

DEMONS 961

Chapter 961 The C-C-Contract

D.E.M.O.N.S had been right. The old man just asked a bunch of simple yes or no questions that took less than a second's worth of thought to answer. Simple things like 'Are you Rank 3' and 'Do you think you can work well together' or 'Do you hold any hatred for the human race' and other such things. Though, Kat did give the old man a bit of a confused look at the latter. There was only one question that Kat wasn't entirely sure of the answer to. After asking if Sue was 'Specialised as an Escort' to which the answer was yes of course, he asked Kat if she 'Specialised as a Body Guard' which...

"Um... maybe? I'd say probably not?" offered Kat.

The old man frowned at this and said, "Hmm... not ideal... would you mind elaborating on your stance?"

"Um... I can but I don't understand the confusion?" returned Kat.

"The Contract I'm brokering requires one demon to act as a defensive measure for a young master, while the other acts as his date to an official event. The fact that you do not seem to specialise in defence is not a great sign for the runes we used. Based on your answer, you have at least some experience, so we are likely not on entirely the wrong track, but further clarification would be nice," explained the old man.

Hmm... how much of an answer do you think I should give him Lily? I've got a few guesses as to what might have happened, but I'm not sure how much to share.

[I don't think it matters too much. He's already shared that we're going to be doing bodyguard stuff if we agree to the contract. If you're cool with helping him out that's fine with me. You're nice like that and we don't have much of a reason to think poorly of the maybe-not-old man. He's been quite polite so far and I can respect how he goes about things. He's even got a proper survey on his clipboard.]

Ok. Thanks Lily.

[Anytime]

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"Right well... I'd say that I don't necessarily have a specialty so far? I've done a lot of different jobs which is apparently somewhat strange for a demon. I also don't have any good abilities that lend me to one role or another, except perhaps my regeneration for combat. That being said... I do often throw myself into danger, especially to protect people and I'd say I have a good temperament for being a bodyguard even if I lack specialised skills for it, or much experience. I have been a bodyguard definitely once, and maybe twice or three times, but the only time I was certainly a guard I didn't actually have to do any fighting at all," explained Kat.

"Hmm..." the old man noted down Kat's response on a separate paper. "I see... hmm... I do wonder... if you wouldn't mind another question, how well do you know your partner here?" the old man asked pointing at Sue.

They shared a look, and Sue shrugged. Taking that as a queue to answer however she wanted, "Sue's a good friend of mine. We've not known each other for a particularly long length of time but our friendship is quite strong I'd say,"

"Hmm..." more scribbling, "I wonder if we put too much emphasis on the companionship aspect of the summoning? Possible?" the old man made a few more notes, crossing out one line in the process before writing three more, "Attitude or specialised skills? Do we have runes to optimise for one over the other? If yes should we? If no why not? Hm... hmm..."

There was some more mumbling and scribbling before the old man ripped the paper off his board and folded it into a neat square that vanished, presumably into the ring on his finger. "This has been most informative. Thank you both for your cooperation. Now for the Contract, assuming you are both ready to hear it?"

At this point the soup had been cleared away, and most of the fruit had been eaten. The raw meat for Lily was still around, and the Memphis snagged one last piece for the road. Kat gave a simple, "I'm ready,"

Sue looked at the old man a bit more closely... but couldn't find anything particularly strange. It wasn't the first time she'd been summoned to help someone else, and it likely wouldn't be the last. Especially considering that quite a lot of parents didn't trust their children to summon a Succubus and word the contract properly while she was leaning all over them.

What Sue had noticed, that Kat hadn't, is they'd intentionally sent in a gay man after seeing two Succubi show up. Well, it was possible they were asexual of course, though if Sue was putting money on it? She'd go for gay. Something that many people forgot was that lust wasn't the only way to distract people. Looking beautiful, it was possible to distract an asexual person. Kat was a great example of that whenever she looked at Lily. A gay man however? He'd be more likely to complain about their outfits, or think about hot guys.

Now, you might say 'why not send in a straight woman then'? Sue knew that was a mistake. Sending a straight woman to conduct an interview with two attractive Succubi? One that wasn't even trying and one that knew all the tricks in the book? The woman in question either needed to be a peerless beauty and risk annoying the Succubi, or the woman in question would be easily played like a fiddle.

Sue had plenty of experience making powerful women glare at her in envy. A few 'subtle' looks, a handful of backhanded compliments... and anyone without complete confidence in their image would crumble. Sue was also getting the sense that this was a Qi based world... and if Sue managed to cheekily introduce a heart demon into a powerful demon summoner? Nobody except Sue would be pleased with that outcome. No, best to send in a gay man who would just register them as 'vaguely important' in his mind and move on.

Men were simple like that. For a gay man, women weren't competition, and they weren't something to chase after either. They were just... there. Oh sure it was a little more complex than that, but in essence that was what it boiled down to. At least, that's how Sue saw things. Still, that did mean that the 'old man' wasn't likely to cause them any unnecessary grief. So she gave him a solid nod, "I'm also ready to hear what you have to say,"

“Understood. In that case, the Contract is somewhat simple. The individual you are tasked with watching is the young master of the Mountain Shaker sect. He has been invited to a large gathering, that includes a ball and a small tournament afterwards. He needs an Escort we can trust not to murder him in his sleep because the young master has shown himself to have horrendous luck with women he himself chooses.

“He needs a guard, because despite the fact it is being hosted by the Holy Icy Wind sect which is supposed to be an ally of the Mountain Shaker sect, we have heard rumblings through our spy network that they may in fact be about to turn traitor. Of course, it is not yet confirmed. That’s why we need a guard of unknown origin and exceptional, but unconfirmed power should the worst happen.

“Poison is a minor concern, as it is considered exceptionally dishonourable to the Icy Wind sect. Additionally, we will have an alchemist travelling with you should they completely disregard their honour that can handle anything that is not instantly fatal. For the Escort, your job is to ensure that the young master doesn’t get entangled with other women. It is fine to speak with them, but do not allow it to come to anything more than that.

“For the Guard, you will be required to watch him during the event and combat any assassinations. During the tournament, if someone goes for a killing blow you are to intervene. The tournament is NOT to the death, simply to knock out or forfeit but ‘accidents happen’ will be the excuse used. Even if it would disqualify the assassin, they’d risk it for a chance to take out our young master. I would like it if your intervention does not disqualify the young master, but if he is about to perish it is of no consequence.

“As for the timeline. You will have two days to get to know the young master before taking the sky boat to the Holy Icy Wind sect, after which you will have two more days, with the feast on the third, and the tournament starting on the fourth. We do not currently have an estimate of how long the tournament shall last, but it is expected to be two or three days at this stage. Your mission will be complete once the sky boat takes off from the Holy Icy Wind sect, or in the event of escalating tensions, when our own sect master, or the vice sect master arrives as reinforcements. Any questions?”

Chapter 962 The Devil’s in the Details... and it’s not Kat

“Assuming the young master is poisoned, what should we prioritise?” asked Sue as her first question.

“Ideally, getting the young master to the alchemist should be the first priority. It’s not a major concern, as I already mentioned, but using the fact the young master was poisoned is much more valuable as a bargaining chip than catching the criminal first and then trying to get concessions later,” answered the old man.

“Yes, that makes sense, but what should I prioritise, as the escort?” repeated Sue.

The old man thought for a few moments before shrugging, “I’ve not been informed. I’d simply ask you use your best judgement at the time.”

Sue nodded, “That’s fair. Am I expected to engage in sexual relations with the young master?”

“Is that an issue?” asked the old man carefully.

“You seem to be avoiding the question,” responded Sue.

The pair stared at each other for a few moments before the old man broke first. "It was not something I was requested to make part of the contract... but it is your job to stop him sleeping with other women so... how you go about that is really up to you," answered the old man with a frown on his face.

Sue let out a light chuckle, "I'm just messing you. I'll happily fuck him if he shows even the slightest interest. I'll also probably make a few attempts even if he doesn't. It'll be good fun,"

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The old man glared at Sue for a few moments, not particularly liking the fact she was starting to mess around. For him, this was all rather serious still. He hadn't had the contract confirmed and Sue was asking silly questions. Still, he was a professional and it could be much worse, so he chose to turn away from Sue and ask Kat, "What about you Enforcer? Any questions for this old man?"

Hmm... "Am I responsible for the young master's safety before we leave for the event? I'm not sure if we're currently in the Mountain Shaker sect, or not but am I responsible for his safety during the two days we remain here?" asked Kat.

