

DEMONS 981

Chapter 981 Quick Trip on a Flying Ship

The boat trip itself didn't end up being all that interesting after that. Once things got going there just wasn't anything for the girls to do. Sure there were a few key events... but in between that Kat and Lily spent the time training. It turned out that important cultivators liked to have warded training rooms on their transport. Who would've thought?

The first thing that happened, was of course Bodeir Jr's escape from the ropes. Though... escape is overly generous. After a few hours whatever force was making them unbreakable just fell away and Bodeir tore his way through them before stomping off to go hide in his room. Kat and Lily didn't see him at all after that. Apparently Sue did... but Sue phrased it rather strangely at the time, "What a poor bodyguard, I'm perfectly aware of what Bodeir has been doing. I've seen him a few times," but Kat was pretty sure Sue just snuck a look in through a window or something.

The cafeteria food was alright. Nothing amazing, but nothing horrible. The sailors were a bit noisy during meal times but Kat and Lily didn't hold it against any of them. The first meal, the evening dinner, a few crew members pulled out old beaten-up instruments and starting singing sea shanties. It put a smile on people's faces, and Kat promised to sing on stage tomorrow night. It was easy to agree to. These weren't professionals at all, just a few sailors singing sea shanties, and Kat was happy to lead the chorus for such simple songs. It wasn't like she was going to forget the worlds.

The next day there was a few attacks from various animals and things, but what the cannons didn't scare away, or kill... well... Kat offered to help with one and lobbed a decent sized fireball containing 20% of her demonic reserves. It quickly froze the beast, sending it careening out of the sky. Apparently it was a Rank 3 spirit beast. Kat's mind flashed back to that giant snake... and just how much easier it was to take out this flying one.

I wonder if I really am that much stronger or if the snake was an exemplar of its species. Besides, I don't actually know what killed this one, technically speaking. Sure the wings froze and it fell out of the sky, but it's not like I know if it actually died from either the impact or from having its insides turned into an ice cube. Might be something else to test.

After that, Kat was called up whenever something a bit too scary for the cannons was flying around. Sometimes just throwing some fire casually at these monsters was enough to drive them away, fleeing into the clouds to get as far away from the, honestly rather slow, fire. A few others thought they were hot shit and tried to simply tank the slow moving projectile. They became fast moving projectiles, destined for the ground. Not a single thing that tried attacking during the whole flight could withstand more than 20% of Kat's demonic energy.

Kat wasn't entirely sure what that meant. Was there nothing tougher along this route? Or were the strong ones smart enough to know attacking them wasn't worth it. *It's also possible that this route was picked specifically because it doesn't step on the toes of any ancient dragons or something. I imagine that with so many deadly creatures around, flight paths are just as reliant on being safe as they are on having favourable wind conditions. Though... how much that latter actually matters is hard to tell.*

Mostly because there wasn't really any wind. Oh sure the sailors all bundled up to keep warm, and obviously nobody was suffocating, but there wasn't any billowing wind. It was all gentle and calm. This stood in direct contradiction to the sails. They seemed to be perpetually full and normally pointing towards the front of the ship. It did occasionally lean to one side or the other... but when that happened the rest of the ship was sure to follow, lining things back up again.

It seemed like the ship actually steered more with the sails than the rudder. Well, that is if there was a rudder at all. Kat hadn't checked and wasn't sure if it was necessary to keep the ship on track. Lily actually tried to ask for specifics, through Kat of course... but the sailor in question just laughed and said, "That nonsense is too complex for me. I just know how to keep the ship running and to avoid falling off the edge! Important lesson that," which... wasn't really helpful at all.

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When Creshe was asked, she apologised and said, "While I do know a considerable amount of the technical details, I'm not allowed to share them with anyone. Perhaps the patriarch would've main an exception for you had he been asked, but without permission I'm afraid I just can't risk my job to satisfy your curiosity,"

Which was a shame. That being said, Kat did get to cuddle Lily a bunch to cheer her up before they got back to their training. So Kat ultimately considered the endeavour pretty successful even if Lily didn't. The only thing Lily did manage to understand, was that the ship was more complicated than it looked, with a central control room that was off limits, quite a few removable panels with glowing sigils hidden underneath them, and so many sailors that, now she was looking, clearly had a purpose below deck. What that was... she didn't know and that irked a bit.

Kat singing later that night made up for any issues though. Kat wasn't amazing at singing, she didn't have the practice to make it a truly spectacular performance, but her voice was smooth and able to easily handle shifting pitch. Practice from yelling over excited children also gave her the projection necessary for her words to carry across the room. Towards the end... when some sailors were... perhaps a little tipsy. Not drunk of course, they were sailors... Kat was asked to sing with her demonic voice. It was a very strange feeling... but the cheering was nice.

The next day, they arrived at their destination a little before lunch. It was about eleven in the morning. Kat and Lily were pretty happy with their practice, and time aboard the ship. Well, Kat was pleased with Lily's progress. Kat herself hadn't really made any advancements with her own water form. Kat had gotten better at getting everything in place and her mind was rapidly adapting to being able to see so much all around her...

But Kat hadn't been able to move yet. Any attempt to try and break apart and travel, or just flow in a vaguely humanoid shape from one point to another was miserable at best and useless at worse. Kat also had Lily try to attack a few times and... well... Kat found she could switch to water fast enough... but the paper Lily launched still knocked around said water causing havoc with Kat's feelings of perception.

On Lily's end, she got quite a few spells working. Everything from a small, exceptionally sturdy and sharp paper arrow all the way up to swarms of paper birds to harass an attacker. Lily's progress was beyond anything she'd come to expect after labouring heavily in worlds that suppressed mana. It turned out all that time and effort she'd been putting it had very much been worth it.

Lily's favourite spell had to be her 'giant' paper aeroplane. Sure she could fly with her wings, but flying around while sitting regally on a paper plan just called to her for some reason. It was a pain in the ass to control, because you had to set the spell up in such a way that the paper always went forward with respect to the pointed bit of paper at the front. This meant that to refine the movement Lily had to tilt herself and use a bit of paper manipulation to tilt the construct.

Which was both easier and harder than moving random bits of paper. The paper in question was already filled with her mana, so that wasn't an issue... but it also had a set of instructions to obey. It was very easy to disrupt those instructions if Lily wasn't careful. She needed to focus only on moving the paper directly, instead of accidentally trying to force the spell to change which caused the paper to disappear if she messed with it like that.

All in all though, it was a good time. The sailors were nice, the view was nice if a bit samey a lot of the time. Kat got some more training done, even if she didn't make the kind of progress she'd been hoping for, Lily made great progress that helped soothe a lot of the confidence issues Lily had been feeling lately and Sue... well she was probably doing Sue things. Neither of the two really wanted to ask for the specifics. The smell was answer enough.

Chapter 982 Hamish Greetings

As the boat pulled into the Holy Icy Wind sect, Kat's jaw dropped. The whole sect was made of breathtakingly clear ice that seemed to have little bits of confined light as edging. Every building was made from the same material, and they had mostly the same styling with little bits of flourish to make them distinct from each other. Behind most of the clear ice was a secondary layer of ice that was exceptionally foggy. It was clearly for privacy reasons... but the light contained within the edging bounced wonderfully through the fog, giving it an ethereal feel.

The dock space was on the outskirts of the town, making use of a particular cliff face. Instead of digging down as the Mountain Shaker sect did, they instead built out a long pier off the side of the mountain that floated over nothing. It was interesting to see a shipyard that was so high up. The only thing that made Kat frown was that there clearly wasn't any method of launching the boats. Kat could even see one taking off right now. It just... slowly started to drift off.

Creshe was nearby and Kat asked, "Why do they just have a floating dockyard and nothing to get the boats up to speed?"

Creshe shrugged, "Most ships aren't as sturdy as the Flying Rock here. Mountain Shaker specialises in sturdy construction and we can take the pressure easy," Creshe patted the railing fondly as she spoke. "Downside is... our acceleration is shit. It's somewhat intentional, but we wouldn't reach our top speed without the launcher. Keeping that speed is easy... but accelerating? That's a pain in the ass.

"It's a flaw we're not too worried about. We do have our launcher after all, and with it we can reach speeds that exceed most, and rival the best. Our ships just can't make it there by themselves. A minor price to pay for never being taken out of the sky by monsters. The Holy Wind sect however... they do good business with touring boats, slower things. We might be invited on one while you're here but probably not,"

“Hmm...” mumbled Kat as she continued to look out over the city. It was clearly separated into distinct tiers and the shipyard marked a sort of... halfway point between the second and third highest sections. The ship continued descending, the oars held out but unmoving. The sail full but fluttering oddly in the breeze. Then there was a pop and the bubble that kept the ship stable fell.

