

## DEMONS 1051

### Chapter 1051 A Bottle of Wine... maybe two

Meng coughed, "Sorry, I'm getting a little passionate at the moment. Would you like a chair?"

"Ah... sure?" said Kat with a slow nod.

Meng nodded and clicked her fingers before dropping down onto what looks like thin air. Kat opened her mouth, closed it, looked around confused for a moment before Meng spoke up, "It's a solid illusion, just focus on trying to see it and you should be able to."

Kat frowned but did as she was asked and suddenly, she could see two beanbags in the room, one that Meng was relaxing in and one just behind her. It wasn't a chair sure, but it was clearly what Meng had been talking about. "Huh... I didn't know I could do that... and wait, how are these solid illusions? Wouldn't that make them REAL chairs? Er... beanbags?" asked Kat as she relaxed into the beanbag, doubly surprised when she felt her wings and tail sink into it like demonic furniture.

"Honestly?" asked Meng, and Kat nodded, "That is a philosophical, and contentious issue. It's also a matter of how you think about things. As someone specialised in ILLUSION cultivation, I want them to be illusions, because then I have more control over them. That's how a lot of cultivation can be, it's all about how you look at it. Take Lian for example. A blessing user might GIVE someone the ability to ignore wind resistance to make them faster... but Lian could TAKE the away the ability to effect the wind and produce roughly the same result. Though in the latter case it might cause suffocation..."

Meng shrugged in her chair and continued, "When I say it's a matter of perspective, I really do mean that. They are illusions because I think they are, and that lets me maintain control over them. If I stopped seeing them that way, then they'd either disappear, or perhaps become something I couldn't manipulate at all with my power,"

"Right... umm... hmm..." Kat looked at Meng and tried to focus on what she 'should' look like, but Kat couldn't see any changes in Meng's appearance, despite already knowing from looking through Lily's memories what Meng was 'supposed' to look like. "How come I can't see what you're trying to look like? I was trying the same trick with the chairs... but it doesn't seem to be working,"

Meng shrugged, "True sight is rare Kat. I know some things about it, but not much. Just a few titbits that would be useful for an illusionist to keep in mind, One of those is that you should, apparently, be able to chose to see the illusion... so I'm not sure what's different about the one around my body. Perhaps its because the chair is solid? I don't really know, I've never met someone with real True Sight, just a few artifacts that try to mimic the ability, and even those are quite rare. Plus, they only work on things weaker then a certain level,"

"Right," said Kat with a nod. \*I suppose I shouldn't have expected anything else. I already knew it was a rare ability. Hmm... I wonder if I always could see illusions with a thought, or if it's something I've gained after ranking up a few times?\*

The pair sat there in silence for a while. Meng takes out a large bottle and plucks out the cork. Kat can smell the alcohol. It burns her nose as the scent filles the room. Meng takes out a glass, pours one and then places it off to the side... before chugging the whole bottle. Kat just stares in a mix of confusion and

horror as Meng drinks the hole thing and then smashes it on the ground nearby. Kat was pretty sure that bottle had a high enough alcohol content to kill multiple mortals.

"Um..." mumbled Kat not sure what to say.

Meng, looked up and, getting the wrong idea said, "Do you want this glass? I did pour it out for you in case you wanted to share, so it's no trouble,"

"I... I think I'm good," said Kat, still reeling in shock.

Meng just shrugged and grabbed the glass, downing everything in it in one swift swallow. "Welp, I still feel retched," said Meng.

"Sorry?" said Kat.

Meng gave a sloppy shrug, her robe coming undone somewhat but not minding the change. Kat wasn't sure if it was because Meng was so used to using her illusions to keep a dignified appearance that she wasn't properly thinking about the fact Kat could see through them... or if she was just done caring. "Eh, it's not really your fault. I knew something like this would happen eventually so..." Meng trailed off with a shrug as she stared at her storage ring, likely pondering if she should get out more drinks.

"So... what do we do now?" asked Kat.

Meng shrugged, "How should I know Kat? I'm pretty well fucked regardless of what happens so I can't find it in myself to care all that much at the moment. Maybe once the alcohol kicks in properly I'll come up with something crazy,"

"Wait what do you mean you're... well... um..." Kat started, and failed to say...

"Fucked, Kat. I said FUCKED," giggled Meng.

"Right... yes that. Why? I mean... I haven't even attacked you yet?" said Kat.

Meng let out a long sigh, "The fact that you're already here is enough to cause no end of problems. The fact Sue has likely reported I'm a fake, and it means that my cover is gone. So, the way I see it, either I have to waste time fighting those rumours while my bosses make my life hell,

"Fight you, and win, then get fucked when Bodeir Sr comes for my ass. Fight you and lose, then get fucked when my bosses come for my ass. Don't fight you, and get fucked when my bosses come for my ass, or try running, and get fucked when they catch up to my ass," said Meng with a grin.

\*I feel like Sue would get along great with Meng... so with that in mind.\* "You seem awfully concerned with getting 'fucked' in the ass. I'm afraid I never wanted to know so much about my friend's mother's kinks," said Kat.

She did not expect to see Meng burst into tears. "You... you don't know how much that means to me,"

\*Right well it means nothing to me. Please elaborate, I am so confused.\* "Um... what? No seriously what are you talking about? Pretty sure I was insulting you there, jokingly, yes, but still insulting you,"

Meng wiped at her tears but shook her head, "No... no it's just... well I know enough to know demons can't lie, and to hear you still recognise me as Bing's mother means you believe I truly care for her..."

and... well I just expected that when it all eventually came crashing down I'd need to live with my daughter and all her friends hating me forever for 'removing her real mother'

"And before you ask," continued Meng with a raised hand, "I don't have any clue if Meng is alive or dead, and I only feel a little bad about stealing her family. I'm a selfish bitch like that, and a spy as well. I honestly feel worse about that time I bumped into Bing and she got a cut and she was four then what happened to her biological mother,"

\*Welp... thanks for the confirmation that you've been with Bing since she was no older than four Meng. Ugh... what the heck am I supposed to do with this information! Actually, wait a second...\*

"Um... just to check, everyone is fine on the other side of those doors right? No deadly weapons?" asked Kat.

Meng shook her head, "Nah, I intentionally botched that part of the job, for obvious reasons," Kat nodded. "Bodeir and the dwarf might have a bit of trouble, because I let them take artifacts that aren't particularly good matches, but it's not a serious worry unless they do something stupid,"

Kat groaned and put her face in her hands, "That sounds exactly like something Bodeir would do,"

"Woops," said Meng with a shrug, not all that concerned, "if it makes you feel better, or less restricted by the contract know that it's still probably better to just leave Bodeir to his idiocy. Probably. To the best of my knowledge anyway," Kat made a 'so-so' gesture, "eh I'll take what I can get. Like my alcohol,"

Meng did just that, bringing out a smaller wine bottle, but when the cork was taken off, clearly no weaker. Meng gave Kat a look, and Kat shook her head, before Meng downed the whole bottle again. Meng let out a nasty belch and Kat winced at the smell, "Sorry for being such a slob... but I just can't bring myself to care about it at the moment. Especially not with my real body. I keep in shape sure, but I've always been prone to hiding the fact I look like shit under illusions. Though there was that time I went without close for a day... turns out exhibitionism is NOT for me,"

Kat rolled her eyes, "Apparently I need to introduce you to Sue,"

### **Chapter 1052 ...Or three**

After Kat watched Meng down a third glass of wine, she decided to start offering suggestions, "What about defecting to the Mountain shaker sect?"

"You're just saying that because it would make Bodeir safer aren't you?" returned Meng.

Kat shrugged, "Eh, not really? I mean, yes now that you mention it that would be nice... but it's for two main reasons. One, is that you could play on the fact that Bodeir Sr is a parent as well, and the fact I ruined your cover and endangered your kids might be a good angle to try... the other reason is that I don't actually know the names of any other sects,"

"Did you not hear the announcer? I know for a fact you watched fights with people from other sect," responded Meng.