"The young master will certainly be safe from attacks while he is here. It is part of the Mountain Shaker sect and the patriarch will be able to respond to any issues in a few moments. I am to encourage you to spend at least some time with the young master to get to know him, and for the Escort, capturing his attention is important, but he is not expected to be in any danger," said the old man.

Kat nodded for a few moments before realising there was something to clarify, "What should I protecting the young master from? Assassins of course, but what else?"

The old man nodded, understanding the question easily. "You are primarily to concern yourself with unseen threats, and attacks of much higher Rank. The young master is currently Rank 1, on the edge of Rank 2. It is not your job to stop fights between his peers. We need you to defend the boy, not coddle him. Injuries are not a concern,'

Sue decided to jump in here, "Hang on... how old is the young master? I'm a Succubus yes, but not one to go after children. That's one fetish I'm perfectly happy to avoid,"

The old man sighed and shook his head, "The young master is 93 years old this year," Sue coughed in surprise, "he has begun cultivating recently but has not yet reached 100 or passed his test of adulthood. As such he is still considered a boy by our society's reckoning,"

Sue frowned and looked at the 'old man'. "Is the young master not human?"

The old man shook his head, "The Mountain Shaker sect is primarily made up of Mountain Elves."

"Huh... never fucked a mountain elf before..." mumbled Sue.

Wait... I thought this was a cultivation world... why is there elves here? And what about this old man? Is he human? He looks human and I'd have seen through any illusions he had on him... so... hmm... Lily do you think you should check your spell casting here?

[Do remember this place is warded massively Kat. I'm not sure I could cast properly regardless of what higher energy they use here. That and I'd almost certainly get caught by the old man. Hard to hide a glowing blue circle. Perhaps you should just ask the old man?]

“What higher energy do you use here?” asked Kat, ignoring Sue’s comment. Probably for the best.

“We are capable of using both mana and qi here however not both at the same time. It has been shown that qi is a more reliable path to long term power, though mana allows for explosive growth, especially amongst geniuses. The problem is that using both inside your body leads to exploding. Not ideal at all. Oh, and demonic energy of course, nothing will stop that,” answered the old man.

Huh. I didn’t think we’d find a place that uses both. I guess I kept thinking of them as mutually exclusive. How good do you think your spells will be here Lily?

[Not sure... apparently mana works fine so I’d assume they’d work better then ever... but I don’t really know how mana interacts with qi in the air. I doubt they’d just explode, that seems silly and easily exploitable.]

“Are spells likely something I need to be worried about defending against?” asked Kat.

The old man scratched his beard for a few moments, “Not especially no... at least, it’s not something we’d expect, and no spies have reported powerful mages making any moves so it’s not expected but I’m not going to say that it’s impossible. So... do be aware of it at least, even if it is unlikely to be a problem for the young master,”

Kat nodded but went on to ask, “How resistant are people here to spells?”

The old man shrugged, “It really depends on how much power is behind them. I also don’t have a good comparison to what you’d consider ‘resistant’ or ‘weak’ to spells. They truly aren’t common Enforcer. Do not discount a spell just because it looks weak I suppose? It’s what we teach the younglings in school, so that seems appropriate now,”

Kat nodded, and Sue decided to ask her own question. “What sort of accommodation do we have? Both here and in during the event?”

The old man’s eyes lit up, apparently this was a question he had prepared for. “Before you get on the Sky Boat we have set aside to joined rooms for you both to share. They are modestly sized and sparsely furnished but part of the main compound. During transit, there will be a small bed provided in the young master’s room for the Enforcer, and a spot in the crew quarters for the Escort. You can of course, choose the young masters bed, if he allows such a thing,”

Sue grinned as the old man continued, “Once you arrive at the event space, the young master should be assigned to a modest dwelling with two guest rooms. One will be set aside for you, while the other will be set aside for the servants. There will be four of them. All mortal, and not really your concern,”

Kat let the statement hang for a moment before asking, “Do I need to protect them as well?”

The old man just shrugged, “They are of no consequence. If they die, it is no matter, though they are not expected to be attacked either. The young master has no favoured servant, and though well trained the servants in question are easily replaceable. I don’t see why anyone would go through the effort to attack them.

“I would personally suggest not going out of your way for them. They are weak, and unremarkable. If you start to noticeably defend or defer to them someone might get the wrong idea and target them

more deliberately. They will be safest if you just ignore their presence or treat them as part of the furniture. You can save them if you really wish... but you will not be rewarded for it at all and if the contract deems you to be neglecting your duty to the young master because of your actions..." the old man finished with a shrug.

You know... I kinda hate that he seems correct in this explanation. I'm perfectly happy to defend them... but that's opening up a weakness... I wonder if they're really safer if I just completely ignore them and the risks to them?

[I'm not sure... I do sort of get the argument. If they're just sort of there nobody will be bothered with them. A thief doesn't go and steal a basic t-shirt when there's jewellery on display nor do they kill the family pet... or no... a better example would be a vacuum cleaner I suppose. If you're coming in to attack someone... would you take out the robot vacuum?]

That's a horrible way to think of a person.

[But one that just might keep them safe.]

Chapter 963 Stairway out of the Ground

Kat and Sue spent a while longer asking a few clarifying questions just to get all the details ironed out. Nothing shocking came up, and it was all minor stuff like making sure there'd be food for Lily or some time for rest. When they finalised the deal though... that's when things were different.

There was of course the normal swarm of chains from Kat wrapping around the old man, though Sue's own set of chains also came into play. Sue's chains were a silver, nearly matching the colour of her hair. There was just a touch of blue in them, especially when the light caught the chains and flames, but that wasn't too surprising. No, what was really surprising were the two additional chains that shot from both Kat and Sue. Kat's eyes itched as she watched them vanish through the wall.

The additional chains quickly wrapped around each other so that there was now only two, slightly larger chains... but they still looked rather distinct. One set of chains looked... weak for lack of a better word, it seemed to flicker in and out of existence and seemed to barely be able to remain at all. Kat wasn't sure what it signified, nor what it meant for it to be so weak. The chains were also thinner than the normal lot. It looked more like oversized necklace chains than proper chains for binding like the swarm.

The second set of chains seemed almost like it was trying to be as different as possible to the first. They were heavy, each section of the chain the length of Kat's arm and twice as thick. If it wasn't for the occasional spikes, Kat would've thought these chains weren't for holding prisoners but for keeping a bridge together. They felt weighty and despite the multiple chains binding the old man... Kat felt like if she had to pick the deadlier of the two... she'd choose the heavy set of chains instead of the mass.

Once the chains vanished the old man stumbled a bit, nearly tripping over the chair leg before righting himself. He was breathing heavily, sweat cascading down his face as he shivered. "Right... glad that's done..." mumbled the old man.

What the heck happened there? Why is he so tired? What's with the two extra chains?

[Why are you asking me? Ask D.E.M.O.N.S.]

The chains identified by User Kat are linking the other parties involved in the deal. While the Summoner will bear some of the cost for the summoning, the Summoner in question was ordered to perform it by the individual the thicker chain chased after.

Yeah... I suppose I should've expected something like that. Makes sense that we have some way to ensure the person actually responsible for the Contract is punished if things go wrong.

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Once the old man recovered, he made his way to the door and proceeded to knock according to what was clearly a pre-arranged patter across various places on the door. After waiting for a responding knock, he returned another series. Kat and Sue actually started to get a bit bored as things dragged on because it took a full TEN MINUTES of knocking to get the door to open up. Once the door finally opened, it was to a blank corridor that was all stairs. There wasn't even any torches. Just light coming from somewhere that kept the corridor illuminated.

The old man then grinned at the two of them before sprinting up the stairs. Kat watched him go for a few moments before turning to Sue, "What the heck was that about?"

"Eh... probably a test to make sure we weren't entralling him. If his mind was dulled too much he wouldn't be able to knock out the correct answers. It's also probably a code, with different responses based on what they knock back to him. Probably to prevent us just ripping it out of his mind. It'd take too long to assimilate the code to use it ourselves to escape," Sue paused, "And now that I have provided you with the service of knowledge, I require the service of being carried up those fucking stairs,"

Kat raised an amused eyebrow and Lily tilted her head cutely from her position on Kat's shoulder. "What are you both looking at me like that for? Especially you Lily, you're getting a free ride anyway. Do you know how many damned stairs are in this place? I don't, because I can't see the end of them from here and I'm telling you that's too fucking many. Crazy ass cultivators probably use it as punishment for weak sexy demons like me who don't spend 110% of their lives training. Thus, I request being carried as payment,"

Sue made grabby motions towards Kat as if she was a kid asking to be carried. It looked kind of silly, because nothing about Sue said child at all. Certainly not her looks, and not her attitude either. That being said, Sue wasn't heavy in the slightest and carrying her wouldn't be an issue. Honestly, the biggest complaint Kat has about carrying Sue is interacting with her wings.