Sue and Lily shivered slightly as the frigid wind blasted them unprepared. Lily bounced over to Kat, who opened her arms and cuddled the little cat. The sailors... and Kat, didn't bat an eye. For them it wasn't worth worrying about. When Kat looked back over the railing, once Lily was secure of course, she noticed that a group of people were standing at the docks, all grouped up together. Probably waiting for them.

Kat's suspicion was proved correct. As the boat slowed it became clear that the large offshoot of the pier they were heading for was the one filled with formal looking people all standing around. Kat pursed her lips but didn't comment as the boat carefully pulled up beside them. Just as the boat pulled to a stop, Kat heard a door being kicked open and Bodeir walked out, servants in toe.

Bodeir had dressed up nicely, if warmly. His robes were lined with soft, puffy looking fur and his face was framed by a weird hat that had a veil on the back. The whole ensemble was done up in colours reminiscent of Bodeir's home. Dark reds, and browns with a dash of bright blues. Without saying a word, he strode forward confidently as the sailors rushed from another door and delivered a gangplank for the procession.

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Hromdir got their attention with a very slight wave, indicating that they should be positioned between Bodeir and the rest of the servants. Shrugging and doing just that, Kat fell in line behind Bodeir, but Hromdir made a few more subtle gestures, and Kat mimed back the idea of 'looming' over Bodeir, wings out. Hromdir nodded, despite Kat's confused look. With another, much smaller shrug Kat did just that sliding up behind Bodeir... and realising for the first time that the elf was actually rather short.

Kat didn't need to do much to loom over Bodeir, as her natural height already did that. Letting her wings sit slightly more open than normal, and just the slightest tilt of her neck. Kat felt like she was doing a wonderful job when the person clearly in charge on the other side took a step forward and she flared her demonic energy just for a second, letting it seep into her eyes and flash purple. The poor guy stumbled and Kat was very pleased with the development.

“That is the third son of the Holy Icy Wind Sect Matriarch, Hamish.” whispered Hromdir so softly, that even with Kat's enhanced hearing she wasn't sure she heard it. Hamish was a rather small, willowy figure. In a less hostile environment, that might've been the norm but this willowy youth displayed that fact clearly despite the harsh winds. They wore a simple but elegant suit with an ice blue rose as the clasp on his bolo tie. The suit was a dark blue that seemed nearly black, with pink lining around the edges of the sleeves.

“I greet you, Bodeir, in the name of the Holy Icy Wind Sect, may the winds blow good tidings your way,” said Hamish with a very, very slight bow.

“I greet you, Hamish, in the name of the Mountain Shaker Sect. May your enemies quake when they hear your march,” responded Bodeir with a similar, slight bow.

[*WAIT HE CAN SPEAK LIKE A NORMAL PERSON!*

Unconcerned with Kat and Lily's surprise Hamish continued to speak, "I can lead you to your abode now, or if you prefer, my people can escort your servants and luggage to your temporary domicile while giving you a tour of the city. Not all that much has changed since your last visit, but perhaps you would like a refresher?"

Bodeir 'thought' for a moment. Though... Kat and Lily were still debating if it was possible for Bodeir to think. Prior evidence suggested no... but the new evidence said... perhaps? "I will travel to my abode first I think. I know my way around the Holy Wind Sect well enough. We are great allies after all, I would like to think I won't be too surprised by what I find here,"

[Ok, there's no way this speech wasn't like... rehearsed or just written by someone else right? I'm not going crazy right?]

That's the only thing I can think of. How can this be the same boy that wanted to demand I date him for money... using money given to him by his father. He actually sounds like an intelligent person right now!

"Ah of course. Perhaps you remember our winter rose garden? We've made some improvements to the sculptures there. Our hot springs are still in high demand, though it is possible to use the imitation version within your lodgings if you are concern with crowds," said Hamish.

Bodeir gave a shrug in response and said, "I would like to find these places of interest myself. A bit of exploration gives everything you find a bit of extra spice you know?"

While Kat and Lily did understand the point... they were somewhat wishing they didn't. Who the heck is this and what happened to the idiot Bodeir that was tied up with rope and thrown onto the deck of the Floating Rock. Was the rope actually an intelligence draining artifact? Was Bodeir actually... smart? Or at the very least of a reasonable level of intelligence?

Wait... Hromdir said, specifically, that Bodeir was dumb and it was the main thing holding him back in cultivation... so how the heck is he managing to make a perfectly acceptable speech?

Hamish nodded, "My siblings have said things of that nature before. While I myself prefer a personally guided tour, I suppose I can see why some would prefer the call of exploration. As such, I will happily guide you to the residence we have put aside for you, this way," finished Hamish.

As he whirled around two maids stepped in behind Hamish while the rest held back. Bodeir marched forward, with his servant train behind him. Through some unseen signal, various servants started to share the load but Lily, who was watching the goings on behind Kat... couldn't work out the system. Some people carried multiple bags, some only one. Some had large packages, while others only carried a few small things. Despite this, everyone seemed to know what they were meant to carry, even Hamish's servants. There was no complaints. No jostling. Just a few swift movements and the baggage was all sorted out.

Chapter 983 Details of Their Stay

After investigating the lodgings... Kat found them to be fairly standard. At least, fairly standard for a lot of her Contract work. The room she was assigned was lovely to look at and about twice the size of her

bedroom at home. With that being said... Kat was starting to get used to living in pseudo mansions as a guest. Especially while out and about. The only truly notable thing was that the servants quarters were all in the basement... but Hromdir, upon seeing Kat's concerned look informed her it was a heating thing.

Apparently building your house out of ice kept things rather chilly. There was magic to help alleviate this for guests... but in truth the natives of the Holy Wind Sect were all trained to deal with the weather, even those who didn't have any ice affinity. Servant quarters were set underground because it was much warmer down there, and they were not expected to be used to the cold of the standard areas. Hromdir seemed to take great pleasure in pointing out that many foreign servants think they have better accommodations than their masters.

"Why? Why would they set it up this way?" asked Kat, needing no prompting from Lily who was thinking similar thoughts.

"Politics of course," said Hromdir. "If guests complain about something as... seemingly insignificant as the temperature, despite the fact that even the mortal inhabitants of the sect are able to deal with it... it's admitting to a large degree of weakness. Truly, it isn't too hard to get used to with a bit of extra clothing and some more attention paid to how a cultivator reinforces themselves with Qi..."

"But for guests who have never been here before and who do not know to avoid mentioning it... the Holy Wind Sect gains a good deal of leverage by answering the call for concessions. Either by supplying heaters or warmer clothes. At ruinous prices of course,"

"Of course," grumbled Kat. "Is it all politics?"

"Of course," said Hromdir with a smile, sending Kat's words back at her. "Cultivators that reach Rank 4 quite regularly stall out, either through lack of talent, lack of resources or both. From there they have exceptionally long lives... and nothing to do really except for hoarding resources, growing a sect to produce resources, or messing with people. All things to keep themselves occupied."

"What is there to occupy ourselves with anyway? I mean, I doubt I'll get a chance because Bodeir will need guarding but I'm curious," Kat paused for a moment... "Wait... I forgot to ask... how was Bodeir able to speak like a person with at least average intelligence just before? No... um... hmm... whatever pick a either question I don't mind,"

"I'll start with the young master then. There is quite a few things to do after all. The young master was of course trained for this sort of thing. It was... painfully slow and the young master doesn't bother to even pretend competence in most situations. We are lucky that many believe his is an intelligent young man that enjoys acting the fool... in truth he just knows a number of pre-written responses that either myself, his father, or some of the other servants supply him with."

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"That... that makes an annoying amount of sense. Does it work?" asked Kat with some hesitation.

"It works... well enough..." offered Hromdir. "In truth Bodeir having a short range communication tattoo to supply him answers helps immensely. It is also rather scary to think about just how much time it took

Bodeir the elder to get him to this level. Still... despite all of Bodeir's complaints about his son... his son can act. It's underutilised, but with a script and solid direction Bodeir Jr can perform shockingly well,"

"So... what? He's some sort of acting savant?" asked Kat.

"No... not... not really..." offered Hromdir hesitantly. "Bodeir is just... when he wants to, he's able to take instruction quite well and understand what is required for roles with some prompting. He's good at playing the young master because Bodeir the elder has been teaching it to him for decades. He cannot swap roles quickly or with minimal prompting... but with time to explain everything and a good script? He's not so bad,"

"Right..." said Kat slowly, not ready to believe Hromdir was actually explaining everything about Bodeir Jr's talent here. Kat found though... that she just didn't really care. If it was acting talent, a magic spell, or Bodeir Jr's true form... it didn't matter right now and Kat was getting annoyed with the amount of time she spent dedicated to trying to figure it out. "So what is there to do here?"