Kat made a 'so-so' gesture, "Technically? I mean, I'm sure I remember them because I have a perfect memory but they weren't important enough to be easily recalled,"

"Right... I'm going to just assume that's a demon thing. As for your suggestion... it's not the worst thing ever. Bodeir Sr is a strong cultivator in his own right, and joining with him might not be the worst idea ever... but he is in an alliance with The Holy Icy Wind Sect and that complicates matters from a political standpoint. I'm not supposed to be in charge, and if, or more likely WHEN it comes out that I was running things for years, he'd face a lot of problems from the other sects.

"That, and I'd almost certainly be forced to take one, or perhaps even multiple restrictions of some kind. From crippling my cultivation, making me a mortal and 'not worth worrying about' to allowing an explosive array to be engraved into my soul... or perhaps what they'd consider the most lenient, and I the cruelest, they'd take my children on as 'apprentices'" Meng spat. "Which would make them hostages in all but name. It also might not work for Lian...

"Because I never formally adopted her, if they can pressure her real parents, they can remove her from my authority pretty easily. Here I am sect master, and they wouldn't bother trying that sort of shit... but when it becomes a complicated political issue those sharks would take every advantage they can get,"

"Why do you seem to have such a hatred for politics. I mean I DO understand, but aren't you running a sect here?" asked Kat.

Meng sighed, "I turned out to be really talented. That's all there was to it. The Holy Icy Wind sect was responsible for the death of my family, and I was shoved into one of their orphanages where I nearly starved to death, this was quite some time ago by the way, I AM old, I'm not afraid to admit it. Anyway, one day a cultivator showed up pretending to be a grieving father, and he went around testing us for potential.

"Well, that's what I assume happened, the starvation really causes issues for my memories at the time. It was a few centuries ago now, and I'm just basing my guess about what they did later. I wasn't ever sent on recruiting missions because I showed a 'terrible predilection' towards doting on any young child put in my proximity after I turned seventeen...

"Anyway, so I got tested and found to have a useful affinity for spy work, and rather strong talent for cultivation, as far as they could tell anyway, so they bundled me up for training camp and I never looked back. It's probably the best thing to ever happen to me, even if I do somewhat hate them these days. That's more because my bosses are now idiots than any real anger about my situation.

"Anyway AGAIN. Sorry, apparently I ramble a bit when I'm drunk. I haven't really had the chance. To risky at base and certainly to risky to drink on the job. Those bottles you saw me drink have been in my ring for two centuries at least," Kat winced at how quickly Meng drunk bottles that were so old, "Anyway a third time! Politics. Turns out, I'm quite strong, and I managed to learn an ancient technique for illusions that let me bind an illusion to an artifact.

"It made the illusion impossible to see through for anyone below Rank 6, which is considered impossibly powerful for a Rank 4 like myself. It has a few restrictions, but nothing too bad. It made me the obvious choice for this job... and thus, despite my dislike of politics, I find myself embroiled in it. God being a spy and assassin was so much easier,"

"Really?" asked Kat, "I would have thought you'd be more adverse to being ordered around and killing things,"

Meng sighed and shook her head, "Kat, it seems like you're once again confusing me for a better person than I am by virtue of the wonderful daughter I raised. Kat, I am a MONSTER. I have assassinated more innocent men and women than I have lived years on this earth. I have killed enough cultivators to put me in the top 10 disasters in the continent if they could all be linked back to me.

"I was, and perhaps I still am, considered one of the best operatives my organisation has ever produced. I feel no guilt for killing people, even innocents. I am a broken woman Kat. I can love my family sure, and I'd kill for them... but that means nothing coming from me in truth. I'd kill someone for basically nothing as long as it wasn't too much effort. It would be like asking me to climb a mountain. Time consuming, but ultimately nothing truly difficult...

"I cannot say if I was born this way, or if the training I underwent as a small girl, and teenager destroyed what empathy I have for other human beings. It was only my love for children, and desire for a family of my own that remained. Perhaps it is my luck that children were almost never targeted by my organisation, and my skillset was better for taking out high priority targets stealthily.

"I never had to contend with the moral quandary of crossing that one boundary, killing children." Kat's gaze softened, "Oh don't give me that look. My organisation has the death of thousands of children on its hands and I still willingly work for them. It might not have been MY job to kill kids, but I'm sure it was someone's. I'm not leaving because I've suddenly realised I'm working for the bad guys Kat, I just finally have the one thing I've always wanted more than anything else, and I'm too selfish to give it up,"

Kat's lips stretched into a thin line. \*I'm really not sure what you're doing here Meng. It's almost like you're trying to get me to hate you... and I'm sorry but I just can't. Perhaps I should be horrified, and I don't know if it's because I don't really understand the sheer scale of killing you must have done, if it's just a demon thing, if it's because I don't really believe you on some level, or if it really is just because you're Bing's mother.. but I don't seem to have a problem with it. Does that make ME a bad person? Certainly not as bad a self-proclaimed assassin, but perhaps my priorities are out of order.\*

Kat did know it would be different if Meng regularly had to assassinate children. Her own years at the orphanage had made a caretaker of children, and her strength as a demon made her a defender of children, if she wasn't counted as one before. In the end though, it didn't really matter because Meng didn't partake in that part of her organisation. Perhaps, if she was not Bing's mother, Kat would have held the simple fact she was part of such a group against her... but Meng was too... too much of an individual presence in Kat's mind, it was hard to blame her for actions of a group when Kat knew she didn't participate in those.

Kat let out a long breath of air as she collapsed back into the beanbag she'd been surprised, head lolling over the back and forcing her to look at the ceiling and behind her somewhat, removing Meng from view entirely. It was the most vulnerable position Kat had put herself in so far... and idea time for Meng to strike if that was what she desired. The angle Kat was sitting in was horrendous, even with super speed, Meng could dash over and stab her heart before she was on her feet again. Kat knew this. Meng knew this... probably. She was pretty drunk after all.

Kat pulled herself forward and Meng was drinking a fourth bottle of wine. No sign she'd even considered going for Kat's throat while it was exposed. Perhaps she had thought about it, perhaps not... but whatever the case, that she did nothing was the truth. Kat just didn't know what to do about it. Not

now, any more than she did when she arrived. \*Maybe I should contact Lily? I might need her advice on this one...\*

### Chapter 1053 Sweet Dreams

\*Ok. Hopefully Lily will forgive me interrupting but I need advice. I just don't know what to do here. Meng seems genuine about her love for Bing... and really that's my deciding factor so far. Is it a good idea to leave Bing with an assassin though? Perhaps? I'm leaning towards yes... despite my misgivings.\*

"Hey, I'm just going to... stop paying attention for a bit to check on my partner if that's alright? I... well honestly I just don't have any good ideas, and I'd like to know if she's ok," said Kat.

"Meh, do what you like, I'm in no rush, and if my bosses use their truth compelling artifact I can honestly say I kept you busy this whole time. Misleading sure, but true enough for the artifact not to get pissy about it," said Meng with a wave... as she summoned a fucking barrel.

\*That's a barrel of alcohol, isn't it? You know what? I don't want to be paying attention to whatever shitshow is about to go down here anyway. I can at least say I'm doing major damage to Meng's liver...\*

Kat focused on her connection to Lily, opening it slowly just in case she was in combat. The last thing Kat wanted to do was distract Lily and get her hurt... but the link was strangely silent. Kat swallowed hard, ignoring the panic in her chest and carefully kept opening the connection more. Ever so slowly, Kat got more of the picture... and it was clear Lily was asleep. Still, Kat couldn't shake off her fear.