It wasn't too much a problem though. Kat simply scooped Sue up into a bridal carry and took off up the stairs. It didn't take long to make her way up, especially once Kat started to notice that the stairs seemed designed to be climbed multiple steps at a time for those with enhanced physiques. They were just a bit too sharply inclined for a natural mortal's stride. Kat managed to find great success with a sort of half gliding technique where she kicked off the ground, let her wings carry her forward just a tad, then kick off a second time and repeat the process.

It actually let her pass the old man after a bit. He clearly wasn't Rank 3 himself and he was taking the stairs on at a time. Even if he was much faster than any normal human, the fact he was still placing his

foot on every step when he didn't need to was slowing him down massively. Kat gave him a grin as she passed... but the man was focused on the climb ahead and might not have seen it.

I wonder if this counts as good practice for my body control. Everything has to move perfectly in synch and while it is taking a bit of thought to make sure I don't miss any steps, adjusting to the slight wind currents with my wings, or poor angles I jump off with when the stairs aren't perfectly level. This really is a neat training opportunity. Huh... guess this is also why Sue complains about cultivators being obsessed.

Kat managed to make it to the exit first, to the surprise of nobody... but the only thing there was another large steel door, just as enchanted as the previous one. Kat sighed as she looked around the landing for a good place to sit but found nothing. In the end, she just put Sue down and then took up a spot in against the wall, with Lily moving to her lap. Kat happily gave Lily a few scratches while Sue pouted at the wall. "I suppose the real jokes on us," said Kat.

Sue sighed and answered in agreement, "Yeah, it is. I mean, I'm not that surprised. I'm actually more annoyed with the fact I didn't think about it before. I mean, this is a super secure bunker for summoning demons. Why would they only have the one door? Heck, the real question is if this is the only other door, or if this is just the next door we need to get through,"

"Ugh, I don't want to spend half a day slowly making my way through half a dozen doors. I think I'd want to try and dig through the walls just on principle if it starts getting too annoying," responded Kat.

"Don't let them here you say that," said Sue with a laugh. "If you start breaking down the walls it'll be a massive pain. Just think of it. Technically we haven't broken the Contract, but nobody will be happy with us and we have to spend two days here with them. Heck, when we are called to the sky boat... they might 'just so happen' to give us the wrong time and force us to catch up. Then we'd be at risk of getting in trouble for breaking the contract. Not seriously of course, but certainly at risk,"

"Wait really?" asked Kat.

Sue gave a 'so-so' gesture, "Depends who is causing the trouble and how much. If the patriarch, or the old man directly order it they're at risk of getting punished as well. If it's just people annoyed with us or taking their own initiative though... well... then it gets more complicated. Especially if it's just annoying, and not too much of a problem for us to overcome,"

"Hmmm..." grumbled Kat.

Chapter 964 Sand Everywhere

When they finally got out into the open Kat took in a deep breath of fresh air. Only to sneeze and then immediately start coughing. You see, after leaving the underground demon summoning bunker, Kat hadn't really thought about the fact that the Mountain Shaker clan was made up of mountain elves, or what it meant to be a mountain elf. The 'fresh air' Kat had sucked in was filled to the brim with dust and debris. Once Kat recovered from her coughing fit she carefully walked back into the bunker, grabbed a spare bandanna and then walked back out.

Are you going to be alright Lily?

[Yeah I've just closed the backpack and settled in. The dust isn't really getting to me here but I don't want to try my luck outside. Ugh, it'd get all in my fur and my ears. Oh my poor ears. I can just image how painful and annoying it'll be. You're so lucky dirt just slides off you. Though... does Sue have the same thing? I hope so.]

Kat looked over at Sue, the Rank 1 demon in question had grabbed not only a bandanna, but also a pair of goggles to keep the dust from her eyes. *Huh... my eyes seem fine. I wonder why? Rank 3 powers go?* "Do these goggles make my but look big?" asked Sue out of nowhere.

Kat looked at Sue, confusion written on her face. "What?"

"I asked if these goggles make my ass look fat?" repeated Sue.

"I have no idea how those two things are connected. The goggles don't change the size of your ass, and unless I'm mistaken... the goggles are on your face right? How would it have any effect?" explained a still confused Kat.

"Hmm..." murmured Sue before bending her torso around to check out her own backside. "Must just naturally look that thick,"

Kat slammed a palm into her face. "Is now really the time for this Sue?"

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Sue just shrugged, "I don't see why not. You walked into it... though I am a little sad your girlfriend wasn't looking so I could tease her about it. She'd at least look at my ass and then get flustered about getting caught,"

"I feel like I shouldn't agree with your point. Feels a bit too much like encouraging you..." said Kat slowly.

A moment after Kat said that, a man flew down to them on... a sword? Kat blinked a few times to confirm that, yes, the mountain elf was standing on a sword that could apparently fly for some reason. It didn't look like it'd be much use as a weapon, being closer in size to a surfboard than a great sword. It was much too wide and Kat could tell with a glance that the blade was dull. Then again, if you were using it to fly, perhaps it was for the best.

As for the mountain elf... well... Kat wouldn't admit it aloud but she really wasn't a fan of his looks. His skin was the same brownish red colour that all the nearby rocks were, and Kat practically shivered looking at the elf's bare chest. Instead of smooth, thin skin that most races Kat was familiar with had, mountain elves went in the opposite direction. Instead of hair that increasingly go finer as clothes were introduced mountains elves clearly went in the opposite direction.

Their skin was almost bark, or perhaps rock like in texture. It was rough and clearly built to withstand the damage the countless dust particles would do to anyone of fairer complexion. What caused her issues though was the fact the elf had their chest exposed... showing off the cracks in his skin. Kat felt a shiver race down her spine at the sight. Large chunks of his skin had deep cracks running through them, and one section was even curling up slightly, like dying bark.

Part of her wanted to rip it off, just so she didn't have to look at a full 30cm worth of skin slowly peeling itself off the man's body... but the rest of her wanted to stick it down and pretend that nothing was

wrong. Their face wasn't much better. Kat had expected with the name 'mountain elf' they'd be somewhat fair. Instead, their face was sunken, eyes deeply recessed to avoid the dust but with exceptionally bushy eyebrows. Their ears were completely flat against their head... but they were more like hollow tubes that wound around the skull.

Kat had never before seen a race with aesthetics she so thoroughly disliked. Beholders were completely alien. Fiends were big, and bulky but she could at least understand them. Shadows were just sort of there. Not good or bad. Kat even enjoyed the looks of quite a few races, Lamia, Medusa, Beastkin of course. But mountain elves? Nope. No way. Kat decided she was NOT a fan.

The problem was, at least Kat's excuse was, they were just a little too humanoid for her to classify them as completely 'other' like the beholders where she could simply appreciate the weird eye guys for what they were. Yet they were far too alien for Kat to think of them as pleasing in any way. Sure she could see how such an appearance would be useful for terrain like this... but Kat wasn't a fan. Not a fan at all.

That's why, when she looked over at Sue and saw completely undisguised interest in the bare-chested elf's direction. She wondered if her true sight had decided to leave her. *Sue finds him attractive?! What the fuck?*

[Huh... that's the rudest thing I think I've ever heard you say or think about someone's appearance. It's... kinda weird actually.]

I will not apologise for finding mountain elves exceptionally unappealing. I... I'm trying to think of a way to explain this but like... just look at this. Kat pushed the image of the elf towards Lily as well as her feelings about many of his traits.

[Huh... yeah I'm not a big fan of this either... and I don't like the fact that their skin seems to crack off in large sections whenever it gets too damaged or maybe just old...? Still your reaction seems a little extreme. I don't like them much either, certainly I'd call them ugly... but you've gone straight to outright disgust.]

I'm not apologising.

[I'm not trying to make you. I'm just saying you might be taking things a bit far.]

While Kat and Lily were having their conversation, Sue strutted up to the elf and said, "Hello their big boy. Going to offer me a ride on your massive sword? I really hope it's accurate in scale..."