"Well, skiing is probably the simplest activity, if you are aware of it?" Kat nodded at Hromdir's question, "Good in that case, skiing or snowboarding are quite common. So is using a large board to slide down as a group. Ice skating is known but not really practiced so high up because there are no good lakes to use it and it's not traditional enough a pastime for the sect leaders to invest in it.

"The markets contain a number of rare herbs, as well as finely crafted items. The sect has quite a few cultivation lessons that you likely would not be interested in. Hmm... what else. There are a number of hot springs across the mountain. Some with healing properties, some without. They are used for a variety of things from communal bathing to relaxation to alchemy.

"There is also the public greenhouses, Hamish mentioned them, but they are rather beautiful... though they are also exceptionally busy. Many, many cultivators like to use the open spaces to hold non-confidential meetings, it is also the main date spot for couples, far ahead of following the hiking trail up to the star watching platforms. Then of course the servants like to explore them, not just for the beauty but because of the warmth. It's a very accessible activity," explained Hromdir.

Do you want to check them out once we've finished our guard shift? I'm sure we can stick around for it.

[Maybe? I'd rather look at the stars in a nice private place with you. Oh don't get me wrong, the gardens sound nice but I've never been a big fan of crowds and I... I think I'd be a bit too embarrassed to do anything overly romantic in public. If they empty out a bit at night I might be interested, we do have much better night vision after all.]

Something to keep in mind certainly. The only worry would be if we need to take the boat back with Bodeir at all.

[Speaking of Bodeir why aren't we guarding him at the moment?]

I saw Sue sneak into his room shortly after he claimed the master. I do not want to, hear, smell, or even think about what's going on over there at the moment. I'm sure with Sue's barrier they'll be safe enough till I rush over, considering we're just a few rooms away.

[Right... yeah... I don't want to know either and my nose is a lot more sensitive. I'm guessing I'm going to find out before you do...]

If that is the case, kindly do NOT inform me, thanks.

"Are there any events we need to know about before the feast?" asked Kat.

Hromdir gave a light shrug, "It will depend entirely on the whims of the young master,"

Yeah I was afraid of that answer. Actually wait, "So... we were told, two days. I'm wondering if today is day one? Or if tomorrow is, seeing as today was more like half a day," asked Kat.

"Today is day one, or so I was led to believe. The feast is set on Friday, with the tournament likely to take the weekend, or a bit longer," said Hromdir.

"And today is... Wednesday?" Kat asked, mostly because she wasn't sure how comparable the week actually was. Hromdir's nod implied, quite comparable to be the answer.

"Ok... soo... would it be possible for me to just relax around the house then? If you could have a servant inform me should Bodeir wish to leave that would be perfect. The sound dampening isn't the best here... so if something goes wrong I should be able to hear it... and other things," finished Kat with a grimace.

"The master bedroom has additional sound dampening enchantments that can be activated," added Hromdir.

"Oh no... I'd... um... rather I didn't have to... you know?" said Kat.

"I can assign one or two of the more... adventurous maids to watch over the enchantment and turn it off at the first sign of trouble?" offered Hromdir.

"Many thanks," said Kat with a sincere tone, and a slight bow.

Chapter 984 Strutting Around Town Part Kat kept herself busy by messing around with demonic fire, changing it into various shapes and putting on little plays for herself. You see, Kat decided to do this guard thing somewhat properly and was currently resting against the sloped roof just above the window for Bodeir's room. Kat was very thankful that nothing happened between Bodeir and Sue today. She knew because there was a bit of an argument over that fact... but it wasn't Kat's problem. Sue also sounded disturbingly chipper during the whole thing... so it was probably going exactly as Sue wanted it.

Lily had tried to stay up with Kat and keep her company but the call of sleep was too much for the kitten. Kat herself was starting to be rather impressed with the control she had over her fire. It did get a bit unruly under certain circumstances but if she kept to a few specifics, it was surprisingly docile.

The first part was just how much energy Kat pumped into the fire. After ten percent Kat was limited to basic prodding more than detailed commands. Oh she could throw a fireball without a problem with more than twice that... but sticking below ten percent Kat found she could use her flames to write letters, make dancing figures, really whatever she wanted. That was the second thing, there was also still a limit to the amount of flames she could control even if she kept the total demonic power in them down.

A few little tricks she figured out though... was that the ten percent cap was just based on the amount of demonic energy in each clump of fire. If Kat continued to summon up little embers with barely a percent she could have hundred of the things out with only minor issues. If she moved them all at once, they'd listen fine, but not if she tried to give them too many unique instructions.

Kat was learning that limitation seemed to have more to do with her minds inability to properly multitask to that extent instead of having anything at all to do with her control over demonic power. It was... interesting to realise that the bottle neck wasn't the demonic energy anymore it was herself. So that's what Kat decided to work on as she passed the time. Kat found, to her surprise, that she could hold up to ten separate things in her mind at once. Despite being nowhere near her theoretical maximum limit... she was fairly proud of the fact she managed ten with no issue.

Her progress after that... was... less thrilling. Kat managed to get a whole one extra line of thought running without demonic energy, and three if she was using it on her brain after a night of effort. Sure Kat knew that this wasn't really something a normal human could train... but it felt like she was behind for some reason and it irked her to realise she had a long way to go if she wanted to properly control her demonic energy. It seemed that she'd been taking it easy in her attempts to understand and control the energy, focusing too much on the energy itself and not enough on improving everything else.

When morning came around Bodeir awoke and went into the backyard for morning exercises. Kat's jaw dropped when she saw that Bodeir was putting real effort into his training. *I really should stop being so surprised. Idiot he may be but I already know that his father tried really hard to make sure his son isn't completely useless. That Bodeir knows how to exercise, and does so regularly really shouldn't be a surprise to me.*

After exercise came breakfast and a shower, or, apparently a bath as Sue gleefully informed Kat when she met them in the hallway. Kat simply glared back and ran her hands through Lily's fur to ignore the implications. Of course, eventually Bodeir was geared up and ready. Kat followed him into town, and their group was a bit of a strange one.

Bodeir of course led the way. Not only did he know the area, but he was the young master. Kat and Lily followed to make sure he didn't get murdered horribly, two servants, one of which was Hromdir, followed behind him, presumably to do servant things. Finally there was Sue. Kat... wasn't entirely sure why Sue was following along at the start... but that was answered shortly.

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Bodeir went into a few stores and then left without paying or really looking at anything just to insult the owners. Or well, that was Kat's guess anyway. Bodeir didn't actually say anything... but he definitely wasn't looking at anything on display. One of the shops they entered was a somewhat secluded sex shop that disguised this fact somewhat by displaying a bunch of ropes out front. It was called 'Trap Supplies'.

Kat could feel the burning embarrassment coming from Lily as she recognised that nothing in the store was a serious method of restraint. Granted, the fact that the handcuffs had pink fluff on them should've clued Kat into that fact... but it just didn't click until she heard Lily's mortified thoughts.

Bodeir didn't seem to notice either, because he just walked in, gave one quick look around, tested one of the ropes, and left. No comments were made. No embarrassment was apparently on his face. The

strangest thing was the fact Sue didn't say anything. Kat made the mistake of asking "You're surprisingly quiet Sue. I thought you'd be tempting Bodeir a bit in that shop,"

Sue just scoffed, "No, that's all amateur stuff. It's nothing new to me, and I've not got much interest in any of it. Basic BDSM stuff was like the first thing I tried on my fetish quest. It's not bad, but to make things work you and your partner both have to really know what you're doing and I'm not much of a physical sadist. Emotional... maybe but I haven't met a someone with a proper humiliation fetish to test that part of me on,"

"I'm sorry I asked," grumbled Kat as the box in her mind from Vivian's 'Talk' rattled ominously, threatening to show her 'helpful' memories from that particular event. Kat of course threw some mental weight its way to keep it from opening even a crack.

They continued exploring stores for seemingly no reason until Bodeir took a sharp turn, backtracking a bit through several side streets and stopping at a small restaurant. Bodeir walked in like he owned the place, and slapped down a large sack that jingled. "One of everything,"

The owner was server was a middle-aged looking man with a nasty scar over one eye that seemed blind. He had a dirty apron, but gleaming metal knives on his body. The man nodded, not saying anything and immediately began to cook. Kat just sat off to the side silently while the meal was made.