\*Dammit. Is she asleep because she's tired and safe? Or asleep because she's been captured and knocked out? Exhausted? Injured? I just don't know! Dammit Lily, why did you have to take up the habit of sleeping for most of the day! Now I can't be sure if there's anything wrong just based on the fact you're sleeping in the evening! Ugh... can I?\*

Kat pressed harder on the connection and felt her body in the real world shuddering slightly between her normal form and her dream walking form. \*Oh yes, right. I can enter people's dreams. Can I enter Lily's dream even from this distance?\*

Meng watched on as Kat went from solid demon, to pink smoke and back again before flopping unconscious, with just her horns as bright pink smoke. "Do I even want to know?" Meng glanced at the barrel, "Nah, I got better things to do,"

Kat groaned as she sat up in a mostly white space, the only thing of note was a bed off in the distance. She first got her bearings, shaking off the nausea and disorientation that came with the transition before stumbling her way over. Kat felt her eye twitching at the sight as she got closer. I don't know how to feel about this.

Lily was flat on her stomach on the bed, with a copy of Kat sitting on Lily's back and using one hand to scratch her ears while the other ran her nails across Lily's stomach. Lily was panting heavily and blushing bright red while dream Kat spoke, "You did such a good job with keeping Lian I just thought I'd reward you a bit,"

"Bmt U bagely mnnaged ta" Lily said, trying and failing to make a coherent sentence, constantly interrupting by a rumbling purr that shook her whole body.

\*I don't know how embarrassed I'm supposed to be about this? I kinda feel like a creep watching at the moment... but Lily is MY girlfriend and this is just a dream. Plus it's not like she's imagining someone else in my place, that's clearly me. So why do I still feel super awkward about this? And like... should I interrupt? I do have questions... but is it rude to interrupt my girlfriend while she's getting worked over by a dream clone of me?

Actually, new question? Does this count as masturbation? Technically speaking, this is all Lily's dream, and the dream me is just as much a part of her as the dream body of Lily is. Hmm... these are questions I... DON'T WANT ANSWERS TO DAMMIT. Back in the box naughty thoughts.\*

"Such a good kitty," whispered dream Kat into Lily's ears, "I think you did a fine job, after all, would I be doing this if you failed?"

"Yes!" meowed, Lily, making the real Kat chuckle off to the side, knowing that it WAS true. Kat would definitely be cheering Lily up somehow if she failed. Not like this sure.

Dream Kat grabbed Lily around her neck, squeezing just a bit, "Are you sure Lily? Are you sure you'd get a reward?" The real Kat frowned at that behaviour, but was surprised when Lily's blush, if anything, deepened as Lily barely managed to nod around dream Kat's hand.

"Oh? Well then..." started dream Kat as she reached down to play with Lily's skirt.

"Nope, nope, too far for real me, nope" mumbled Kat as she strode forward heavily. "Nope, nope, too far, I'm not watching this just for a bit of advice,"

Kat got to the bed, dream her probably should have been able to see the approaching demon but it was likely due to the fact this was a dream, and dream Kat wasn't really 'designed' to pay attention to anything but Lily. When Kat got to the side of the bed, she clapped, loudly, abusing her demonic strength for extra noise.

Dream Kat just raised an eyebrow but Lily spasmed in dream Kat's grasp as she tried to see what the having a nice dream about me... until things headed towards sex and... well that was a step too far.

I'm not willing to watch you have sex with someone else, even if that someone else is a dream sound was. When she saw a 'second' Kat nearby the whole area started to shake and crack. A blink later and Lily was looking at the real Kat, while sitting in dream Kat's arms. "Um... wait... what's going on?" said a confused Lily as the dream stabilised.

"Hey Lily," said Kat.

"Um... hey?" said Lily as her mind cleared, not that she noticed the difference. Her dream solidified with Kat's presence and direct intervention making everything seem more real. The 'room' gained floorboards and walls, as well as windows but no door or ceiling as Lily tried to figure out what was going around.

"I'm sorry to interrupt your fun time, but you see I needed advice," said Kat.

"But... but there's not normally two Kat's in my dreams. Wait I'm dreaming? How do I know that..." said Lily, before turning confused and glancing between both Kat's. Lily frowned as she kept looking between

them both before hissing and leaping away from the dream Kat she had been sitting on. Her hiss only deepened when the dream Kat barely reacted. "What's going on here," hissed Lily.

"Calm, Lily calm. You're just dreaming at the moment and I needed to ask you for advice on what to do about the Meng situation. I wasn't sure if I wanted to interrupt you while... well you were clearly having a nice dream about me... until things headed towards sex and... well that was a step too far. I'm not willing to watch you have sex with someone else, even if that someone else is a dream version of me. It makes me surprisingly jealous," explained Kat.

Lily's eyes widened and red crawled up her face as it morphed into a horrible expression, "Oh no... what have I done..." whispered Lily.

"Hey, Lily, Lily, chill. It's all a dream, sorta? Sorta literally? Look it's fine that you dream about sexy times with me. That's fine, I'm not mad, and I'm sure for couples it's very natural. But not only does it still make me jealous despite mentally knowing this is closer to masturbation than anything else, it's also really pushing the Teen rating on this story," assured Kat.

"Wait... what?" asked Lily.

"Well, this is all in your head right? Normally I wouldn't be involved at all, so it can't be sex. Even dream me is just an extension of YOU. Therefore it's masturbation," explained Kat.

"No the other thing," said Lily.

Kat just waved her off, "Don't worry about it, this is a dream,"

"I feel like I should worry about it a bit," said Lily.

Kat just smiled. "Don't."

Lily frowned but didn't argue, as she turned to properly face Kat while fixing up her clothes. The fake dream Kat gained cracks across her body before disappearing entirely, not that Lily noticed. "So... what did you need my help with exactly? I'm not sure I can think of any reason I'd NEED to help. Fighting is your area not mine, and if Bing and Bodeir are like... trapped or something I don't know enough about qj to help,"

"Yeah... no... much more complicated than that. Let me tell you about Meng, the one we thought was 'Fake Meng' and sort of is? Look it's complicated and that's why I need your advice Lily," said Kat. As she started to explain the ridiculousness that was Meng, and the confusing situation Kat had ended up in. Starting with just how long Fake Meng, who was really a Meng as well, had been acting as Bing's mother.

#### Chapter 1054 No Easy Answers

"Yeah I got nothing," Lily's blunt statement hit Kat with the force of a hundred roaring trucks. "Kat, don't look so surprised, my own fight wasn't nearly as morally confusing and I don't have the answers to everything. Why are you acting like I should have the answers to the meaning of life?"

"Because you almost always do?" offered Kat. Lily rolled her eyes as Kat continued, "And what do you mean your own fight? What exactly happened on your end,"



“Eh, it’s fine, we got away... but it was mostly a question of what to do. Even if the servants were the ‘death before dishonour’ type, they were just doing a job, not even an evil one. We did break into their master’s house. Plus, if one of them was a friendly acquaintance, or even just outright friend of Bing’s? Yeah really didn’t want to be responsible for that,” explained Lily.

Kat gave a commiserating nod, she could obviously understand the feeling, as that was a large part of her current issue. Making sure that she didn’t have to kill Meng, and that Meng wouldn’t inadvertently be killed by the actions she’d already taken, or the ones she was planning to take. It was a problem though. “So you’re fine then?” asked Kat.

Lily nodded, “Mostly, I needed to use all my mana to summon up a permanent paper plane so that Lian could fly us out of there. I knew it would knock me out when I did it, and as far as I can tell my planned worked. I haven’t woken up at least, and I’m not dead. Probably not injured either... I think I’d wake up from that? Maybe? I feel like my dreams would be much more distressing in the very least,”

“I don’t know enough about dreams to say,” said Kat as she tapped her thoughtfully.