The elf just laughed, "Ah, perhaps I can. My name is Hughlife and I'm your guide back to the city. It's a little ways away. Originally, I was going to suggest we all fly there but I mean... if you're saying you'd rather take a ride with me then who am I to refuse? I don't really have it in me to go for both of you though... sadly as... large and potent... as my sword is, it still can't fit three people,"

Kat was still mentally arguing with Lily and didn't hear the comment at all, or perhaps chose to ignore it, consciously or unconsciously. Sue was of course, perfectly happy to answer for her friend, "Ah don't mind my friend there. She's more of a... well I suppose you could say she prefers a magic carpet ride to that of a wondrous sword. I've never seen the appeal myself. Choosing between something long, thick and hard, or some fluffy, floaty, nonsense? Yeah I know what I'd rather be doing,"

“Ah, no shade, no shade,” said Hughlfe as he nodded in understanding “My sisters the same way. I mean, I of course can appreciate the wonders of a magic carpet but I don’t own one myself,”

Sue nodded, “Of course not. I’d never even want to imply that anything could be potentially more potent than this weight sword of yours. Why, if I’m not busy I’d be very happy to take an... extended tour of the entire thing. I’ll make sure to scour every inch of it,”

Hughlfe’s eyebrows, or was it just the folds of his skin? Whatever it was, his eyes clearly widened at the implications. “Are you suggesting I let you... take in my whole sword? In just one meeting? I’m not saying I’m not down but that’s not the sort of thing I’d expect a girl to go for when we’re just meeting for the first time,”

“Oh but I LIVE for this sort of thing. I’m an expert at polishing swords,” Sue of course lifted her bandanna to show her tongue snake out and mime wrapping around something cylindrical. “I practically live for it. You might not be the person I’m here to impress... but you’ve already impressed me with something so special. It’d certainly keep my up. All. Night. If I didn’t at least try and make the offer,”

Hughlfe agreed, “Sounds spectacular”

Kat and Lily, ignorant of the flirting, were still trying to determine where Kat’s issues with the mountain elves came from.

Chapter 965 Keep Those Mental Wheels Spinning

Kat, Lily, Sue and Hughlfe flew over the city at a sedate pace. Kat was wondering why exactly that was. Hughlfe had proven rather quickly that he could go much faster but apparently he wanted to drag the ride out. That might have something to do with the fact Sue was draping herself over Hughlfe, pressing her breasts into his back and moving her hips with every turn. It wasn’t quite indecent, but she was certainly using every little change Hughlfe made to their heading to rub on her more.

Kat had no interest at all in whatever her friend was doing and decided to instead focus on the city they were flying over. Once it came into sight, Kat realised the city itself was huge. Not quite as large as the city of water from Apep’s dimension, but certainly the second largest she’d ever seen. The city was built... or... perhaps that was wrong, it might be more accurate to say that it was carved out instead.

You see, it was clear that the mountain elves had started with a mountainside and then dug down. Not into the earth, as you might image a cave dwelling species would attempt, but they carved around what they wanted, fashioning houses out of rock not by building up the house but by digging down and carving away nearby rock and earth, before hollowing out the remaining structure into rooms.

It made for a rather interesting style where the tops of pretty much every house was matched with the nearby mountainside. The house slowly angled there way down following the curve of the mountain rather accurately, with only a few notable ones standing taller. Kat wasn’t sure if this was a natural formation, simply using rocks that had jutted out once upon a time as the foundation for their home... or if it was instead the excess rock that had been carved away from the streets or internals and then piled high.

*Actually. That’s a question I’d love to know the answer to. What happened to all the extra material? The edges of the city don’t seem to be any higher than the roof of the nearest houses. That seems to

imply that they aren't just dumping the dirt on the edges of the city. Which, would be dumb but not surprising. So where does it go? Lily?*

Kat waited a few moments... but got no response. Turning more of her attention to the link revealed that Lily had managed to fall asleep at some point during the flight. *Oh... well... that's not ideal but I mean... huh I guess I've gotten a bit too used to Lily being around to talk to... or at least noticing when she goes to sleep. Then again... when we were on Earth she normally warned me beforehand. Hmm... is this a bad habit Lily formed going on missions? Just sleeping all the time?*

Kat of course didn't have anyone to answer her. Sure she wanted to talk to Lily, but not if it interrupted her sleep. The problem was... now she was flying and had nobody to talk to. Sue was busy seducing Hughlfe, pretty successfully if the fact Kat hadn't heard any complaints said anything. Sure flying itself was fun... but not when she was in the mental equivalent of cruise control.

Hughlfe was flying so slowly, and he didn't seem effected by the air currents at all. So now Kat had to follow him, slowly, but without turning her brain all the way off in case the wind started to cause troubles, either sending her into Hughlfe or slowed her down enough to require more effort to keep up. Perhaps it was a little demanding of Kat, but it just wasn't a relaxing situation.

*Ugh whatever. I guess I'll just entertain myself. Kat nodded. Right. With that... back to my previous question. Where does the extra dirt go? They've got to have what's practically a city's worth of dirt just... sitting around somewhere. I'd like to know what exactly it is they did with it all? Based on the nearby terrain it doesn't seem like they just dumped it nearby. So we can rule that out...

.....

And there isn't anywhere near enough 'taller' houses that they could have used all that dirt on. Even if every single one I can see was added to with extra dirt I'm sure they'd still have tonnes of the stuff leftover. Hmm... could they just have it all stored away in storage artifacts?*

Kat pursed her lips, feeling particularly displeased with that thought. The fact that it was quite possibly correct only served to make Kat more annoyed with it. It made a bit too much sense to ignore, and it was a rather simple and easy way to deal with extra dirt. *It's just so mundane though. It's the magical equivalent of 'eh I'll deal with it later' and that's just disappointing.*

I'd somewhat hoped this thought would keep me occupied for a bit longer. The only other thing I can consider is that they used the dirt to build up a garden inside some rings but the problem with that is there's barely anything growing around here. The idea that the reddish dirt is actually good for plants is ridiculous... unless....

Kat moved her attention to her wings, feeling all the dirt particles constantly battering against the somewhat fragile leather. At Rank 3, her wings were tough enough that the constant barrage of sand wasn't hurting them. She barely noticed it until her thoughts turned towards them... but it did let her continue to ponder the current topic.

Could the wind be the real issue? I don't exactly have anyway to prove it one way or another but it could be somewhat of an explanation? No wait... most the houses I can see don't have a garden and those that do are all pot plants. Nothing seems to grow directly in the ground. Seems that line of thinking might be wrong then? I don't really know how much wind gets down there...

Kat continued to ponder the issue as she got closer to their destination. It was easy to pick out once Hughlfe aligned himself directly with the building in question. It was built near the side of the city with a rather respectable amount of land cleared around it. It was a big rounded mansion sized structure. Well, it was on the smaller side for a mansion, but it wasn't small by any means. The weirdest thing about it really was all that free space around it.

Well that or the building that was created nearby. It was out of the elf-made crevice that most of the city had been carved in. The building was large and squat, but clearly not natural and it was the only thing Kat had seen that wasn't carved down. Kat didn't know why that was, and after spending some time on a guess, she decided it might be the sky boat docking area. It was the best guess she could find after a good thirty minutes of flying.

When they finally touched, Kat had a moment to smile before irritation reared its head. Hughlfe gave a very short, "This is where you'll be staying until the sky boat leaves. I'm sure you can find your own room," and then he took off again, Sue in tow.

Kat stood there, dazed for a few moments. There were no guards around the edges, and the front lawn was completely flat. If there was anyone inside the house currently Kat could see no sign of them. The grass, if it was grass, was at least interesting but... "They just left me here?!" hissed Kat.

The nerve! I'm pretty sure Sue will apologise when she gets back but that doesn't mean I'm not annoyed about this. How do I get inside? Do I just open the door? The place is huge, where do I find my room? Do I need to be present at meal times? Am I responsible for my own food? Is there someone I could ask about all this?

The answer to all of those questions, was of course, 'I don't know' because there was nobody around to answer them. Kat suppressed her budding annoyance. It was easy to calm herself down, especially with a little help from meditation... but part of her felt she had the right to be annoyed. *I wonder if it's worse because I know neither of them meant to cause me so many issues?*

I think it is. I think I'm more annoyed by the thoughtlessness of it all. Hughlfe is clearly just thinking with his dick at the moment... which... fair enough, Sue is trying to sex the guy putting a good deal of effort into making it happen. Sue... well honestly she's not any better. She just wants the D and isn't really thinking about what might happen to me in the meantime. Hmm... I wonder if she's ever been on a mission with friends that she isn't competing against? Something to ask I suppose.