Bodeir was supplied, in remarkable time really, the full menu. Some things were handed off to Hromdir to be put into a storage ring, others were handed over to Hromdir and the other servant to eat. A few dishes were pushed towards Sue and Bodeir ate the rest after Kat gave her first soup to Lily. Bodeir just glared at her a bit for it and then said nothing.

Bodeir was... almost delicate when it came to eating his meal. Everything was eaten with a proper posture, and with a noticeable break between each bite. Bodeir grabbed from all across his table with seemingly no pattern. The only exception to this would be once a dish was finished, if there was a decent amount of liquid, either as a broth or because it was a soup, Bodeir would always go back to finish that off before moving on.

Bodeir finished his meal after about an hour and a half. Kat... wasn't sure if it was impressive or not. Sure he handed of a large number of dishes to Hromdir for storage, or eating, but Bodeir still ate like nine full meals. They weren't necessarily large meals, but certainly enough for lunch. Bodeir didn't seem to care about that though. Instead, he enjoyed the whole thing swiftly, but with care and said nothing to the owner, simply dropping another jingling stack off.

The chef received it with a small grin that seemed to have so much genuine feeling behind it. Kat wasn't entirely sure why that was, but if she had to guess, Bodeir had probably spent more in this one session than the guy made in a month. Of course... even with that guess, Kat felt like the smile meant something else. She was right of course, but just because she knew there was more to it then that didn't mean she could magically figure out the 'what' from nothing.

Lily did speak highly of the food though. Apparently, it was quite rich but full of different flavours. Too many for her cat senses to really pick up. [I'm actually a little bit sad I can't risk transforming right now. I think I'd have loved to know what this actually tasted like.]

If we make money somehow we can come back here. I remember the way.

[Thanks]

Chapter 985 Strutting Around Town Part After the meal Bodeir was in a noticeably better mode. That didn't stop him entering stores, and leaving before really doing anything. However, this improved mood meant it was time for Sue to start her own angle of attack. Kat didn't notice it until the fourth store, but Sue had started directing the group, or more accurately, directing Bodeir to direct the group towards fancy female clothing stores. Sue achieved this with a few whispered words... but mostly the power of tits. Certainly not something to be underestimated.

After Bodeir got used to being lead around, Sue started to extend the time they spent in each store slowly. Carefully forcing Bodeir to spend enough times for her to take in the offerings they had on display before leaving again. Before Sue's plan could crystalise... the group had their first hostile encounter. It was straight out of a JRPG. Final Fantasy eat your heart out. Kat had 'Cultivator in Hostile Territory Simulator'.

The other cultivator was a buff human male with no shirt on and pants that only reached his knees. He was muscly sure, and he had a nice tan... but despite the brave face he was putting on the guy was also quiet clearly shivering. He was supressing it as best he could... but Kat's eyes were better than that. Though... what he was using for warmth was very silly, at least in Kat's mind.

He had three girls draped over him. One clinging to each arm, both pressing their breasts into the arms in question while the third, and smallest of the group rode on his shoulder and leaned across his head so that her boobs were just barely in his line of sight. He had one servant behind him, a butler that looked like he was no older than fifteen but that probably just meant the butler in question was a cultivator himself.

The two groups squared off against each other. The women glaring jealousy at Sue who was of course wearing a thick jumper... that showed off her much larger tits. The fact that all three of the girls were noticeable smaller, and two sets of gazes were trying to burn away Sue's 'extra fat' was a good hint they weren't too happy with their Succubus counterpart. The one on top of the guy's head though, she stared at Kat, eyes burning with envy. Why? Kat really didn't know.

Kat just looked back with all the confusion and apathy she could manage. Kat really didn't know what their problem was with her. They were nice looking girls, and Kat just couldn't comprehend why they'd feel threatened by Kat's presence. Which... was very silly of Kat, all things considered.

Kat was a Rank 3 Succubus. Her skin was flawless and she radiated a subtle grace that seemed to lightly caress the senses. Kat had no obvious defects anywhere, and her face was now perfectly symmetrical. Kat's legs, as Lily liked to point out, were easily her best feature and unlike the rest of the girls she was wearing a light silk kimono that showed off her body quite well and didn't seem to be suffering for it. Of course, the fact that Kat clearly wasn't trying and still looked better than them just made it worse.

Kat of course had no real understanding of this. A combination of not bothering with her appearance before changing into a demon. Thinking makeup was always too expensive, and the general lack of time in front of mirrors meant that Kat didn't have a proper understanding of how her appearance had improved over time.

Lily also wasn't much help on that front either. Lily had always thought Kat was the best-looking person she'd ever seen. Her deep infatuation gave her exceptionally rose tinted glasses when it came to Kat... but it also meant that the improvements were rather unremarkable to Lily. What did it matter if Kat's face was a little more symmetrical if Kat was already the best looking person in existence to Lily? Smoother skin? Presence? Kat was already an 11/10. Getting to 12/10 meant nothing in her mind.

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At some unseen signal, while the girls were eyeing each other up... well, most were. Sue was making more of an effort to push her chest out then glaring back... Bodeir spoke first. "The young master of Mountain Shaker sect greets his junior,"

The shirtless man grimaced, realising that he was outclassed in background and in beauties, nodded, "This junior disciple of Iron Body Mountain greets senior, and would be most grateful for any tips the young master can bestow upon this junior,"

Bodeir seemed to think for a moment... but Kat could guess he was waiting for someone else to provide him the answer. When he finally spoke... Kat was pretty sure it was just nonsense that was meant to seem insightful. "This senior disciples suggests that junior brother meditate on the fact that a single apple tree can provide more sustenance then an entire farm of carrots if given time and care,"

The shirtless man had a look of confusion flash across his face before he forcibly set it back to something more neutral and bowed to Bodeir, "This junior brother thanks senior brother for the insightful words. Is there anything this junior brother can do to repay this wisdom?"

"No, it is the duty of all seniors to dispense wisdom to deserving juniors, go in peace and think on my lesson," said Bodeir with a shocking amount of poise and gravitas.

The shirtless man bowed again before quickly power walking off, taking the first turn down a side street to get away from Bodeir's line of sight as quickly as possible. The girls did keep glaring at Sue, even the one that had originally focused on Kat. They kept up their glares until they round the corner. Sue of course wanted the last laugh and slapped her ass right as they rounded the corner. Kat could actually hear the growling start as soon as they were out of sight.

Things calmed down a bit after that until a few stores later, while Sue was looking at clothes for a full five minutes this time, a woman with antlers on her head slid up to Bodeir and said, "Hello handsome, how can I help you? I can get you A N Y T H I N G in the store if you'd like." Now, this was of course said in the most seductive manner possible. So Sue had to rise to the challenge.

She hopped in front of Bodeir to partially block the sight of the woman, and said, "Yeah can I get this in a gold? This shade of blue does my skin no favours,"

The two then proceeded to stare at each other for... minutes it felt like, changing their expressions slightly over time. *Ok. What the heck is going on here?*

[It is the ancient art of 'establishing territory']

I am beyond confused.

[Look it's going something like this...

Sue: He's mine.

Antlers: I don't see him complaining about the attention

Sue: No but I am. I'm staking my claim and you can shove off.

Antlers: There's nothing wrong with looking is there? If you think his attention is so easily caught maybe you can find someone better.

Sue: Maybe I can but he's an idiot, rich, and good at a few other... naughty things.

Antlers: Well that's just making me want him more.

Sue: And I'll fight you over it if you press me. Think you've got tits better than mine?

Antlers: No but your leg game is weak and your ass is so big it makes clapping noises when you walk.

Sue: Of course it does. I practiced that walk for years. If I didn't want people looking at my ass I'd wear less tight pants. Just because you're flatter than a pancake up top, and down bottom doesn't mean I feel bad about my extra stuffing. It goes to the best places after all.

Antlers: Clearly if you need that much extra padding you're doing something wrong.

Or something like that.]

Are they really having a conversation like that?

[I mean... probably? I don't really speak the language because I was never interested in men so I didn't pick it up properly. They are definitely trying to tell each other off for various reasons but honestly? I don't have a clue what they're doing anymore than you do]

Ok... but that was a hilarious image. I could actually imagine them saying all that stuff.

[Yeah... Sue would. Not sure about the cashier check but if she's already trying to sleep with Bodeir without even hearing him talk? I feel like my guesses aren't too far off.]

Think we should share this with Sue later?

[Hmm... yeah I think we should. Or maybe we should ask how accurate our version of events is?]