“Right... but regardless, I’m afraid I just can’t help you here Kat. I have no idea what to prioritise, and worse, the situation is so complicated that even if I DID know what I wanted to do with Meng, there doesn’t seem to be a clear path to go about that isn’t deciding, and then following up on the idea, of killing her,” said Lily with a wan smile.

Kat winced but nodded. It wasn’t a good solution, not if she wanted Bing to be pleased with the result. It was still the simplest, and only clean solution. Kill Meng, say that you took out the traitor but couldn’t figure out what happened to the ‘real’ Meng and then leave the world before it really became a problem. Bing would likely be devastated for some time afterwards as well...

Kat didn’t think she could live with herself if she lied to Bing about how it all went down, nor about the entire truth regarding her mother, or both mothers really. \*Dammit. If only I could safely talk to Bing and get her help dealing with this shit. Then again, asking her if she wants me to murder her mother because her current mother kidnapped and shipped off her biological one really doesn’t set the tone for a constructive conversation. Fuck, Meng, why did you have to make this all so hard.\*

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“So do you have any advice for me?” asked Kat.

“Follow your heart,” said Lily with a cheeky grin.

“You’re my heart. So get to the advice please,” said Kat with a grin, very pleased that it didn’t count as a lie. A metaphor perhaps, but she meant what she said. Lily of course went bright red at the suggestion before making an adorable whine that made Kat want to imitate a few of the ideas that dream Kat had provided her with.

\*BACK. BACK IN THE BOX WITH YOU.\* Kat mentally beat back the thoughts that had sprung up from the box labelled, ‘The Talk, Vivian edition. Do Not Open’. Kat didn’t let any of that show on her face though, she just kept staring at Lily which really wasn’t helping her girlfriend calm down in the slightest. Aw well.

Eventually though, Lily did manage to calm down and Kat pulled her into a hug. “So, any real advice for me this time?” Kat whispered after giving Lily a light kiss on the forehead.

Lily pouted in Kat's chest, "I really don't know what to tell you Kat. I didn't see Meng during her breakdowns, I can't judge her honesty from here. Don't worry too much about the consequences right now. We CAN leave if it really comes down to it. What matters, is that we leave content in the results,"

Kat frowned at the statement. As true as it was, Kat didn't really see it helping in anyway. \*I was already more or less going to do that.\* Kat did however, continued to run her hands through Lily's hair. No sense in making Lily feel bad, it was good advice... just not useful advice. \*Guess I've just got to go back and... well DEAL with this whole thing. Eugh, Meng is going to be smashed when I get back isn't she?\*

"Right well... I couldn't live with myself if Meng got hurt before Bing has a chance to talk to her... so I guess we're just going to sit around and wait or something? I'm not sure if Meng can just... sit around that whole time though. Sure I can wait... maybe... but I'm not sure SHE can. And we need to contact Sue... hmmm... could I sneak a message to Sue somehow? Can YOU sneak one to her Lily?"

"Um... maybe? Not sure what I can do once I wake up. I suppose it depends on where Lian set us down and how many people are looking for us," said Lily.

"Hmm...." Kat bit her lips. "I... hmm... if I'm just killing time and Meng needs to do other stuff... I might be able to give her like, a chunk of my water body and have that be delivered to Sue to pass on the message? I wonder if sending KatE with the message would work? She's made of demonic fire... so can she pass through the walls?"

"I think the bigger concern would be running out of energy before reaching Sue if you took that option. We don't actually know where you are in relation to everything else is at the moment right?" returned Lily.

"Dammit, why does this have to be so complicated?" whined Kat.

"Yeah... this has turned into one of the weirder situations," said Lily. "It's probably made worse by the fact that we can effect the outcome in a major way, but it's not our main objective... but because of our main objective we do have to take some sort of action. Makes me wish Bodeir Sr had left us with our own communication talismans or something to send messages back,"

"Unless he had some that worked on mana, just for you, they wouldn't work. Remember, demonic energy doesn't play nice, and on top of that we were keeping you more of a secret back then so he didn't KNOW we had access to mana, or well, a person with mana to reply to a communication talisman," retorted Kat.

Lily just gave a shrug and Kat nodded, giving her a kiss on the lips this time. "I guess I'll have to leave and just... start working things out. I... I can't kill her so I'll need Meng's help. Hopefully it works out..." mumbled Kat.

Lily couldn't help it when her face twitched into a frown at the idea of Kat leaving but she knew it had to be done, so she returned with a kiss of her own before stepping back and trying to smile. It wasn't a great attempt, but it was enough. So Kat gave a bow, and then felt herself being tugged...

And next she opened her eyes she was back in the vault and Meng... well Meng was something else. Her appearance was even more dishevelled, her face was flushed red and her robe was left hanging open.

Her stomach was visibly distended and Kat was about how that had even happened to such a high ranking cultivator when she noticed the FIVE barrels sitting around Meng. "Oh Meng... that cannot be good for you,"

Meng turned her drunken eyes to Kat and let out a burp. Kat winced, disgusted at the smell and the sight as she waved her hand in an ineffectual attempt to get rid of the smell. "Urp... um... welcome back Kat? I... got a bit worked up after you peaced out... alone with my thoughts you know? So... got out the cheap stuff. Basically just poison really,"

Kat felt her eye twitching, "Meng... I do NOT want to have Bing come out to find her dead or unconscious mother, not because of something I did, and certainly not because of something YOU DID TO YOURSELF. Now can you please... I dunno use some poison purging cultivator trick?"

"Why do you think I have one of those?" asked Meng.

"Meng, you're a spy AND the head of a sect, of course you do," retorted Kat.

Meng pouted, "Of course I do... but it shouldn't have been that easy to guess,"

### **Chapter 1055 Masks**

Meng had cleaned up well, her outfit had been swapped out for a new one without any wrinkles and was no longer falling off her frame, the barrels had been returned to her storage ring to be dealt with later and Meng's face no longer carried the flush of alcohol. Finally, her stomach had returned to its toned, flat appearance it normally had. There was just one notably omission. The smell. "Can't you do anything about the smell?" whined Kat.

Meng just shrugged, "There's nothing I can really do about it with the transport array offline. Sure we've got some air purifiers, but they don't really change the smell of the place. We just cycle the air with the transport array a few times to clean the place out occasionally. With that down, and me not actually being a wind cultivator there isn't much I can do. Especially when a scent based illusion still wouldn't work on you because you're a demon with truesight,"

"Urgh, fine I guess. So what are we going to do now?" asked Kat.

"Shouldn't that be my question? You are the one with the power here. Are you going to tie my up? Beat my into submission? Fuck me into submission?" Kat recoiled at the suggestion, "Hey YOU'RE the succubus not me. It's a perfectly reasonable guess. Imagine how Bing would feel, to come out and see her poor, ravaged mother? She'd be devastated and scarred for life," sighed Meng.

"Then why are you advocating for it!" hissed Kat.

Meng shrugged, "Seemed like the most fun way to pass the time,"

"Well I'm sorry but I'm an asexual virgin so I really have no interest in having sex with someone who is barely above a stranger and certainly not my FRIENDS MARRIED PARENT" retorted Kat.

"Technically speaking, I never married the original Bang, nor the person who took his place, so I'm not really married..." started Meng...

But Kat cut her off, "Nope, you've played at being married to Fake Bang for decades. By the same argument that Bing is your kid, Fake Bang is your husband. And even if you were single, I'm NOT. Though if you REALLY need to get your rocks off somehow you can... I dunno, go set up an orgy with Sue somehow. I'm sure she'd be happy to help with basically anything sexual at all,"

"I'll keep that in mind," said Meng with a nod. Kat really didn't want to know if Meng would go looking for Sue to confirm the offer.

"Right... hopefully you have that out of your system now. What are we doing?" asked Kat.

"I've already said that should be MY question Kat, why don't you come up with the plan?" returned Meng.