Chapter 966 Casual Testing... Not So Causal Results

Kat rolled back and forth on her feet as she stood in front of the door, waiting for someone to come and open it. Though... as the minutes passed Kat was becoming increasingly sure that nobody was coming to answer her knocks. Kat sent a bit of energy into her ears to try and see if she could pinpoint a servant. It would let her know if she was being intentionally snubbed, nobody was around, or it was a mistake.

A wave of sound assaulted Kat as all the sounds she'd been ignoring came pouring in. Most of it was chatter and movement from the houses around her or the wind whipping up a seemingly endless amount of dust. So it was rather conspicuous that the house in front of her produced no sound at all. No sounds of movement, conversation, or even the sound of dust hitting the walls. Frowning, Kat knocked twice heavily and was unsure what to make of things when she heard distinct thuds of her fist.

Right... so the house definitely dampens sound. There's no way it doesn't... but the door is also just as clearly exempt from that. So I have to assume that either they can't hear me, due to malice or mistake, perhaps from not being around, perhaps just not hearing the knocks. So... what do I do about it?

Kat stepped back a bit and then started to roll her feet again. If she'd been let into the house at any point she'd feel a lot more comfortable just walking in. If Kat knew where her room was even better... but she didn't want to just barge in without having been formally invited. She might not have been a vampire but it felt wrong to just make her way in without informing anybody.

So... what do I do now? Lily's asleep so we can't just chat. Sue's off on her... date? And I'm stuck out here. Hmm...what the heck do I do now?

Kat looked around for an answer and found... nothing of course. Kat stepped out of the small awning that encased the door and ran her hand through the grass as she thought up a plan... only to realise it wasn't grass.

Well... it's not the best plan of action... but I guess I'm going to watch grass grow! Or... not as seems to be the case. Kat's cursory examination of the grass was leading her to believe that it was actually just dirt that looked like grass and sort of acted like it. The biggest hint was the texture, but the clincher was that now she was looking all the grass was exactly the same height. Any variation there seemed to be in height, was simply down to the wind.

So Kat amused herself messing around with the grass for a good thirty minutes before the boredom started to creep back in. Honestly, Kat thought she made a pretty good attempt at occupying herself. Sure she could go out into the city... but she didn't know anything about the local society and wasn't totally convinced she could find her way back here. Especially if she didn't just fly around. It was a risk she didn't really want to take just for a bit of an amusement.

Eventually, Kat decided that perhaps the best use of her time would be to get in some proper practice. Flapping her wings carefully, Kat made her way up out of the crevice and onto the flat-ish mountain area right next to the house. Kat also made sure not to get too close to the nearby structure, just in case it was something important. It wasn't worth the risk she'd damage it if an attack went awry. Kat landed softly and pulled out her fans, mentally going through her options of where to start... before the slight shifting on her back gave her an idea.

.....

I suppose the whole point of that bag was so that I could keep Lily with me when I fight and protect her that way. Let's see if I CAN fight without waking her up. Kat nodded to herself and started to run through her katas, trying to make sure that any movement Lily was subjected to was slow and gradual, occasionally keeping her torso completely rigid and relying on either her arms or legs to complete the motion as best she could.

Kat was finding it to be an interesting exercise. Not only was it a good way to practice while keeping track of Lily, but it meant that in real combat Lily wasn't at risk of being thrown around. *What I want to know is just how much of Lily's ability to sleep through all the movement, because I know I'm no expert and there is movement, but how much of my success is due to the fact that Lily can tell she's with me?*

Kat didn't know the answer to that question. So she decided to do some... riskier testing. Kat steadily increased the speed of her routine, still making sure Lily was safe of course... but not bothering all that

much with ensuring that Lily remained unmoved. After ten minutes of rigorous exercise and more than a few scratches from Lily's horns... Kat was able to conclude the answer was 'a lot'. Lily barely shifted even after being thrown around a considerable amount. Kat had stopped on a dime after her max speed, letting the bag containing Lily swing sharply forward then back... and Lily didn't even move.

Apparently Memphis were really good at ignoring things that weren't dangerous. Or perhaps it was just Lily? Kat wouldn't be surprised if it was due to the link. Kat knew Lily was safe, and despite the movement that certainty might have been conveyed to Lily's sleeping mind, allowing her to ignore the outside disturbances. A counterpoint to that, was of course that Kat had a good deal of trouble waking Lily up when she was actively trying to wake the Memphis... but Kat wasn't sure if that was only the case because Kat believed it to be safe during those attempts. Perhaps something to test.

Once Kat had determined rather thoroughly that inconveniencing Lily was something Kat would have to actively go out of her way to do. It was time to test her fire out a bit. Kat summoned a small, fist size ball of demonic energy and then threw it gently away from her body. A moment later a soft 'thump' sounded out. A blink later and Kat had iced a large area in front of her. At least ten square metres and it was spreading.

Oh. Oh dear...

Kat gazed at her hand and casually summoned up her fire once again. It wasn't hard. Making sure to put the same amount in as last time Kat checked her reserves... that were already full. *Oh dear me. That's... that's just excessive.* Kat palmed the fireball for a bit. The mental practice she'd done previously making it easy to automatically make the demonic energy act as if it was a ball and not just energy pretending to be fire rolling around her palm. Kat sucked in a breath before hurling the fire away, making sure it was nowhere near the first impact sight...

The fire rapidly expanded for a short moment before it continued to burn on the edges, slowly creeping along the ground as she watched it... and just as large, if not larger then the first time. *It seems my demonic energy is more potent. That's... well it's to be expected but this is a bit silly. I'm not even trying at all. What the heck would happen if I really started to try? Could I ice a whole mountain with my reserves now? Because it just might be possible.*

You know... getting faster and stronger is one thing. Especially when my mind can move just as fast as my body. It makes it hard to appreciate the changes. This... this makes it real clear that I'm Rank 3 I suppose. I wonder what it means for the abilities I already have? I didn't get to use my dream walking much but I'm sure that's stronger now. What about my regeneration?

Kat sliced into her arm. It actually took a good deal of pressure to even break the skin... but as soon as she moved the fan away the cut healed. In fact, she could feel her body pushing away the fan even as she continued to cut. *That's a little freaky as well. Hmm... do I want to try and find out what my new ability can do? Even just this little bit of testing has shown me that I'm really strong now. What if my third skill is something indiscriminately deadly? Like a plague or just a laser cannon? I'd really rather Lily wasn't around for those tests...*

Kat looked over at the ice that was still expanding.

You know what. Scratch that. I don't want ANYONE or ANYTHING anywhere near me when I test my Rank 3 power. I've seen what I can do basically by accident. I do NOT want to know what I can do when I try. Not with people around.

Chapter 967 Totally Testing Testiness

As the afternoon dragged on and Kat still hadn't seen any sign of movement from the manor house or the sky's signalling Sue's return Kat started to argue with herself over how valid it was she hadn't tested out her new ability. At this point she'd even used her dream fog form a bit to test the drain. Which was still noticeable, but perhaps combat viable now. It drained at about 5% of her reserves per second but with Lily's reserves added in it complicated matters in regards to how viable it was.

Lily's reserves were much smaller than Kat's, but also much closer to Kat's in terms of regeneration. Why that was, Kat wasn't entirely sure but it wasn't something Kat was overly concerned about. The only concern Kat had, was that she'd tested her dream fog... while still wearing the backpack with Lily in it. Lily didn't turn into fog of course, she just dropped straight down and Kat managed to turn back and catch her all without waking the Memphis.

It did however set back her mental attempts to argue over if it was acceptable to test her new skill. The biggest problem was that for every safety argument she made, for every reasonable excuse to use the new skill, whatever it might be... the fact of the matter was Kat essentially had a new, really fancy toy, in a box... and she was told not to open it. Just because. There was no Christmas or birthday celebration on the horizon. It was her present to do with as she wanted... and the fact she wanted to play with it was a powerful motivator.

This feeling only grew as the sun made its way across the horizon. With every excuse Kat added, the desire to test the new ability grew... as did the guilt at making up another excuse to use a power she knew hadn't been tested. Only the fact that Lily was still asleep was able to stall Kat's desire to test things for this long... but even that was waning.