Bodeir, a bit slow at the best of times, took a while to work out he wanted nothing at all to do with... whatever the heck this was, regardless of how accurate Lily's 'translations' might have been. So... he just walked out. When Sue noticed this, she kept the cashier's attention for a little longer before walking out... and knocking over a pile of clothes with her ass on the way out. The wink might have been overkill though.

Chapter 986 Much Sneak, Very Stealth

The group ate at another small but excellent restaurant before they made their way back to they were staying at. Sue swindled a dress out of the whole thing to wear to the party tomorrow night, and there was a few more encounters with other cultivators... but none of them were assassins. Kat didn't need to do anything because it seemed that Bodeir was always the... higher Rank? Kat didn't really understand how the system they all seemed to operate under worked.

Still, after seeing it happen a few times, where Bodeir and another guy would face off. Stare for a while, until conceding that Bodeir was... somehow a 'senior brother' and then he'd offer advice that almost certainly meant nothing. It was always the same template... though Kat was a little shocked when she saw it play out the same way upon meeting a female cultivator.

She was ripped, much like the first guy, and wore a skirt and bustier that left her very exposed to the elements. She wasn't shivering though, and managed to brave the elements quite well. In fact, the three girls she had clinging to her were clearly colder despite their increased levels of clothing. She had quite a few scars, and was by far the fiercest looking cultivator they met on their walk. Despite that, she still deferred to Bodeir, got cryptic advice, and left.

Though, the woman in question did give Kat a very suggestive wink. Of course, Kat only found it out was suggested when Lily started projecting killing intent at the woman, forcing her to shiver for the first time since they'd met and turned away. Kat used her fans to hide the smile that wouldn't seem to leave her face. Lily was adorable when she was being overprotective. It wasn't as though Kat was in any danger from the cultivators here. Despite how fierce the lady looked; Kat was certain she was stronger.

When they got back to the mansion Bodeir went off to do Bodeir things, while Kat, Sue, and Lily found a pack of cards. There was a bit too many cards in each suit, but they just removed the extras. Apparently 52 was a common number for a deck of cards even in the demon world, it wasn't the only one, but it was common enough. Sue spent most of the game trying to turn it into strip poker then playing seriously. Considering they weren't even playing poker, but hearts, or more accurately, Black Lady, a variant of Hearts where the Queen of Spades was also a card to avoid.

Lily was able to do surprisingly well despite not having hands. Her memory was good enough to check over every card once, then line them all up on the table flipped over. Kat, in a show of solidarity did the same. Sue decided to have fun with things and put her cards on the table as well... but her memory wasn't quite perfect and she didn't even bother to flip them over. Lily and Kat could see Sue's cards quite clearly and were rather torn as to how much they should take advantage of that fact. Sue also turned out to be terrible at the game. So knowing what cards she had didn't hurt her chances of winning... much.

Sue actually did manage to win one round, Lily and Kat both not realising that she managed to shoot the moon, meaning she collected every hearts card, and the Queen of Spades, letting her win the game. Kat and Lily were just about to congratulate Sue on her masterful win... but Sue beat them to it asking how she won, apparently not being aware of that rule despite using it to win. Kat and Lily couldn't help but laugh at the ridiculousness of it all.

After that round, everyone tried to win using that tactic, mostly as a bit of fun. Lily got the closest, but never quite manage to get all the hearts to secure the win that way. Kat didn't get more than five, despite making an active attempt to collect hearts and Sue... mostly just came along for the ride. Not winning, but usually coming second after Kat and Lily switched their tactics.

Eventually it was time for bed, and they split up, Kat going back to the roof, and Sue heading for Bodeir's bedroom. Kat had maybe an hour to relax when she heard someone approaching the house. They were dressed up in black and were 'trying' to sneak. The thing is... it was all just so awkward.

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Firstly, black might sound like a great colour for stealth, and in a lot of cases it is, especially at night. The problem was that snow was EVERYWHERE, and the places it wasn't? Normally had packed white ice down instead. This was made worse by the blue/white lamps that shone dimly in the garden... and the person in question made absolutely not attempts to avoid. So instead of being hidden in shadows, they were a very noticeable black spot on a pure white background.

The worst part was... instead of actually sneaking, they were sneaking the way you'd expect a child to sneak. Big, slow steps onto their toes... but they didn't know to put their feet down gently. The crunching of ice after every step was a major giveaway that someone was nearby and with everything else added together? Kat was surprised whoever it was even managed to get to this manor without being caught. Perhaps everyone else who saw them just pitied the poor soul.

Kat watched them walk up to the side of the house and attempt to climb up to the window belonging to Bodeir. Kat frowned a bit at that. *They went straight for that window. They're either very lucky, or they know that Bodeir is staying in that room. But... but if that's the case why are they so bad? Surely if someone is smart enough to case the place a bit they're smart enough to know sneaking like that is terribly obvious?*

Kat didn't really know what to make of it, but she let them get as far as fiddling with the window before she swooped down and grabbed them into a chokehold, hand over their mouth. They tried to struggle but Kat was, much, MUCH stronger than whoever this was. Kat's tail was unmoving as it pinned the attacker's legs together and Kat's arms pinned the figures own.

Eventually, the lack of oxygen seemed to kick in and the already weak struggling dipped in power until eventually they stopped moving. Kat kept up the chokehold for a bit longer and then dropped them onto the hedge. They didn't even twitch. Kat poked them lightly in the side a few times and got no movement. *Hmm... well... they're not really a threat so I don't want to just execute them. What should I do though? Hmm... hmm... give them to Hromdir maybe? He seems competent.*

Plan in mind, Kat set off to visit the room she knew Hromdir was staying in. Kat knocked and waited for a few seconds. There was the sound of shuffling sheets, and... Kat's ears twitched, oh, that was someone putting clothes on. Kat shivered, she did not want the mental image thank you very much. With that bit of mental damage suffered, Kat was preparing herself when... the door opened to reveal someone who was decidedly not Hromdir poking their head out, eyes groggy and uniform in a messy state.

They looked around the hall, squinting but not really seeing Kat. It took her a moment to realise that was because the light was off. Summoning up some fire beside her face, Kat said, "Hello, can you get Hromdir for me?" *no vElnext.com*

The butler jumped back, knocking his head on the doorframe before stepping forward and wincing as he rubbed the impact sight. "Um... er... yup, I can do that," hissed the butler as he tried to suppress the pain. To save himself from some embarrassment he quickly shut the door behind him, and got to shaking the elderly servant awake. "Hromdir, Hromdir get up!"

"What is it boy? I'm an old man and I need what rest I can get to stay active!" said Hromdir with a chuckle.

"That demon girl, the one with red hair, she's at the door for some reason and asked for you. I don't know what she wants, but I wasn't going to refuse her. Standing all creepy-like in the dark. Bashed my damn head on the door when she summoned that spooky flame of hers," grumbled the butler.

Kat of course, could hear all of this through the door no problem. *It wasn't that creepy was it? I'm just used to the fact that I can see without light and forgot that it might be an issue for normal people. Plus, I'm all but certain these butlers are all cultivators. The fact they can't see in the dark is really more of a black mark against them than my forgetfulness is for me.* Kat was very much downplaying the ease of which a cultivator could figure out night vision.

Chapter 987 More Sneakers

Kat could hear Hromdir chuckling on the other side of the door. When he finally got it out of his system he said, "I guess I'll go deal with that now. You... brush up on your basic training when you wake up please," Kat heard the shocked gasp, followed by a heavy thud as Hromdir walked out into the hallway, "Sorry about him. He's clearly forgotten that you'd be able to hear everything. Now, what do you have for me?"

Kat held up the unconscious thief, "What should I do with this guy? He was trying to sneak in and it was comically bad. I saw and heard him coming across the entire backyard. It would've been harder to ignore him. Honestly I have no idea how he made it in here. Also was knocking him out the right choice?"

"Yes, yes it was. Bringing him to me was also a rather good decision. Keeping him alive wasn't a mistake either. Sure, take them out if you need to, but a dead man can't reveal who his employer is. Though... a final bit of warning... I'd run back to your post now. It's rather easy to sneak past the guard, if the guard isn't there," explained Hromdir.

Kat's eyes widened as she took off sprinting, making her way to the nearest window throwing it open, wincing as she heard the lock snapping in her rush. Though, she found it was worth it when a moment later she emerged into the courtyard and spotted someone, once again, trying to break their way into Bodeir's room. Kat rushed towards him as quickly and silently as she could before wrapping him up into another chokehold.