"Because I don't really have a plan!" hissed Kat. "I'm willing to help you, and do what I can to make sure this whole fiasco turns out... perhaps not well, but in an acceptable manner for everyone involved, including you as long as Bodeir Jr isn't hurt of course. What I don't have, is enough experience to know what we should even be aiming for. You talk about how screwed you were with all of the options well... which one is the best?"

"I don't know," grumbled Meng.

"How do you not know!" yelled Kat back at her face, with more than a little venom. "You had to have at least some idea that this was coming. At least a decade! Why would you expect me to have a better idea of what's going on Meng! I've been here barely a week and I found out you were a fake MAYBE five hours ago, tops. I've given you suggestions, good ones I thought, but you keep putting this off. I'm beginning to think that you don't WANT help,"

Meng groaned, "Well maybe I DON'T want help. Kat, I don't know what I want. No, that's not true. I want Bing and Feng to grow up safe, happy and healthy. I want them to perhaps look upon me fondly... but I am a child assassin. I'm amazed I did so well raising them... but that was when I was trying to be someone else Kat. That's what I am to them when I sleep into the role that as Matriarch Meng. Assassin Meng has NO idea what to do. She doesn't have experience, the framework, or the emotional capacity to DEAL with all of this,"

"You're talking about her like she's a different person," said Kat.

"She basically IS Kat," admitted Meng with a sigh. "It's part of an illusion technique to take on aspects of your target. Only aspects, and technically my core values can't be changed... but I've let down the mask now, and assassin Meng has to deal with all this bullshit now, and she's NOT equipped for this. I want to pretend I'm not her, pretend I'm Matriarch Meng for a while and figure things out that way... but then that's still the mask!"

"You didn't bring this up before," said Kat. "And it seems like it's something you really should have,"

Meng threw her arms up into the air, "I'm not perfect Kat. I have the emotional range of a teaspoon like this. Part of me is surprised I still love me kids. A horrible, terrible part I don't want to recognise... but a cultivator is nothing if not self-aware. It's been a big contributor to my breakdown and recent alcoholism. The question of if I still love them... and if it will hold true when I see them for real..."

"Right now? I'm at a sort of... limbo with them. I still feel the same echoes that the mask supplied me... and in the abstract I love them both, no all three... but what about in person? What about when I gaze on my children for what is in some ways the first time? That's not even taking into account if it would be better to send them away from me.

"I'll be hunted down just for betraying the organisation... but if I get Bing and Feng far enough away and then keep running, they should be left alone. Their status as twin heirs not terribly important after the sect collapses... or do I try and stick it out? Even if Bodeir Sr knows the truth, which I'm sure he does by now, maybe I can come to a deal with him and we can let things go as they are?

"These are all options Kat, and you ask why I want you to have a plan? Well Matriarch Meng never saw a reason for escape, a NEED to escape, and assassin Meng never wanted to deal with the idea in anything more than an abstract sense of 'if the sect is lost flee with the children, they are the priority objective' now I have to actually think? And Kat, I can't say I'm enjoying the experience,"

"Why are you acting like a child! Meng you are hundreds of years old!" retorted Kat.

"Because I have the emotional range of a four-year-old" shot back Meng.

Kat's eye twitched as she walked up to stare Meng down. Meng just stared up in defiance, until Kat open palm slapped her across the face. "Thanks I needed that," mumbled Meng as Kat turned around and sat back down. "Ok... so I'm exaggerating a bit... but... this is terrifying for me Kat. I don't think you understand what taking orders for centuries does to a person. As much as I can't stand going back, and can't stand abandoning my kids... it's like I can't properly comprehend the idea of actually solving the problem, certainly not well!"

Kat paused at that for a moment. \*Wait a minute...\* "What are the chances that's a magically reinforced limitation you're currently fighting against and the cause of your mood swings?" offered Kat.

Meng gaped at Kat like a fish. She tried to close her jaw but it kept falling back open. Eventually she just slapped herself again. "Oh... oh fuck you're probably right. Damn... those bastards got me good didn't they? It isn't that I CAN'T think about betraying them... but that I can't think about betraying them PROPERLY. Better for traitors to try and fail, then to just waste energy forcing compliances. I bet they can make a proper example out of people this way,"

"That certainly complicated matters," groaned Kat into her hands. "What are the chances you'll be forced to sabotage yourself if you're making a genuine effort according to my plans?"

Meng made a 'so-so' gesture, "I'd suspect that there's about an even chance either way. If I DO start sabotaging things, they'll either be in minor unconscious ways, or they'll be super obvious but I'll be able to fight against it. That's assuming that they were able to get their hooks that deep into me without noticing... it's... possible certainly, but that's more for those of lower Rank. At 4 I should be safe... maybe? I think I should be safe but that might be part of the compulsion I'm not almost certain I'm being subjected to. Fuck,"

"Ok, well... I'm going to do something that's probably stupid, but differently stupid," said Kat. "I need to let Sue know what's going on and while I doubt it, she might have some ideas for us,"

Meng nodded, a glint in her eyes, "She seems like a woman with all sorts of wonderful ideas, I support this decision wholeheartedly,"

"And yet suddenly I find myself feeling like I'm making a mistake... but fine whatever," grumbled Kat as she called up her power. There was a bit of resistance, and a sharp, tugging sensation on what had to be her soul before KatE burst into existence in all of her flaming glory.

"Ok... but like... what is that and why do I feel the need to run away and never look back?" asked Meng as she leaned away from KatE instinctively.

"This one has been given the designation KatE, though perhaps for your mortal and unenhanced tongue, Kate will have to suffice. I am, in essence, semi-sentient demonic energy with a small slither of Kat's soul to give me preferences apart from the desire to burn everything to the ground," explained KatE as she moved over to the wall and put her hand on it.

Ice started to cover the wall as Kat frowned, "Wait... so am I giving up a piece of my soul every time I summon you?"

"This one does not believe so," responded KatE in her standard tone. "Through what details I was able to glean from my second foray into existence it is likely that the shard is returned and needs time to properly reintegrate itself into the main body of our shared soul before I am resummoned. I have no information to suggest it is the same slither of soul each time, which should, in theory, mean that I will grow more like you as I share various parts of your soul,"

"Well it's fucking creepy is what it is, no offence," said Meng

"I take no offence, as I do not appear to be capable of producing the correct emotional response associated with 'offence' or 'being offended'. I will carry out Kat's orders without fail, and then return to Kat's body. Speaking of, how are you right now Kat, you were not in any proper state last time," said KatE

"It's really weird... I feel... hollow definitely and drained. I only have about twenty-percent of my demonic energy left and I think it might slowly be dropping. That's twenty-percent AFTER Lily's share as well. I can see through your eyes but I can't control your actions, or at least, it doesn't seem that way. Not a fan, of the experience personally," explained Kat after a bit of thought.

"Interesting, I appear to be able to sense your intentions and direction yet I do not see through your eyes as you do mine. Furthermore, it appears I can now leave this cavern," informed KatE

"Hey, how are you getting out?" asked Meng.

"I am comprised almost solely of demonic energy and as such it is possible to force my form through solid objects. It is a wasteful technique, that requires me to saturate the material with large portions of my demonic energy reserves and under most circumstances simply running around the problem or breaking my way through is more useful. Alas, not this time," said KatE

"Stupid demons, able to no-sell all the defences on my best vault just by existing. Should hire more demons to steal shit," grumbled Meng.

KatE gave Kat a nod and then zipped through the wall. Once on the other side KatE took off, heading down the mountain towards Sue. That little trick with the wall took over half her demonic energy reserves, and KatE noticed her reserves only dropped, not recovered, despite Kat also seemingly losing energy. "Truly a bother," mumbled KatE as she made her way down the mountain.

