is starting to bother me. I know it didn't bother me before... and I don't know why it's starting?"

[I mean... if it's all she's ever know... now that she has us as friends she has a chance to explore other interests. The fact that she doesn't seem to HAVE other interests is probably causing her issues. Sue seems to be trying to branch out into more than just a 'Slutty Succubus' but is running into the issue that currently, she isn't much more than that.]

\*Surely she'd notice if that was the problem?\*

[I think the fact that she enjoys her 'job' is making it worse. Just because she wants to be MORE doesn't mean she wants to be someone entirely new. So she's fighting with herself. Clinging to her old thoughts even as they annoy her. It's like... hmm... she thinks that she needs to straighten up swimming, to sky-diving. Instead of mixing regularly swimming with a bit of diving board acrobatics.]

\*Lily... I have no idea what you're talking about.\*

[I thought it was a good metaphor!]

\*I'm making no judgement about that, but I think you've lost me truth be told.\*

[Ugh. Sue wants a hobby, but she enjoys her work more than anything she's ever tried as a hobby, but her lack of a hobby is starting to grate on her. Despite that, she can't get a hobby because she keeps thinking of her job as a hobby, or thinks that she's getting an entirely new job. Does that make more sense?]

\*Let's go with... 'I think so yes'\* Lily just threw up her mental hands and didn't elaborate any further. Kat suppressed a grin at the image... but honestly wasn't following Lily's train of thought all that well. Still, if it helped Sue it was worth repeating. "Lily seems to think that you're trying to be more than you are and failing at it," said Kat.

"Huh?" emoted a confused Sue.

"I don't fully understand it either... but Lily thinks you need a hobby?" said Kat.

"But... but I love my Contract work. I enjoy sex. Why do you think I need a hobby?" returned Sue.

Kat shrugged, "Not me, Lily. I don't entirely understand Lily's point myself, but apparently you're trying to grow as a person and confusing that with completely changing who you are. Does that make sense?"

"Yeah... yeah I think it does..." mumbled Sue.

"Good. Can you explain it to me then?" requested Kat.

Sue grinned and said, "Nope. I don't think I will,"

Kat raised an unimpressed eyebrow, "Ganging up on me? With my girlfriend as well?"

Sue shrugged, "I don't know what Lily said to confuse you so much but it makes a great deal of sense from where I'm standing. I got into the sex stuff because nothing else captured my like sex does. I've tried board games, I've tried parties, I've tried video games and reading books. Sexualising my hobbies never really worked out, because I'd rather be sleeping with someone..."

"But maybe that was always the problem? I need, or at least desire, properly separate hobbies. I wonder which one I should pick out? Any suggestions Kat?"

"Sue... I don't really have hobbies..." responded Kat awkwardly.

"Maybe when we're done with this Contract we can both work on that then? You could even pick where we start!" suggested Sue.

"Eh..." Kat grumbled carefully. Trying and failing to suppress her dislike of the idea. Kat liked things as they were. She had Lily, Sylvie, Vivian and Callisto for social stuff. Training to fill the hours, and sleep of course. Did she need something else?

Yes. Yes she did. Now Kat just had to admit that to herself.

#### Chapter 960 Old Man Walking

The girls eventually moved to one of the nearby chairs. Kat grabbed a plate of fruit to share, while Sue grabbed a plate of stew and a plate of raw meat. They took up residence in one of the normal sized chairs and started to eat slowly. Well, Kat and Sue were eating slowly. Lily gulped down four slices of meat in quick succession before curling up in Kat's lap. "Do you get much good food during a Contract?"

"Oh all the time," said Sue between mouthfuls. "I'm at fancy parties quite regularly and if I'm on something resembling a proper date I'm normally treated something special, either a nice home cooked meal, or a good dinner. It's weird how often guys try to impress me on dates despite the fact they're paying for my time you know? Not something I totally get. I mean, maybe if I was a Gluttony demon but like... I'm going to be way more impressed if you try during our night-time dancing then if you've got money to blow on food. Clearly you do if you've bothered to summon me in the first place,"

"Huh... I guess it's not that special then," mumbled Kat.

"Eh, I'm not trying to downplay whatever favourite dish you seem to have, but for me I regularly get good food. Both Mum and Dad are great cooks. I get good food during Contracts. Food is food to me. I've got a taste for the expensive stuff but I can deal with eating crap if I have to. I'm not so far gone. Then again... that might be from swallowing,"

Lily and Kat gagged in sink. "What?" grumbled Sue, "Nothin' wrong with it,"

"I..." Kat started and then paused for a few moments. "Huh... I'm not sure I have a good excuse for my reaction... it just... doesn't seem appealing at all..."

[Well for me it's the idea of having dick in my mouth. Ugh. I hate that I even had to acknowledge it mentally] "Huh... Lily had a better reason than me," said Kat before going on to explain Lily's thought process.