This one seemed better trained, he was whipping his head around right when Kat's arms were going for him. This meant that his head was at an awkward angle and Kat was blocking his mouth with her underarm instead of her hand but that was fine. What wasn't fine was the fact he was managing to contest her strength somewhat because of the awkward way she'd needed to grab the guy. He even tried biting into her arm. It didn't break skin, which gave her the confidence to keep hold of him... but it might just mean he never trained his jaw strength properly. Not like Kat had either...

The assassin, or thief made the most of their leverage, getting what little bits of leeway they could from the fact that while Kat was strong, she was also good for cuddling. That meant there was a number of areas in which the assassin could squeeze just a bit more room in her hold. They fought with everything they had not to stay caught. Even trying to reach down to grab a dagger. Kat managed to stop that one by flicking her tail in the way.

Eventually, the man's struggles ceased. Kat waited for a solid minute, before slightly relaxing her grip on the man. Seeing as he didn't react, she let him drop... only to be surprised by a kick straight to the chin.

Kat clenched her jaw and took the attack stoically, grabbing the offending appendage and then slamming a knee into the poor man's family jewels. Still, he was well trained and didn't scream, even as his muscles spasmed. Kat bound him up and there was significantly less resistance. "Now, I didn't enjoy that, but I'm trying to do this the polite way and keep you alive. I'm not contracted for that specifically, but it'd be an awful waste of life...

"So here's the deal. I'm going to loosen my grip, and I'm going to take you inside to visit a friend of mine. Great man, Hromdir. He'll keep you nice and... probably alive? We've already got one other person who was trying to sneak in. I wonder how many I can get by the end of the day?"

Kat felt the man nod, and was glad for it. Still... best to test something new out. Kat put the man down gently, but kept her hand on his collar, then activated her ability turning into water. She didn't let the strange shift in perception get her, instead she let demonic energy burn in her hand, turning the watery fingers into ice. A small test, and Kat found that she could still control the water, but it was much harder and it was costing her a frankly painful amount of demonic energy. She was losing a percent every two seconds even with her regeneration.

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Still, that was good enough. Kat started to move the man away, holding him with that one frozen hand. It was slow going and it felt like a strange combination of muscle fatigue and a stitch all up her arm... which didn't properly exist at the moment, making it all the stranger. Still, it was enough. She managed to get the man through the nearby window and into the house. It was a little hard to navigate, but she found Hromdir after just checking a few doors. There was... one slight issue where the man tried to escape, but Kat just flared a bit of demonic fire in front of his face and the man stopped moving instantly. Apparently he knew it was scary shit.

Despite how annoying it was to manage, Kat didn't regret the choice. Especially when a THIRD ASSASSIN showed up in her range of vision. The question was... how did she take out this one? *Ok I'm missing an arm and still dropping off that other guy. I can't turn myself back until my hand gets here... or maybe I can try and control some of the water in one of the water features? Would I be able to build my body back with different water? Dammit this why you test shit like this.*

Kat didn't have long to decide. This person was much better at sneaking, and she didn't think she'd be able to spot him had she still been using eyes. Too bad for this assassin she had 360 radial vision that could see behind obstacles. They weren't quite to the house yet, and this one didn't seem to be going straight for Bodeir's window. Perhaps they saw the others getting caught?

Whatever the case, Kat decided to start acting. She 'threw' her other 'hand' over to the water fountain and found that her water stayed notably separate. Wanting to frown at that, but lacking proper facial features at the moment, Kat did the only thing she could think of. Pushing demonic energy into the water. Kat grinned when the whole pool lit up under her control and her range of vision expanded significantly with more water under her control. It was giving her a minor headache, that was made worse by the fact it kept healing, and then coming back. Apparently being able to see half of the block in excruciating detail was a bit much... but did you know that there was six other assassins running around right now? Kat did. Though they were all sneaking into other houses.

With confirmation that this would work though... Kat waited till she could drop the second guy, and as soon as she did, she tried to reform using all the extra water she had. It worked. Perfectly. *YES. FUCKING YES. I JUST NEED ENOUGH WATER IN THE CORRECT SHAPE. The fact that as long as I have enough water in my shape it works, doesn't matter if I have more. In fact that's better. Oh this is so much nicer.* Of course, now Kat couldn't see anyone sneaking around because she was facing the bottom of a water fountain... but that was easily fixed by turning back into water.

Kat watched the sneaker, a woman this time, reach the wall. Kat floated after the burglar who was just about to pull their hand back into a punch to take out the window. They paused mid-motion as Kat got close though, and they turned to find a wall of water approaching them. They didn't wait to properly process that information. They just bolted. Kat quickly reformed and dashed after them till she got to the property line a second later, where she sped her mind up to think this over.

Ok... what do I do here? This gall is obviously the best of the lost so far... but she's running. I can probably catch her but she isn't that much slower than me... assuming this is her top speed. The biggest issue is that I don't know the area well. If she manages to lose me by ducking into the sewers or a building I might never be able to catch up. On top of that... I might not catch her quickly. She's only a little bit slower, and with my reformation time I'd estimate this to be at least a ten minute chase. I... I don't know if I should leave this place undefended for that long...

Kat winced as she noticed her demonic energy was very low as well. Swapping forms, carrying that one guy off with the ice hand, and now burning energy to keep up the speed, both for running and to think? Yeah... not ideal.

Chapter 988 It's Morning and Kat is Tired

When the sun broke over the horizon Kat was about ready to collapse. Apparently the first night they were here, all the Ne'er-do-wells were taking a vacation. After letting the third person go, Kat had to intercept six more attempts to get into the house. None managed to escape her, though all were significantly more skilled than the first person she captured. It was also unclear if they were working together, or what the overall objective actually was.

Kat simply didn't have the mental energy to spare on such thoughts. Her demonic energy was consistently below fifty percent, and was certain that without Lily's stockpile and regeneration, Kat wouldn't have made it through the night. Granted, she was being rather wasteful and abused her new water ability to keep watch better... but it was mentally taxing and a horribly inefficient use of demonic energy.

Lily had woken up for a bit after the fourth person trying to break in was caught. She did a bit of practice, chatted with Kat and kept a bit of a watch out until the fifth person turned up and she nearly turned them into a corpse. It turned out... Lily now had issues with her magic being too powerful. All of her attempts at controlling magic in worlds it was suppressed meant now that it wasn't... even 'holding back' was still very close to deadly force. Lily was... not terribly comfortable with that realisation.

She 'went back to sleep' or so she told Kat. Lily continued to practice her spells until she passed out at about 7am, a bit before the sun came up properly. When it did, Kat stumbled into the house, swaying slightly on her feet until Sue noticed them in the hallway. She was wearing a fluffy coat and looked like she'd just left the shower. Just a fluffy coat. "Hey Kat you look... well I was going to say terrible, but it's

more like 'a bit under the weather' but for a Succubus that's basically the same thing. Are... are you alright?"

"Eh... nope? I mean... maybe? I've been abusing my body a bit too much I think. I didn't sleep at all yesterday and I spent all of tonight catching people trying to break in. I used my new Rank 3 ability, my entire demonic energy pool multiple times over and I'm just... kinda done at the moment? I'm not sure why I'm so wrung out though. I've ran for days without stopping, even through the night sometimes. I mean... my body is mostly fine but I'm just mentally taxed I guess," explained Kat.

Sue shrugged, "Might just all be in your head,"

Kat gave a deadpan stare back at Sue, "Sue, it's a mild headache. Of course it's in my head,"

"No, no I mean..." Sue started to explain but paused. "Ok... look... I'm no expert but I'm pretty sure at Rank 3 you should be able to work for like a week without issues. My... best guess? You're fighting yourself. You've ranked up really quickly and you were human before. I think... you might be mentally handicapping yourself a bit? To try and keep up with all the other changes,"

Kat frowned, trying to go over the idea in her mind but she was tired and she couldn't really think about it properly. The idea seemed to slip around like wet soap. Constantly evading her grasp and rarely remaining held for long. "I... I mean... maybe? Is that likely?"

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Sue shrugged and said, "Look I don't really know... this sort of thing is really far outside of my knowledge base. I think... I think it might be best you talk to Nira about it. She'd know better than me. It's just the first thing I thought of. It doesn't make all that much sense that it tired you out so easily. Unless... is there anything special about your new ability?"

"It gives me 360 degree vision, turns me into water and I can control said water?" offered Kat.

Sue slapped a hand over her face. "Yeah ok that'd do it. Kat... your ability... it lets you see basically everything, and gives you intimately detailed knowledge of the water that makes up your body. How big is the radius?"

"Most of the block?" answered Kat.