It took some time, but eventually she was in a familiar town. When she found herself at the mansion, KatE could see it swarming with activity through the windows. KatE just walked up to the door and forced the handles open. They were locked, but compared to her own strength it was a minor thing. Hromdir was barking orders from the central staircase so she just walked up behind him and waited for a moment.

When the air started to chill Hromdir turned around, then leapt backwards with great force once he saw KatE's form. "Are... are you dead? Are you the wraith of the demon come to complete her mission?" asked Hromdir, voice shaking as he did so. From just the cold... or more... KatE lacked the emotional bandwidth to properly consider.

"Your assumption about my existence is incorrect, I am an ability of my original creator, Kat and have come to deliver a message to yourself and Sue. Please call her here so that we can discuss the plan for the future," explained KatE.

Hromdir nodded and called over another servant to get Sue and headed off to a room they had secured for meetings since Bodeir's disappearance. Inside was Creshe as well, who KatE supposed was here representing the ship's captain, someone they still hadn't met yet. Sue came in soon and looked at KatE in shock.

"Greetings compatriot Sue, I am KatE, as you likely know. I have come bearing a message," said KatE.

"Right, well... go ahead I guess?" said Sue in slightly confused response.

"Indeed, the situation is as follows..." KatE quickly went on to explain the whole situation with Meng, and then requested advice.

"Why not simply take out Meng herself. I understand if you are fond of young mistress Bing, but Bodeir's life IS your priority as per the contract," asked Hromdir.

"It is still dangerous to interrupt someone when attuning to an artifact is it not?" asked KatE "Assume that Kat took the fight to Meng. It is entirely possible Meng left behind some delayed illusion or way for her to disrupt the bonding process. If Kat decides to fight, despite Meng's seemingly amicable position, it likely increase the danger to Bodeir Jr. Not necessarily of course, and Kat has no delusions that she is attempting this course of action because of both her own and Sue's budding friendship with Bing, but it does appear to be the least likely to result in damage to Bodeir assuming we can escape Bang's notice, and even if we obtain it, still might be safest,"

"I think the lass is making a fine choice... though I do have to ask, what's with all the complicated plans?" asked Creshe.

"What do you mean?" asked KatE

"Why can't Meng just grab her kids and run? The world is quite large, simply running until she enters another continent once or twice would likely see her outside of the main powers on this one. They may

remember her, but with some minor work she could join up with a sect on the other side of the globe. It seems like the best of all solutions," explained Creshe.

KatE paused completely, shuddering a bit like a crashing computer program before returning to normal operations. "It appears that solution was not considered by my original or Meng herself. While it is excusable for Meng, as she is likely restrained in some way, Kat has no such excuse, nor does Lily. I will ensure they are properly ashamed for missing such an easy solution,"

Hromdir glared a bit at Creshe, having intended to try and convince KatE and by extension, Meng that defecting to the Mountain Shaker sect was the best idea, yet he could already see just how much better Creshe idea is. Despite nominally being in charge of the Holy Icy Wind sect Meng was bound to lose that very same power quite soon. Her only value would be as a Rank 4 cultivator and whatever she manages to steal before leaving. Her children valuable only for their talent, but a powerful Rank 4 illusionist would be strong enough to protect them from most who desired them. A Rank 4 was nothing to scoff at.

"Is there any proper timeline regarding when we need to leave? How long will master Bodeir need to attune to the artifact," asked Hromdir.

KatE shrugged, "I cannot answer that. Meng did not know as she made sure he chose a purposely ill-fitting artifact that would give him difficulty to attune, yet it was never explained what the standard attuning time actually was to myself or Kat," answered KatE.

"Hmm..." mumbled Hromdir, not knowing the answer either. Not for one that was not innately compatible with the young master.

Sue, seeing that neither Creshe nor Hromdir had any questions decided to ask, "So how is everyone?"

"Kat is suffering under Meng's alcoholism induced burping, Lily is unconscious but safe and Lian is likely protecting her but still greatly weakened from her self-sacrificial attempts to provide Kat with a way to help Bing, and does not yet know of the truth of Meng so is likely still panicking a great deal," said KatE blandly.

Sue groaned, "Can you do anything to help them?"

"I only retain approximately ten percent of my demonic energy reserves. I will be force dismissed in no more than five minutes," explained KatE as Sue glared at the energy construct.

## **Chapter 1057 Lian on Me**

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Lily's transformation seemed to almost forcibly activate as she returned to her human form, face down on the ground in a cave. Every beat of her heart sent waves of pain through her body. Her mana wasn't rampaging around anymore, but apparently that didn't mean she would be completely fine. Apparently heavily damaging your internal spiritual organs was a dumb idea? Who knew?

\*Why am I on the floor though? I didn't mean to transform, but what is Lian doing that she would just leave me on the ground? I swear if I'm actually in a cell Kat is going to be SO pissed with me.\*

[Kat can hear you just fine thank you very much.]



\*Oh.\*

[Yeah, 'Oh' exactly. I didn't have any reason to close the connection after finding out you were safe and asleep so I just ignored it for the most part because I didn't want to experience your dreams. You should have SOME privacy after all. Now, what's this about being in a cell?]

\*Um... nothing?\*

Lily could feel Kat's deadpan stare on her even through the connection. Kat was thoroughly unimpressed with her response to potential danger. Which meant she actually needed to try and figure out where they were. Lily cracked an eye open and found only darkness. Which was not a great sign.

Swapping her focus to her ears, Lily found she could hear one set of shallow breaths echoing off a number of walls. \*Hmm... right ok. I think, and this is just a best guess because I can't actually see, but I THINK Lian passed out carrying me into these caves and that's why I'm on the floor.\*

[Don't think I can't detect the undercurrent of pain coming from your part of the link. I know it ain't my pain because I'm sitting here sipping on pear juice squeezed from some rare plant in this cultivation world.]

\*Is it any good?\*

Asked Lily in an attempt to distract Kat. It didn't really work, though Kat did answer.

[It's alright. Apparently 100 year magical pear juice is inferior to just dumping sugar and preservatives into a big vat and then trapping it in plastic to sell to the masses. It's not BAD exactly, but considering how rare this stuff is supposed to be? Doesn't seem worth the effort. I'm sure there's some cultivation benefit for people of this world, but as a demon it's just fairly average pear juice. Now. Pain?]

\*Fine... I did something that was perhaps a bit stupid. See, it turns out, once you cast a spell you're not meant to MOVE the spell circle it came with. It causes the mana in your body to go on a rampage and I might be feeling the after-effects of that.\*

[Why would you even do that in the first place? And didn't your book tell you NOT to do that?]

\*It seemed necessary at the time, and as for the second question... well I'm guessing that it's a universal thing across all schools of magic and that the book's owner assumed whoever was reading it would know enough basic knowledge about sigils to know moving them is a bad idea. My guess is there isn't a safe way to move them, you're supposed to make the movement part of the spell.\*

[I suppose I'll reserve judgement until it's clear just how much you've hurt yourself with that stunt. Do you want me to leave you to working out what's going on with Lian? Or do you have questions for me?]

\*Um... anything new I should know about after you talked to me in that dream? Or why is my dream so clear in my mind?\*

[No idea for the second, perhaps my ability makes dreams easier to remember? Perhaps just you? Perhaps you can sort of see my memories of it that reinforce your own? No ideas just some guesses. As for anything new... well I talked to Sue and she seems to think that running is the best idea, and Creshe and Hromdir seem to agree with her.]

\*How did you do that?\*

[Sent KatE to check on them.]

\*Was that... safe?\*

[Sort of? So apparently summoning KatE fragments my soul a bit every time, however before you freak out, apparently it's very recoverable.]

\*I was under the impression you couldn't just damage a soul like that?\*

[I dunno? Maybe it's because I'm doing it to myself? Maybe it's not the important bits of the soul? Maybe it's because I'm a demon. I already asked D.E.M.O.N.S and apparently that's Rank 5+ restricted information.]