See, there just wasn't anyone around. Kat had seen some people moving in the city... but that was only if she looked down into the city. Up here? Where there was nothing but flat dirt and rocks for kilometres? There wasn't any people, or buildings. Well, there was the one single building Kat still hadn't checked out but that was it.

There was a growing voice in Kat's mind suggesting she just leave Lily somewhere far away, but in sight and trigger her new power just to see what it was. Of course, the much more deeply ingrained part of Kat that said to keep Lily safe at all costs wasn't having any of it. Luckily for Kat, Lily simply woke up by herself. Not that Kat realised that particular titbit. Something Kat hadn't noticed was that Lily had started to practice not constantly broadcasting her thoughts.

She'd been... somewhat successful. Kat could always hear Lily if she was paying attention, but Lily had managed to make her own mind much quieter across the link. In this case, it meant that Kat didn't notice Lily had awoken for a good five minutes, before pausing and looking around.

At this point, Kat could tell something was wrong... but not what. [What're you looking for?]

Lily?

.....

[The one and only!]

It's good to see you're awake. How was your nap.

[Eh, same as usual, which has actually been quite good lately. My question for you though... is what the heck are you doing?]

Right well... it's like this... Kat started to explain the events of the day, as well as the results of her tests so far, finishing up with her desire to test out her new ability but hesitating to do so around Lily.

[Well... normally I'd watch over you by flying upwards and then just letting you do whatever... but the dust is a bit much for me if I'm being honest. Now I'm awake though, you can just leave me somewhere nearby, maybe behind a rock or something, and then you can test things out. If I'm in danger I can just call out. I mean, my ears still work Kat, so I'm not too worried.]

If you're sure...

[I am.]

Kat wasn't... but she really didn't want to just stick Lily into a glass bubble to protect her from the world. Kat's next thoughts were hidden from Lily... even if she did want to share, Kat thought perhaps it'd be best not to in this case.

It seems that I've become increasingly paranoid about Lily's safety as I've gotten stronger and the worlds we've been to increase in danger as well. I don't LIKE that fact but it's rather obvious now it's occurred to me. I... I just have to trust that Lily will be fine. I'm not throwing her to the wolves, I'm just letting her watch from a safe distance. This is fine.

Kat dropped Lily off as requested then sprinted as far as she felt she could get away with. This was mostly based on how irritated Lily was feeling with the distance between them. Kat took in a deep breath to settle herself as she looked around at the blank landscape. There was nothing for at least a 500m in every direction. It was the best she was going to get.

Kat poked at that mental switch that had been taunted her for weeks... and she saw E V E R Y T H I N G.

Then a moment later that awareness had been destroyed. Kat's mind thrashed in confusion. She hadn't even been able to properly process the mental input from it, but now whatever had changed in her sight had been diminished a ridiculous amount. Instead of seeing... well... everything she could hardly see anything. Just... a lot of dirt. Hang on...

[Kat! Is everything alright? I can't see you anymore!]

I mean... maybe? I'm very confused but I don't feel any discomfort... Kat was starting to realise that she was no longer seeing with her eyes. Instead... she seemed to have a small awareness bubble around... around what?

It was at that point Kat realised she couldn't feel her body anymore either. Instead, she could feel parts of herself connected to... bits of water? *What the heck is going on? Hmm... seems safe enough. Maybe I should get back to you and test where you can see me?* Kat tried to cancel the effect but got the mental equivalent of an 'error' message. *Well that's not good.*

[Kat?]

I'm... well not fine... or well... I can't seem to undo whatever I just did but I'm not in pain or anything. I can... hmm... hard to describe. I can see all around me, and I'm like... attached? Attached to bits of water and all in all I'm just very confused. Just... give me a bit and I'll try and undo whatever it is I've done.

Kat spread her awareness properly throughout her 'body' and found that she was now a number of water droplets. Most of which were slowly sinking into the earth. Kat flexed her will and the water froze in place. Taking stock... Kat still didn't really know what to do about her... situation.

She could feel all the parts of her even as they spread out. Kat could also see from every single water droplet but it seemed that it was a small bubble around each droplet, a bubble that increased based on the size of the water clump. Kat checked her demonic energy and it seemed to be filling back up rapidly... but had taken a big hit.

Ok... so was it triggering the transformation that caused the drop? Or freezing the water in place? Or falling apart? Assuming that's what happened when I could see so much?

Kat of course received no answers so she got to work on what she DID know. Kat reached out to all the water and pulled it towards the biggest puddle.

Kat assumed the water would slowly trickle its way over... instead all the disparate pieces of her rushed towards the signalled location and quickly become a large puddle. Kat's vision expanded and she could already feel a headache coming on. The bubble just gave too much awareness. Still... she was all together now. So... Kat pushed the mental trigger and... nothing happened.

Grumbling mentally Kat pondered what could be wrong. She tried poking around the trigger to get a sense of what the issue was... but that didn't do anything. *D.E.M.O.N.S? Suggestions?*

User Kat likely needs to be in roughly the correct shape for the transformation.

I guess that makes sense? Sort of?

[Yeah well it better. I'm not exactly happy with you right now.]

I took a bunch of precautions and nobody got hurt!

[Kat... you're a puddle of water I can't even see right now. Pretty sure you count as 'people'.]

I'm not HURT though. Just... a puddle for the moment...

Chapter 968 Comfort and Concern

Kat was not happy with how long it took her to go back to normal. You see, while she had great control over water in that form... she felt like the conditions to turn back were a little pedantic. Kat didn't need the water to all be together, she didn't need it to be in a vaguely person shaped blob, in fact, she didn't even need it to look roughly like herself. No. Kat had to nearly perfectly match not just her appearance, WITH CLOTHES, but also the pose she was in at the time.

That last one was a big source of her grief. Now, part of Kat was pretty sure that she could connect to more water and just throw large amounts of the stuff at the problem... when she transformed on a dusty mountain? It was pretty damn specific. When Kat finally returned to normal she dropped to her knees panting. *FUCKING FINALLY!*

[Are... are you ok?]

Honestly? Not really. I just spent over an hour desperately spamming the mental button in my head to transform back, only to fail for that entire hour without a shred of understanding as to WHY it wasn't working. Only the fact that apparently I can see, and in 3D at that, prevented me from going crazy. I mean, can you imagine what it would be like if I couldn't see while I was made out of water?

[Um... yeah... not good...]

*Not good. Try fucking miserable. It's not even that great being able to see because I see EVERYTHING. It's too much detail to take in at once. So I'm going to need to practice being in that form until my mind gets used to all the visual inputs. The fact I can't smell anything... or hear anything? Hmm... not sure about that second one. I was freaking out perhaps a bit much at the time so I can't be sure.

Point is... turning into water is weird. It clearly has advantages and I'm not going to shy away from it just because it's a bit scary... but it's a bit scary. I probably could've got myself fixed up in an half an hour if I wasn't panicking so much. I just... I don't know. I'm still jittery and a bit scared as well as very frustrated at the moment.*

[Sorry...]

Oh, it's not your fault Lily. I'm the one who really wanted to try out my new skill. It was like it was just sitting their taunting me. I know now I should've waited till Sue was around at the very least. She could probably provide some input, and if she couldn't well... I dunno. It might've been something I should've waited to test at Kamiko's house but it's not like we should be using Kamiko's house as a testing ground you know?

.....

Kat stopped her mental complaints to sprint over to Lily, pulling the Memphis out of the bag she'd been resting in and rubbing their faces together. "Ugh... I'm so done with today... at least I've got you with me Lily. Pretty sure I'd be doing something dumb... er... something dumber anyway. Thanks for being here with me,"

Lily didn't think she could blush as a Memphis but her body sure was trying. Her face was heating up massively. [It's ok Kat. I'm happy to journey with you for the rest of time. As long as you're ok with me weighing you down a bit, I'll always be by your side.]

Kat took a quick glance around and confirmed there still wasn't anyone nearby, "Want to transform?" whispered Kat. Lily instantly took the offered chance and suddenly Lily found herself straddling Kat. She had only a moment to panic before Kat just pulled her in tighter and went in for a French kiss. When Kat finally let out, Lily was bright red and panting slightly, even as Kat hugged them closer together.

"Um... hooo... not that I'm complaining but why?" asked Lily in between hot breaths as she tried to calm down and prevent herself from drifting off into bliss. This was not made easy because she could still taste Kat in her mouth, her nose filled with the smell of Kat... and Kat was definitely pressing them closely together. It did not make it easy for Lily to keep her mind sharp... well, sharpish. There was only so much she could do to weather Kat's assault.