Sue groaned, "Ok I don't know why you thought your mind could handle something like that no problems. I still think it might be partially a mental thing, constantly holding yourself back... but just add to that the constant switching between modes of being and seeing? With one of them being much more mentally taxing? I think you just need to train yourself up a bit. Nobody can use their abilities perfectly straight away. Otherwise there'd be no need to train,"

"But what about my regeneration, or my True Sight? Heck, even my dream walking was pretty easy to use," said Kat.

Sue massaged her temples for a few moments as she tried to think of the best way to explain this...

"Right... ok... Kat, your best skills are all passive, and the dream walking thing... well it's not hard to activate but how much control do you have over dreams?"

"Basically none," answered Kat automatically.

“Exactly. Your regeneration doesn’t need practice because it knows how to put you back together. True sight doesn’t need practice because you either see through the illusion or you don’t, and finally you haven’t practiced at all with your dream walking. Now you happen to have two abilities that need practice, and the fact it’s somewhat hard for you to use them shouldn’t be a surprise,” explained Sue.

“Right... well... hmm... I’m going to crash for a bit?” said...? Asked? The words left Kat’s mouth.

Sue nodded, “Sure that will do you some good. Stop thinking like a human though. If you sleep and need to get up, you might only sleep for an hour or two. Demons tend to sleep for as long as they think they need it. Some demons sleep for centuries just because they can,”

“Wouldn’t contracts get in the way of that?” retorted Kat.

“Not if they’ve been working long enough to apply for a century off or simply remove themselves from the contract roster. Look, my point is, if you focus on resting only as long as you need to? You’ll be up much sooner than if you just let yourself rest as long as you feel like. I’m not saying you can’t just... decide what you want to do,” offered Sue.

Kat pursed her lips. *Sleep sounds so nice. Just cuddling up with Lily... who I might even convince to swap back to human so I can really squeeze her properly. I just feel so worn out. Even knowing I could be good in an hour maybe two? I... I feel like I deserve some extra sleep, even if it’s not really extra.*

“Just... um... how long till you leave for the party?” asked Kat.

“I’m not actually sure,” said Sue with a wry smile. “I was talking to some of the servants about it, and it seems that while the ballroom is opening at three, nobody is really expected to arrive until later, and the hosts aren’t ‘starting the party’ formally until about half past five unless they get a bunch of important guests showing up early, in which case they might be forced to start before that.

“Even then... Bodeir IS one of those important guests and as such he’s expected to just sort of make his own way there at whatever time he feels is appropriate, but it would be a major snub to the organisers if he isn’t there before the meals are served. Which... because we haven’t been given a time for that, could be a bit complicated. Food could be served anywhere from 5:45 to 8:00, and technically they could push it back further if not enough important individuals show up.

“It’s one thing to serve dinner and have one or two important guests missing, that’s on the guests... but if ten or twenty aren’t present? Then that’s on the hosts. Very shameful, and the only choice is to delay the meal and hope they do eventually turn up. It’s... mostly just dumb politics but, that’s how things are,” explained Sue.

“Ok... um... hmm... can you wake me up before you start getting ready for the night? If I’m not already awake again before then? I... I NEED time to rest before the party. I imagine I’ll need to be watching closely during the event and I don’t want to be the cause of Bodeir getting attacked because I snubbed someone when I was too tired to think clearly,” said Kat.

“Sure, sure,” said Sue as she stepped forward and gave Kat a hug. “It’ll be fine. I don’t think Bodeir is planning to head out. Just do a bit of exercise and prep for the tournament. He might check in with what’s been found out about the people you caught? Or maybe not... it’s not all that clear how much he cares for that sort of thing. Now, you go off and have a good rest. I’ll take care of him for a few hours. My shield might not be durable, but it can stand at least one good punch. I’m sure,”

“Thanks Sue” said Kat with a yawn as she hugged Sue back and then stumbled towards her bedroom.

Chapter 989 Deep Thoughts, Staring Sue

Kat didn't see the concern on Sue's face as she stumbled back to her room. Nor did she notice that Sue just stood there in the corridor for some time before grimacing down at her outfit. *Kat's a tough cookie isn't she. As envious as I am that she's already Rank 3 despite only doing Contracts for less than a year... she really does try doesn't she? All the information I have about Rank 3 demons are much older than her. Could that be the real source of issues? That's she's rushing through the ranks so fast?*

Sue sighed, brushing herself down and pulled the coat around herself properly. Suddenly the idea of teasing some servants with a half-naked state left a bitter taste in her mouth. Instead, she walked carefully to the room that had been set aside for her. Sure she'd ignored it before this point... but she just needed a minute. Yup, only a few minutes.

When Sue got to the room she flopped down on top of the bed, letting the coat fall open. She hadn't bothered to tie it up properly at all so her large breasts spilled off to the side and the coat fell to the bed, front open. Sue once again grimaced as she looked down at herself. *Am I really happy with what I'm doing? *novelnext.com*

Sue frowned again. No that's a dumb question. I love my work. I enjoy what I'm doing... but I can't help but feel a bit shallow at the moment. I've been seducing Bodeir, pretty well I think. Sure I haven't had any sex with the guy yet, despite what everyone else thinks but these things take time. Time I'm... no longer quite as certain I'm using correctly.

It's one thing to go for straight for the sex. I love that. I live for that. This... well no I'll call it what it is. It's straight up emotional manipulation when it comes to Bodeir. I am trying to force him to develop a crush on me so that I can more easily keep his attention. Why though? It IS the optimal way to go about this Contract. I've also seen Bodeir's horrible control when it comes to bad women. Really I'm doing him a favour... so why do I feel like I'm doing something wrong now.*

Sue turned to the side, staring at the cupboard containing the dress she'd conned Bodeir into buying... and found she didn't feel bad about that one at all. Bodeir was loaded, and despite the fact the dress was expensive... she knew Bodeir spent twice its value on lunch. Sue also did feel it was necessary for the ball tonight and her heart didn't quiver when she looked guiltily at the cupboard. Despite trying to force herself to acknowledge more guilt... none of her negative feelings stirred when she thought of the dress.

Does that make me a bad person? Definitely still emotional manipulation but... is it really? I checked the price tags on it, and I can estimate what the fool paid for lunch. Well, that's assuming he spent twice the cost of the menu. If he handed over even more in those two bags? My dress then becomes much cheaper. It suits me well too. I don't feel bad for this one. Is it because I know I need a dress to compete with the other women tonight? Or is it because I know it cost Bodeir essentially nothing?

.....

Sue clicked her tongue as she threw herself up off the bed and summoned her demonic attire. Once again, she patted herself down, looking for what? Even she didn't know. Now that she had clothes on she turned to the door... and promptly about faced, planting herself face down on the bed. It was

awkward, and didn't last long. She might've had demon durability, but that just meant her back was bent in a horrible awkward position because of how large her tits were. Flipping over she had to be careful of her wings... but she relished in the bit of pain it caused her stretching them awkwardly to flip herself over.

Damn why did I become friends with such wholesome girls? Kamiko is such a sweetheart. I just want to make sure that she's protected for the big bad world. Including me. Sue laughed. Then again it's just so much fun to tease the girl. Makes it hard to keep myself from corrupting her. Not that I think I could succeed in making her that much like me... unless I tried to break her. Which is a BIG no-no. Do not break the Kamiko. She is for snuggling and teasing and NOTHING ELSE.

Sue nodded, glad to have affirmed that in her mind. She wasn't a lesbian of course... but Kamiko really did have great reactions... plus Kat and Lily made the idea much more tempting then it should be. *Still, I am firm in my sexuality. As adorable as Kamiko is, and as much as I like her... there's just no lust there. Which I mean... clearly Kat makes her relationship with Lily work. Still... I like sex a bit too much and it just isn't the same without the lust so I know that relationship would be doom to fail.

A big shame. Hmm... does that mean I should find a cute, adorable femboy? Sue was of course ignoring the fact that one of her top fetishes was shapeshifters. Who, simply by default were not limited to male... or female... or anything really. So she had to be a little bit bisexual. Probably. Sue's mind was a damp and confusing place. Possibly. I'd have to make sure he's a switch though. I don't want to top forever...

But it'd be basically impossible to find an innocent femboy that KNEW he was a switch. Damn. The trials of wanted good sex and adorable people to tease. Guess I'll just have to settle for having friends to tease. Though... Kat's getting a bit too used to my teasing already. She doesn't even play the jealous girlfriend well! I wonder if that's a testament to how much she trusts me? Or how much she trusts her girlfriend? Or both I guess? It... it feels nice to be trusted like that. I didn't realise how much I missed that sort of thing from when I was younger.