\*Ugh fine. I guess I'll figure out what to do now.\*

[Cool. I'll try not to intrude on your thoughts too much, though I'm not closing the link so I'll probably still be here.]

\*No problem Kat.\*

Lily transformed with remarkable ease. After the annoyance she'd gone through before, her transformation was being remarkably cooperative right now. A few flashes between forms to confirm that nothing was inhibiting it anymore, and a few wincing from the pain, Lily padded over to what was almost certainly Lian's downed form as a Memphis.

As soon as she got close, it was clear it was the goth. Lian had a pretty distinct smell, perhaps from the curses, but it was a bit like wilting roses. Despite all the dirt and grime in the cave, the smell was quite easily identifiable. Hopping over to Lian's front, Lily put a whisker in front of Lian's nose.

\*Hmm... breathing steady and not too weak. Perhaps she exhausted herself? She was not well and I had to carry her, then she had to figure out how to fly a paper plane while in her exhausted state and carry me into these caves. It's unclear how deep we are, so it may have taken some time. Damn I should have asked Kat how long it had been.\*

Lily waited for Kat's response, assuming that her girlfriend was paying more attention than Kat would admit to... but there was no answer forthcoming. \*Hmm... either she isn't listening... or a more likely guess is that she doesn't know. I'm pretty sure she's still stuck in the vault so without a way to tell the passage of time I doubt she could answer anyway.\*

\*Welp. I need Lian awake to know just how bad things are. Plus I can... start filling her in on all the Meng weirdness as well.\* Lily started to squish her paws into Lian's cheeks. It was surprisingly effective, only a few squishes and Lian was already stirring. An arm reached blindly around near her position but Lily easily jumped over it. Lian managed to sit up against the cave wall and groan. "Ugh my head..."

Transforming, Lily added her own input, "Well at least it's not your everything. I feel like somebody decided it was a good idea to put needles in my bloodstream and they act up every time my heart beats,"

"That... cannot be good. How are you functioning right now?" asked Lian with some worry.

"Not sure... maybe it's not actually that bad? Maybe I'm pushing the pain down the link to Kat accidentally? Actually it's probably that second one and Kat has a stupid high pain tolerance so she

probably just thinks it's normal bleed over. It is NOT fun, but I need to know what happened after we passed out," said Lily.

"Wait, is Bing ok?" asked Lian

"She's pretty fine?" offered Lily uncertainly.

"Well isn't that more important? You're connected to Kat right? How did the fight go? What happened? Why are you seemingly uncertain as to the answer?" asked Lian rapid fire.

"Well Lian... it got complicated. At the moment, Bing is attuning to an artifact so she's probably fine, and fake Meng didn't sabotage Bing's selection, yes I'm in connection with Kat, no there was no fight, and I'm uncertain because it's fucking confusing. Turns out... the Fake Meng, is ALSO called Meng, and Bing's mother was replaced... a long time ago," explained Lily.

"What the fuck? Why was there no fight! It doesn't matter how long ago Meng was replaced by the Fake Meng, why would Kat not fight against someone who probably got Bing's mother killed!" hissed Lian.

"See... that's the thing Lian... as far as Kat can tell? Meng was replaced weeks if not days after Bing was born..." said Lily.

"No" whispered Lian in horror.

"I'm afraid it does really seem to be the case," said Lily with a sigh.

"Then... then... what... what does that mean?" asked Lian, voice quivering with emotion.

"It means a lot of things... but that's one of the reasons Kat was willing to forgo a fight. Meng really does care about Bing and Feng, she has been their mother basically their entire life and that love is not just a mask. It is however going to cause MASSIVE issues now, because the Mountain Shaker Sect already know she's a fake because we freaked out. And well... she IS a fake just... not in the ways that really matter to us as your friends," explained Lily with a wince.

"I... I need time..." whispered Lian.

## Chapter 1058 Shatter the World

It was hard to keep track of time when everything was dark and Lian wasn't interested in talking. It was made worse by the pain Lily experienced when she tried to do a bit of training with her spells. \*Yup. Ok, you win body. I won't cast anything until I stop hurting. Pain is your body telling you that you've fucked up somewhat and I should respect that. As much as I want new magic and feel the need to be stronger... it's not worth crippling myself over. Which, could very much be on the table. I didn't know what I did was a bad idea... now I have to hope it wasn't a catastrophic one... or if it is, Nira can fix it.\*

Eventually though, Lian had too many questions in her mind to avoid Lily forever. So she crawled over to the Memphis and asked, "Ok... I... I'm still not entirely comfortable, or... I haven't really dealt with the whole 'Fake Meng' issue but... can you just go over it again? One more time... just... as dull and clinical as you can be?"

"Sure... um... just let me..." mumbled Lily as she transformed for vocal cords and readied herself. Lily spent a minute getting the wording right and then let it flow, "To the best of our knowledge the original

Meng was replaced by the current Meng within days or weeks of the twins' birth. After that, Bang was replaced in short order and since then they have both continued to run the sect as best they could without letting people figure out that Meng and Bang have been replaced.

"Meng was chosen for this assignment both for her name, her loyalty, and her affinity which happens to be illusions. Something their parent organisation did not account for however, is that Meng, despite their training, still has one desire above all others and that was for children. So now that they are at risk, and Kat has called her out on being a fake, Meng had a bit of a breakdown, and we are now working together to try and get the best result for everyone involved while keeping Bodeir safe, as Kat, Sue and I MUST do,"

Lian let out a long breath of air, "So I've never known the original?"

Lily shook her head, "No. Based on when Meng was replaced there was no way for you to ever meet the original Meng,"

"Is the original Meng alive?" asked Lian.

"I don't know, and Meng doesn't either," answered Lily.

"I... is there anything else you feel I should know?" asked Lian.

.....

"Um... hmm... well... maybe? Meng, the current one that is, said a lot of things and Kat relayed most of that to me while I was dreaming. One of them is that she understands you. As a cultivator with a talent for illusions she understands you a lot better than Feng and Bing and has claimed you as her daughter as well... so... if Bing and Feng do run away, Meng isn't just going to leave you here," said Lily.

"Ah" said Lian voice breaking as tears leaked from her eyes. She didn't know how to feel about that. So much of her was screaming that it was wrong, that she shouldn't be happy to hear that some assassin liked her on any level... but just as Meng wanted nothing more than children, Lian wanted parents that didn't hate her. Meng had already been that substitute so to hear that Lian was just as precious to Meng as her own children meant a lot. This fact further cemented itself in Lian's mind because technically speaking Feng and Bing were adopted as well.

Lily awkwardly pulled herself to her feet and did a few stretches as Lian went silent. The pain was lessening somewhat, but Lily suspected it had more to do with getting used to it than a true reduction in pain. Perhaps it would be a good reason not to try untested techniques with her spells. In the end, after a few stretches Lily just occupied herself with drawing shapes in the dirt on the ground. No sense interrupting Lian as her whole world gets destroyed.

Still, trapped as they were, Lian eventually had to speak, even if just to get her thoughts in order. "God this is such a mess. I don't know what Bing is going to think when she finds out. I really wish I could be there for her... but I don't know what sort of timeline we're working on and the transport array should be unusable because of us. So I can't even go through to help them.

"I still feel like shit. Not from the news, but I'm not exactly topped up on qi and I don't know how long it takes to recover from extreme blood loss so I'm a bit dizzy. I've got food and water in my storage ring so

I'm not going to die, it just isn't a fun experience. The real problem? I have no idea what I'm supposed to do with this information you've given me. I was working myself right up you know?

"I'm sure you and Kat figured it out but I was pretty set to die on this mission. I was expecting to be left behind, captured, and then executed unless you managed to free me. Then I would be branded a traitor and hunted for the rest of my likely short life. I knew that going in and I didn't regret it for a second. If that's what it took to make sure Bing was safe? That was all worth it to me. If Meng was found and rescued as well? That was a bonus.