"I can't say I understand Lily's thoughts either truth be told," said Sue as she ran her tongue seductively over the spoon. Seeing that Kat and Lily weren't reacting to that, Sue took the spoon into her mouth and down her throat before pulling it out again, "Gotta make sure I get all the soup off it,"

Kat rolled her eyes, "Yeah sure that's why," said Kat as she ate the not-grapes she picked up. They were rather crunchy but considering they were crunchy all the way through and the whole thing tasted rather nice, she was pretty certain they were meant to be eaten as-is. "Do you know what's taking so long? I'd have thought we'd be contacted by now,"

.....

Sue took another big gulp of soup, like a normal person this time, before answering Kat's question.

"Could be any number of reasons. They could be willing to observe us until we start to do something strange, they could be a big group of demon summoners and be waiting for the client to actually arrive, they could be slowly poisoning the air here just to see if it'll impair our judge. Really, it could be anything,"

"Wait... can they poison us?" asked Kat with some concern.

"Eh... not easily," said Sue. "A lot of demons are resistant to poison. Venom is another matter, but our stomachs are built very differently so it's not a huge concern. If I really wanted to I could eat the metal plate you're using. I doubt I'd like the taste, but I could do it if I wanted. If we're breathing it in... depends how concentrated it is, and venom is regularly an issue unless you have bullshit regeneration like you,"

"So... do you think they're trying to poison us?" asked Kat now with some more concern.

Sue shook her head, "Nope, not worth the effort. Especially considering you're here. At Rank 3 the chance that you'd be effected by anything short of the very best poison, venom, either or, is super low. The problem is, I'd likely be effected first, and then you'd bash their heads in. If they went to the trouble of getting something really really strong? Something that got us both? Well then we'd be summoned back home via the safety protocols." Kat still didn't look super pleased with the news so Sue added, "Look Kat. You've got your regeneration and you're Rank 3. Poison is not something to worry about. Acid is a bigger concern and you'd notice that,"

"Why acid?" asked Kat carefully.

"Well, perhaps not for you specifically but acid and fire scar wounds. If you regeneration isn't up to par then you need to either see a doctor when the missions over, or if it's nearly good enough you need to slice bits of yourself off. For you... it's more an that good acid is a lot more common than good poison. If that make sense," explained Sue.



Kat sighed, "Is there anything else I should be wary of?"

"Eh... I doubt it?" said Sue with a shrug. "The only things that come to mind are for much stronger foes than we're likely to face, you know, Rank 5 stuff I've been told about. I don't really know how dangerous or common they actually are so I'm not sure if it's worth trying to scare you with them,"

Kat thought back to her other scarring memories, "Let's go with later. If it's not a problem right now, then I don't want to know,"

The girls relaxed for a little bit. Sue grabbed a few of the not-grapes, Lily tried lapping at the soup and Kat got a spoonful as well. Of course, Kat made sure to use a different spoon after Sue depthroated hers. Sue actually had a second spoon, so Kat didn't need to get up, but she was prepared to do so. Eventually, the sound of door opening rang out across the room. It was actually pretty silent once the door was in motion, but the large rush of air at the beginning made it very noticeable.

The door opened just enough to let through a small man before they shut again. The man in question was about Lily's height with a shaved head, and a few wrinkles around his eyes. He had a salt and pepper goatee that was well kept... but robes that looked like they'd been worn for as long as he'd been alive. The threads on them looked so worn Kat couldn't help but wonder how the whole thing stayed together. There was also a few splotches of ink, both on the edges of the man's robes and on his hands. In those same hands was a clipboard, though it was clearly rugged and personally made, not mass produced.

Kat looked at Sue for a cue on how to act but Sue just remained where she was, despite the fact they were properly the fitter party. Sue simply gave the man a nod and went back to her soup. \*Um... is that the right attitude to have?\*

[I suppose it depends on the image you want to show off. Sue is trying to say that this is nothing special to her. At least, I think that's what she's going for. My guess is Sue wants to present herself as well-used to this whole song and dance. For us... well... I guess we can try the same? Or at least follow her lead. Then again... that might look bad considering we're the stronger party.]

Eventually, the old man made it to the table and sat down across from Sue and Kat and spoke as soon as his butt was on the chair. "Greetings demons, I have a Contract prepared but I'm wondering if you would indulge me a few questions. Nothing major, just a way of ensuring the summoning array was attuned properly," Now that he was in front of them though, Kat was pretty sure she could smell dye on the old man. It was covered by the ink well... but he might not be an 'old man' at all. Just trying to look like one.

\*Um... system? Can I answer whatever questions he has for me?\*

Summoner in question knows not to push questions beyond a certain limit. Summoner has regularly double checked to ensure the Demons they Summon are as requested. User is allowed to answer, or not answer as User wills.

\*Right. Thanks.\*

[Also Kat. I'm with you on the whole 'dyed hair' train.]

\*Good to know I'm not going crazy. Why pretend to be older though? Do you think the wrinkles are fake as well? I don't know enough about makeup to say either way...\*

[Um... could be? I don't really know much about faking wrinkles either. Might even be able to make them appear with good facial control as well. Hmm...]

"I'm perfectly happy to answer a few questions," said Kat despite the fact that she had a few questions of her own she doubted would be answered.

Sue gave a look Kat couldn't quite decipher before saying, "I suppose I can answer a few if my partner is willing to give answers out so easily,"