I can't remember the last time someone gave me that much trust... well outside of my immediate family of course. All my 'friends' were all too willing to stab people in the back. Even if I didn't do that sort of shit... they all seemed to think I was just waiting for the right time to screw everyone over so thoroughly they'd be walking funny for months. Which... I'll admit is a hilarious image but... god I was so wound up dealing with that shit all the time.

No wonder I'm a nymphomaniac. I needed the sex to deal with all the fucking stress that comes from hanging out with those kinds of bitches. In just a few interactions, and a bunch of letters I already trust Kamiko and Kat more than I ever did those sluts. Fuck, I trust Lily more than that as well and I've known her for even less time. AND MOST OF THE TIME SHE'S A CAT!

Which, I mean. Cats can be major assholes so the fact that Lily is always adorable and never a little shit really says something about her core principles as a person. Though... very easily distractable and teasing. Honestly she needs to get laid. Which is... god I'd be surprised if that happens within the decade. The girl is too concerned with... everything. Doesn't want to move too fast, too slow, too rough, too gentle. I almost think it would've been better for Kat to reject the poor girl just so that she could build herself a bit of a spine...

But Kat's too nice for that and Lily might've just shattered if that happened. So... now we have to make sure she doesn't get stuck with an inferiority complex for the rest of her life. Which... I mean... Kat is pretty awesome, and a demon. So that's going to be really hard. Still... * Sue smiled, *It's a problem I'm willing to help with.*

Sue smiled again, sitting up and pulling her knees in. *You know... maybe I should be thanking old foreman Stone. I was NOT happy to be conned into dealing with those fucking rats... but it was the best decision I was ever forced to make. I should do something nice for the guy as thanks. I could have a go at making those 'Rock Cakes' that Golems tend to like... then again... do they require any special cooking utensils? I mean... I have heard Stone crunch the damned things. If there isn't actual rocks involved in the making of that shit I'll... well I don't want to say I'll eat one, I'd break ALL my teeth and I need those. Maybe... hmm... nope. No dumb punishments for me. I'll look up the recipe and if I can't make it, I'll just bake some normal cookies or something. Does Stone have any allergies? Shit this is becoming more complicated than I wanted it to be...*

Chapter 990 More Thoughts with Sue

Sue is still in the driver's seat

Sue took some time to rest. She was going to be busy this evening and seeing just how tired Kat was... well Sue felt a bit lazy herself. It didn't last all that long though. She needed to be prepped to go at Bodier's convenience. As lovely as it would be to call for whatever extra time she might require as a woman... she knew Bodeir was a bit of a dullard and would take it the wrong way if she called for more time. Thus, she had to be ready to leave, and arrive, at the party as soon as it was open just in case.

Sue called for a maid to help with her hair and sat down at the vanity. When Sue unwound all of her hair and let it fall down her back the maid was mentally cursing. Sure Sue was a Succubus and thus her hair was much less prone to getting knots than a human or mountain elf... but Sue had an exceptional amount of hair. It was going to take some time to get through. The poor maid didn't think she could do it all herself in a timely manner. She decided to call for reinforcements.

Sue wasn't going to complain about the extra help. She had been intending to do half of the work herself. She might've relied on several Hub products to unknot her hair normally, but Sue's mother taught her well. If the situation called for it Sue was more than capable of brushing out her own hair. It took forever, but she was capable of it. Still, being pampered was nice and she'd never turn the chance down. Especially if they were basically volunteering.

As the brushing continued, Sue relaxed and thought back to what she'd considered early. *I think... that while I love sex, and I don't mind being the sexpot nymphomaniac... I don't want to be JUST that. The question is, what else can I do? Unlike Kamiko who clearly kept up with her weapons training I'm surprised I managed to do as well as I did fighting those rats off. I mean, I love my hammer and the fact that it's a bit fancy means I can really pack a punch with it...

But I neglected that training horribly after I left school. I mean, I didn't exactly try my best during school either but at least I was training regularly during those years. I... I don't know if I want to focus on that sort of thing. Demons are strong enough without training that I don't really NEED combat. It's something

I'd have to want and... I just don't think that's my calling. My blood doesn't sing at the thought of a thrilling fight. Honestly a proper fight? That gets really gross really fast... and I'm aware of how hypocritical that is to say considering what I get up to in the bedroom but I'm trying to understand myself damn it, not criticise.

Besides, that one time I tried blood play it just got everywhere and it didn't add anything to the experience for me. Crazy fucker had some impressive regeneration though. Just as potent as Kat's... if you ignore the fact that the fool still scarred. God he was more scars than clean flesh everywhere except his face. Which also really isn't my thing. Scars CAN be cool, in small amounts but not everywhere. I certainly wouldn't want to develop any myself. So that's enough to count out combat as somewhere to start.*

Sue's train of thought paused as one of the maids found a particularly tough knot in her hair. Instead of gently teasing it though, Sue could feel the maid just gearing up to try and rip straight through it. Which was never going to work. Sue took good care of her hair... and used a number of products to increase its durability. A little maid wasn't going to be able to break her hair with a hairbrush and a bit of effort. Sue decided to play a bit of a joke on the maid.

When the maid slammed her hand down on the knot, yanking Sue's head back, instead of pretending to feel pain... she let out the most sensual moan she could manage, drawing on her experience with masochists and the slightly different tones they liked to use for that sort of thing. The maid jumped back, dropping the brush as if it'd been set on fire. "What's wrong dear? Now the hair brush has been on the floor you'll have to clean it. Then again, you were having a bit of trouble with that knot. Brute force is all well and good for some things but not for hair. Though... I'm not really complaining about it either,"

Sue grinned into the mirror, watching the clearly less experience maid go bright red and attempt to stammer out something resembling words. It was not working. The older maid just rolled her eyes and pulled another hairbrush from the pocket in the front of her dress and handed it over to the younger maid. Sue flashed a cheeky grin at the older maid who returned the grin before the younger could recover and realise they were messing with her.

*Right. Where was I? Combat. Yup, not interested in that. Too bloody, not an adrenaline junky and I'm not a masochist. Sue was fully aware of the irony in insisting on that last point after what she'd just done but Sue wasn't a masochist. Not a physical one anyway, possibly worth testing at some point. I guess I'll have to look into something intellectual then. Ugh... I don't know if I want to be a nerd though. Then again... it would be a good excuse to dress up as a sexy nurse or librarian wouldn't it?

No, not nurse. For the same reasons as combat really. I do not want to be covered in blood and healing really isn't what I want to do in life. Then again... maybe therapy? No... I'm not sure I could trust myself not to sleep with my patients. But... but it actually doesn't sound like a bad idea. Might be something I could get Kat interested in as well... we could take the courses together? Honestly that's a pleasing idea...

But yeah... I'd be constantly tempted to sleep with everyone even remotely attractive that walk through my doors and I just can't think that's a good idea. Sure most therapists work at Lust but those guys have some of the harshest punishments for sexual misconduct. I did ask Mum why that was once and it

makes sense really. With so many willing demons around, a lot of them Succubi like myself, going after someone unwilling is a massive no-no.

Which makes Sloth and Greed look kinda sad in comparison. Greed lets you actively proposition your co-workers because 'everyone has a price' and as long as you're not actively forcing anything physical they'll let you get away with so much shit. Though if they do catch you most contracts enforce indentured servitude. Still less harsh than Lust, but not fun.

Sloth barely even has any regulations because a lot of the workers just don't care and can't be bothered to file it to HR. Mum and Dad like to laugh at all the times people have called them out for being inappropriate and then saying 'Fill in the required forms and hand them to HR and we'll accept their response'. Apparently only one person has ever taken my parents up on their offer... and HR dismissed the claims anyway because deepthroating bananas in the breakroom, while strange, isn't against company policy and there were other breakrooms the complainer could've used.*

What was I thinking about again? Sue realised she'd gotten quite far off course. Ah, future careers. Therapist... still sounds alright. We'll put that in the maybe column with learning how to do proper massages. Though at least if I chose to work at a massage parlor I could pick one where it's expected you sleep with the customers at some point during the treatment. That sounds nice... but perhaps not really helping me do something that isn't sex. Plus... I feel like I'd get bored working a job like that.

*What about diplomacy? That could be interesting. I could use my natural charms, my wit and whatever extra stuff they shove into my head to get good at diplomacy and start locking down deals for whoever Contracts me. Hmm... though I've heard that sort of contract negotiation can be really boring from Mum and Dad. I don't know if I could keep myself interested for days at a time. And diplomat is widely considered one of the toughest courses to complete.

Ugh... why is everything so hard? Sex is easy and fun but trying to branch out to other interesting things just seems to lead me back to more sex. Though... I am starting to realise that I might have a problem.*