"I... I don't know? I just felt like it I guess. I... I guess it's to confirm that things are alright now. As I said... I'm still freaking out about the whole water thing... and I mean... I dunno. I like making you happy, and even if I don't feel that same lust you do, I can sort of bask in all the positive feelings kissing brings about in you. So... it's still quite enjoyable for me," explained Kat, much less red if you weren't counting her hair. Still had a massive grin on her face though.

They sat there together, tightly bound together by Kat's tail, even as Lily's own did its best to contribute to the effort. Lily's purring soothed Kat's mind, the frustration and slight bits of fear flowing out of Kat's mind with every passing minute. Kat's reassuring presence helped Lily as well. She wasn't as riled up as Kat but her worries were just as present. Seeing Kat panicking was not a pleasant experience and the feelings Lily had picked up on, despite Kat's clear attempts at hiding them, were probably still going to haunt Lily a for a while.

When the sun started to touch the horizon, the pair took that as the signal to check out the mansion again. It was still silent, and when Kat knocked on the door and received no response she wasn't surprised this time. Kat looked around, checking in through a few of the windows and seeing no one. Kat moved back to the door and rattled the handle a few times, determining it was locked... for now.

See, Kat was no locksmith, and had very little knowledge of how to pick locks... but there was something she did know. A few clicks later and Kat turned the handle, opening the door. Sure those clicks might have been snapping springs and sheering driver pins... but when you had enough strength to lift a car, opening a door wasn't hard, locked or not. It was just a matter of politeness.

Kat stepped inside the mansion with Lily padding along beside her. It felt very... empty. The foyer was a raised half dome but other than the windows, and a floor mat... there just wasn't anything else. Stepping through the only other door just revealed a room with a single staircase, and three doors. One continuing forward on this floor and two others going left and right on the second.

It seems... empty. I can't hear anyone moving around even though we're inside. What's going on do you think?

[I think that stupid elf Sue's 'riding' was meant to unlock the door for us and then leave us to our own devices. It's clear that the servants aren't around at the moment, let alone the young master that we're supposed to guard. I'm not totally sure what we should do about that though. No idea what bedrooms to commandeer either. Maybe see if there's any food in the kitchen? It should be downstairs?]

Kat shrugged, it was as good an idea as any. Kat wandered through a few different rooms on the ground floor before coming to the kitchen. It looked well outfitted with a number of knives hung upon the walls, pots stacked in the corner and a series of cutting boards in a rack above a grate on the ground.

Still, as fancy as the kitchen was... Kat and Lily didn't need fancy they needed FOOD. As nice as some of the carvings on those knives were... Kat was also 100% sure that said knives were not edible. Her teeth and jaws might be able to deal with eating metal but it was never going to be pleasant. Not to mention poor Lily. This meant they needed to look around for the party... but nothing obvious stood out.

There was a cupboard, but it was a small thing set into the wall filled with spices from top to bottom. Though of course, half of it was taken up by two massive glass jars filled with salt and pepper. Kat wasn't sure why anyone would need that much of either, but she just shrugged it off.

Another four minutes of searching eventually led Kat to finding the trapdoor. It was actually hidden. Kat had to spot the lines on the floor from one barrels being shifted regularly. At least she got the right trapdoor. Downstairs was a number of food items Kat didn't recognise, but at least it was fully stocked. "Pick what you want Lily... I don't think I'm hungry..." said Kat after a moment.

Chapter 969 Thoughtful Contemplations on the Demon School System

While Lily was eating Kat made her way around the house looking for rooms to stay in. There was the servants' quarters, consisting of bunkbeds and cramped quarters. The guest or perhaps family quarters that were nicely furnished if a bit small. Finally there was the master bedroom, lavishly furnished and taking up a quarter of the house by itself. In normal circumstances, Kat would simply grab one of the guest room equivalents and be happy with that. This was not normal circumstances.

Firstly, Kat hadn't seen any evidence of servants. Not only had they been left outside, without any means to open the door, but they had needed to look for food without guidance and finally... the guest rooms didn't have any bedding. Kat was rather annoyed at that last point. They just had a single sheet thrown over the bed. The pillows didn't have pillow cases either.

It was at least interesting to note that the bed was carved into the floor instead of built up... but the lack of bedding really was the sticking point. *Now... do I do the right thing and look for bedding and make the bed myself, or do we take over the master bedroom because that actually has bedding?*

Kat was of course neglecting to mention that the servants' quarters also had bedding but the bunk bed setup was extremely narrow. Kat's wings would make it hard for her to actually use them if she was inclined to attempt it. She was not. [Check if there's spare bedding in the room I guess? If you can find it that easily it's probably not worth antagonising anyone over it?]

Kat's lips thinned but she didn't contradict Lily. It was the right move, and probably for the best. Kat started to look through the cupboards and managed a partial success. She found two spares pillows and more than enough pillow cases for all the pillows in the room... and the two next to it. Truth be told Kat thought it was a little silly to have so many pillow cases, especially if there were more in the other rooms.

Kat looked over the one sheet that was on the bed before running it through her hands. Hmm... this sheet is nice silk and it's not like I get cold... damn it fine. Kat sighed and started to set up the pillows while tucking the sheet in properly to use as a bottom sheet. Once that was done Kat made her way back down to Lily and went back down into the cellar to grab some water to drink.

Kat plonked herself down on the kitchen bench, using it like a chair and leaving her legs hanging off the side. Lily was tiny and was of course simply standing on the kitchen bench. Was it entirely sanitary? Perhaps not. Did Kat care right now? No. Not at all. They'd clean up afterwards and nobody was around to complain so it was fine. Kat felt like she'd been making concessions all day so for something like this? It was fine.

"So... what's the plan once you're finished with your meal?" asked Kat.

[Well that is the question isn't it? I need to do at least a bit of practice with my spells just to see how effective they are in this world. Other than that... I don't know? It's just weird that there's nobody around. Though a question... if we have 'two days to get to know the young master before leaving' does

this count as day one? Nobody's around at the moment so that could hardly be construed as 'getting to know' anybody. At the same time... we weren't told anything about a break.]

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"I'm not too sure either..." said Kat with a frown on her face. "I do wish Sue hadn't taken off with our guide. This is the sort of thing I feel like he would've been able to address. Though... do you think Sue will be able to get useful information out of him perhaps?"

Lily shook her head between bites. [I doubt it. Oh sure Sue might find some stuff out for us just because it happened to come up but Sue isn't a trained spy. She's just a Succubus who likes to have sex. Useful, and perhaps a good way to steal information with training... but it's training I'm 90% sure Sue doesn't have.]

"I'll concede that's a good point... but on the other hand, Sue always seems to have answers to our questions when we ask, and I'm not sure I've really seen her stumped by any of them. She even knew what was going on when we got summoned this time," returned Kat.

[Yeah, Sue knows a lot of things... about the society she was RAISED IN Kat. I suspect most of the things we've asked her are pretty basic. They probably have 'Getting Summoned 101' as a class in school. I wouldn't be surprised if this sort of thing was covered in exhausted detail. Nearly all demons do summoning things so the idea that it wouldn't be taught in schools is unfathomable to me.]

"Hmm... if it IS taught in schools, which you do make a good point it probably is... does that mean spy craft would be an elective?" offered Kat.

[Huh... I mean... it could be? Would they do that?]

Kat shrugged, "I don't really know but I could see Combat as an advanced physical education elective with things like spy craft or state craft as electives for demons that enjoy those types of things and hope to be summoned to deal with those sorts of issues," offered Kat.

[I guess that makes sense. I wonder when they learn higher mathematics, and enchanting and things like that?]

"I'd say that's either a university level thing or perhaps something that you can take in like... 'high school' equivalent? Look I'm not too sure myself, I don't think it'd be weird for them to have like... stages of universities. Demons live for a long time Lily, and even if they're super advanced, they can't cram all that information into children. Their schooling probably does cover more stuff, and more advanced stuff but it can't cover everything," explained Kat.

[I didn't really think of it like that. Historically speaking school just covers increasingly more things and university education covers the rest. I suppose when you don't have to design everything with the human lifespan in mind you can afford to spread it out more. Plus, if you make it so nobody has to do things they aren't interested in you probably get more capable workers out of it in the end... hmm... I guess I was stuck in... if not 'human' thoughts then Earth ones.]

"I'm not saying I'm right but yeah, I am pretty happy with my guess," said Kat with a slightly embarrassed dusting of her cheeks. She hadn't really thought on the matter as deeply as Lily seemed to

think. It just made sense for a species that lived hundreds of years to be willing to sit in class for decades without issue, especially spread out. With places like Wrath for the meatheads that just didn't care.

Kat sighed and looked at Lily who seemed to be making her way through the food at a decent pace, even if it looked a bit strange. "How is the food here actually? I know there was a lot of it down there but it's hard to tell what's actually good and what isn't,"

[Eh... honestly? It's pretty lacklustre. I think they must dry all their meat here so this stuff is really tough. At the same time it's full of flavour and still has a lot of that meaty taste. I guess I'm... ambivalent in some ways? It's not bad per se but I've had some really nice stuff, and this definitely doesn't qualify. If it was easier to eat maybe I'd be more ok with it but as it stands... it's annoying to chew and just not up to par really.]

"Hmm, good thing I'm not hungry then. Though... they had good food in that room didn't they?" mentioned Kat.

[They did... but I'm not sure if it's really the case that they had 'better' food just that it was more to our taste. You were able to pick up something for me that was basically raw meat and there's no reason for us to think mountain elves eat raw meat. Hmm... I wonder if they have stronger jaws or better saliva production for all the dried meat? In such an arid and windy environment it probably dries out fast...]

Kat shook her head and quickly said, "Lily... I think I'd rather not know. It's... weird to think about another race's biology and I already don't like mountain elves as it stands. I'd rather not think about how their insides work if that's alright with you..."

[I still say it's a fascinating topic but I understand it's uncomfortable for you so I'll drop it.]

Chapter 970 A Dash of Romance in the Mornin'

Kat woke up the next morning, Lily curled into her side, and decided to do something nice. She was going to cook something for Lily, maybe try a bit herself, and make a bit of a romantic moment of it. Throwing her feet out of bed... they thumped straight into the floor. Kat winced. *Shit. I didn't use that much force right?* You see, Kat had forgotten the beds were on the same level as the floor. In addition to that, she wasn't a human. In contest between stone floor and Kat's heels... Kat was going to win.

So when her feet didn't really bounce back up, instead simply absorbed or redirected the impact, Kat couldn't help but wince a bit. Kat carefully lowered her feet down in the same spot and could feel an indentation under the carpet. Still... it was only a small one so Kat pressed a light kiss into Lily's side before surrounding Lily with pillows and leaving the bed.

Kat went to sneak out of the room, then paused, and ripped off a part of her sleeve to tuck next to Lily's face, just so that Lily would continue to smell 'Kat' in the room and not wake up too soon. With that in place, Kat opened the door, wincing slightly at the squeak it made... but Lily didn't stir, so Kat quickly made her way through, shutting it behind her before she could have second thoughts.

It didn't take Kat long to get to the cellar, and once she was there Kat faced a conundrum. *Hmm... do I make something that should taste good for human Lily? Or Memphis Lily?* Kat tapped a nail against her chin a few times as she rolled the problem around in her mind. *On the one hand, Memphis meals are

certainly easier if I can find some fresh meat. And I'm not sure if Lily has noticed but she's taken to eating and spending most of her time as a Memphis...*

On the other hand, there is no fresh meat here. If there was, Lily would've had some yesterday instead of the jerky she had to settle for. Hmm... maybe I can carve up some of those large fruits into something nice? Might have to settle for that. I didn't see any live animals around here, probably overhunted at some point. I mean, this is a city of cultivators after all.

With that determined, Kat grabbed a fruit and then moved back upstairs to work. She focused on whatever the large redish fruit was, carving into it and testing one of the offcuts for flavour. Tasted... a bit like a watery tangerine? Shrugging and considering that good enough, Kat continued to work until it she'd carved out a flower, before turning to the offcuts and carving little flowers into them all and cleaning them up a bit and spreading them around the plate.

Kat then dived back into the cellar for something that looked like a striped pear. Kat cut off a small slice to try and found... that it tasted a lot like a normal pear. What the stripe meant she had no idea. Shrugging Kat carved it into neat slices, eating another small piece from the opposite side to keep things even. Kat went back a few more times for little grape-like fruits that were blue and tasted a bit like cherries, an apple looking fruit that tasted more like corn, and a square fruit that... honestly didn't taste like much at all to Kat's tastebuds.

With everything arranged, Kat ducked into one of the other rooms to grab a table and then started to make her way back through the house, for Kat it was a simple matter to keep the food balanced on the table. It was a small circular one that Kat could hold the centrepiece of with one hand and not let it wobble in the slightest. Kat did glare at the squeaky door hinge before she pushed it open, simply sighing when her glare did nothing to stop the noise.

Kat set the table down gently and then swooped over, picking Lily up into her arms. The Memphis didn't even stir, but Kat expected that. Kat simply gave Lily a hug and a kiss before dropping the Memphis on the table next to the food. Kat had honestly expected that Lily would smell said food and wake up in its presence... that didn't work. Lily just snuggled into that piece of sleeve she had wrapped her little paws around, burying her nose in it further ignoring the food.

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Kat rolled her eyes, and fought to keep the fond smile off her face. Sure it meant the food she prepped wasn't all that enticing to Lily... but it was adorable. With Lily still sleeping though... Kat rushed out of the room and 'acquired' two chairs, one for each of them, before sitting herself down on the same side of the table Lily was currently using as a bed. Kat started to run her fingers through Lily's fur, gently petting the Memphis and causing her to purr in her sleep.

Kat kept this up for a while, simply pleased with the situation. That was until the sun started to shine in through the window. Taking a glance outside revealed that the day had well and truly begun and so Kat started to take drastic measures. Grabbing one of the pieces of that watery fruit, Kat froze it solid and then pressed the ice cube against Lily's knows.

Lily sneezed, and then stumbled back, eyes opening and looking around to find the source of the cold. Quickly though, she saw Kat and the food prepped. [Naw... did you make me breakfast?]

Well, it's awfully close to lunchtime so I can't rightly call this breakfast at this point.

Lily coughed mentally and slid off the table, transforming before her feet hit the ground. Lily smoothed out her outfit a little bit and then took up the opposite chair. "Really, this is lovely Kat. Did you make it by yourself?"

Kat nodded, "Yup, it wasn't too much of an issue... though we do still seem to be alone in the house,"

Lily did wince at that, "That's... well it's not ideal certainly. Um... what should we do? Like... shouldn't the young master be here by now? Even if yesterday doesn't count... you said it was nearly lunchtime?"

Kat gave a 'so-so' gesture, "Eh... it's certainly getting there. Remember, the whole city is set into a big ravine so the we're only just now starting to get sunlight. I doubt it's 12 yet but we're certainly getting close. I'd put us at no earlier then 10:30 I think,"

"Sorry..." mumbled Lily as she grabbed one of the 'flowers', looking it over before popping it into her mouth and smiling at the taste.

Kat shrugged, "It's fine. I was working on this for... well honestly it took a lot more effort to carve everything then I thought it would. Sure I have super strength and great control over my muscles now but that doesn't mean I can always make the knife do what I want, especially when I don't understand how soft or hard the fruit is meant to be at any one point. Still, I think I did pretty well,"

Lily blushed, feeling guilty about sleeping in so much. "Did... did you really have to put in so much effort? I feel a bit bad not doing anything myself. I've just been sleeping the day away..."

"Hey none of that," said Kat as she reached over and lightly bopped Lily on the nose. "I did this because I wanted to make you a fancy, somewhat romantic breakfast. I don't care how long it took me. I didn't check the time when I started and that's very much NOT the point. You know that if I really wanted to I could just stay awake like Callisto and use all that extra time do things if I want, instead I spend them sleeping with you. The fact that I spent a bit of time in the kitchen for this is nothing compared to that,"

Lily looked like she was about to apologise again when Kat glared at her hard, a flash of purple roaming across her eyes, "Don't even think about it Lily,"

Lily's cheeks reddened as she coughed, looking away from Kat's intense stare. "Fine... if... I can't say that... I'll just say... thank you Kat. This was, IS lovely and I appreciate that you took the time to do it. I do feel a bit bad that I didn't think to do something similar... but I also understand that if I turn this into a contest I'm not the one that's going to come out on top here... so... thanks Kat. For this, and everything else,"

"It is my honour Lily. I wouldn't bother if I didn't enjoy it. Plus, maybe carving fruit will be a useful skill to have? I took forever this time but I didn't fuck it up, perhaps I have a talent for it?" offered Kat with a cheeky grin.