"Now however, I find out that the 'real' Meng has been an imposter for years and apparently nobody noticed. I also know that she loves me and frankly I don't know how to deal with that either. It was a lot easier when Meng was just 'My best friend's Mom' you know? It was a simple relationship, and I probably still leaned on her for affection and affirmation more than I should have as just my friend's mom... but she isn't that is she?

"Well now I'm still alive, and pretty safe, albeit quite lost. The Meng I thought I knew was a just a mask, but likely one with more truth than the spy using it would be comfortable with. I have a home to go back to, but not for long because the Mountain Shaker sect knows that Meng is a spy. Which is annoying, despite it being true... and I just don't really know what to do Lily..."

"Um... what was that about being lost?" asked Lily with a wince.

"Ooh... right..." Lian shared Lily's wince though with nothing to provide the pair neither noticed. "So... I was pretty close to falling over while I was trekking through the snow, but I made it to the cave I thought was nearby, and I just sort of... kept walking till I passed out? I was however, more than a bit delirious the whole time I was walking and now I'm awake my memories of walking through the caves have all sort of blurred together. Now I don't know how deep we are, how many alternate paths there are, if we got turned around at all. Frankly, we're lost,"

Lily let out an exaggerated groan, "Ugh, that means we're probably stuck down here then? Kat should be able to find me eventually once things calm down... but we're stuck here by ourselves until then... why were you paying such little attention? Surely you didn't want to be trapped here forever?"

Lian folded her arms over her chest and glared at Lily, though the darkness really killed the effect, "Yes Lily, I am aware that I made a rooky mistake now that I'm not suffering from exhaustion and blood loss. No 'Thanks for landing the plane' or 'sorry I passed out on your first despite knowing you were missing most of your blood' just 'how could you not manage to remember a labyrinth while moments away from collapse?'"

Lily winced, apparently Lian had taken her mostly joking tone as true recrimination. "Lian it's fine really, I wasn't seriously complaining, or well, I was complaining and I was serious that it's a problem but I don't blame you for it, not really. I'm more annoyed you thought doing so much damage to yourself was an acceptable trade, but that's not really what we're talking about right now..."

"Well what else could I have done? We didn't know Meng wasn't going to hurt Bing! I had a choice between wasting time figuring more of the array out, or just sacrificing something decently significant. What would you have done if it was Kat that was in danger?" retorted Lian.

Lily hissed as she wrapped Lian up into a tight hug. "A gallon of blood is a cheap price,"

## Chapter 1059 First to Wake is...

Back to Kat. Amount of time passed, unclear

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After Lily and Lian passed out again Kat couldn't find a reason to stay awake herself. Meng was drinking water more as a way to pass the time than anything else and Kat didn't particularly feel like practicing and risking the chance she freaked Meng out with one of her abilities. Kat didn't fear Meng at this point, and even if she was attacked, Kat was all but certain she could survive it.

That's why, when she heard the grinding of metal on stone, Kat freaked out a little bit as she woke up, flames flaring to life until she realised it was just the door to the vault opening. Meng was watching with some interest regarding the identity of the door opening. It was still quite early on and the fact someone had managed to attune something in less than a day was impressive apparently.

So when the person who showed up was Voldar, Meng just sort of reacted. In a blink, Voldar was on the floor unconscious and Kat hadn't made a move to help him. A quick glance inside the vault revealed three meditating figures surrounded by cocoons of light Kat could easily see through with her eyes. Meng closed the door again and dragged Voldar off to the side before Kat realised that she should probably say something, "So... um... what did you do to Voldar?"

"Oh I just knocked him out," said Meng as she dumped the dwarf in a corner. "I don't know how he managed to finish first though... must have some sort of artifact related bloodline or something. I picked something that was somewhat incompatible with him so the fact that he finished first is truly a surprise,"

"Well why did you knock him out?" asked Kat.

Meng shrugged, "I had a moment of panic, then decided that I just didn't want to deal with it. The truth of the matter is, with all the nonsense that we're about to be involved in? Voldar's death would be a minor inconvenience at best. Really, the only reason he lives is because I remembered that killing my problems isn't the first option, and that you would likely be displeased with my casual disregard for life..."

Kat felt her lips pull into a thin line for a few seconds before exhaling, "I feel like I should criticise some part of that thought process but if I'm not thinking emotionally, I cannot find anything wrong with what you just said. It's all factual statements, and I really shouldn't get mad at the child assassin for thinking killing is a good solution to her problems,"

"I haven't been a child in m-centuries," said Meng as she crossed her hands under her breasts to make them look slightly more prominent, "I don't feel like calling me a 'child assassin' is a particularly accurate title,"

Kat shrugged and said, "I'm more concerned with the fact that you were raised as a child assassin than that you aren't technically one anymore, only by virtue of the fact you are no longer a child, not that you are no longer an assassin. I feel like that chain of logic demonstrates my problems. You were trained in such a way that killing people looks like a really easy way to solve your problems, and your morals either

never existed, or were trained out of you so there's not reason for me to try and bring them up. Honestly, it's more sad than anything else,"

"I don't need your putting," huffed Meng.

"Eh, perhaps you don't NEED it know, but I believe you might already have it. It's an emotional response Meng, not something I can really control. Still, what we should be addressing is the plan for dealing with Voldar. We can't just leave him unconscious forever," said Kat.

"I would like to interject and say that as a Rank 4 master of illusions I CAN in fact keep him unconscious forever, or at least, so long that he'd die of old age before the spell ran out," said Meng as she gave Voldar a few light kicks to prove a point. Kat just glared at her for a few moments.

"Right..." mumbled Kat. "Well... what IS the plan with him then?"

"Meh, probably to just leave him unconscious in town somewhere? I don't really care Kat. He isn't important to me, he isn't important to my bosses, his backing is weak, and leaving him alive is barely an inconvenience. I have about as much care for him as I would a random sack of potatoes, except the potatoes can be put into a storage ring. You can deal with him however you want," said Meng

\*Guess I need to figure something out then. Dropping him off somewhere randomly in town isn't horrible per say... I'm just not sure how I could do that and keep him reasonably safe. Perhaps leave that to Hromdir? Have Meng wake the guy before I leave? No that might take discussion time, discussion time Meng isn't likely willing to waste once Bing and Feng are awake and it's time to get moving.\*

Kat shrugged that off, and checked her connection to Lily, but found the Memphis was still asleep. Kat wasn't surprised but that turn of events, but now that she was awake, Kat didn't feel tired at all and simply meditating didn't seem all that entertaining. So with a sigh Kat started to do some katas with her fans out. "Oooh, fans, I trained with those for a while. I can give you a decent spar with my own set if you want?" offered Meng.

"Really? That would be quite nice... actually... is there space here for it?" Kat said, trailing off at the end as she took in just how small the room is.

Meng just shrugged, "Eh, it's not a tonne of space but all the fans I have on me a mediocre quality at best so we couldn't have a full powered spar anyway. If we did my weapons would shatter before either of us got close to our full speed. My fans are rated for Rank 3 cultivators at best, and fighting a demon as a Rank 4? It's not something they could stand up to. Not even if I had kept them better maintained, which I haven't"

"Why not?" asked Kat as she took a stance and brought her fans up by her face.

"Because I need weapons with history when I'm pretending to be someone else," said Meng easily. "If I had the ability to properly care for my weapons, then I'd be more of a threat. However, mediocre repair and maintenance on old equipment makes me look like a cultivator from a mortal family using heirloom weapons, or perhaps I stole them with no idea how to care for them properly. I also don't know how to use fans to the same level as some of my preferred weapons, so I can't go for 'fan prodigy' with them."

Kat flicked open her fans and world in, trying to get a slice on Meng's fingers, but Meng just bashed Kat's fans away easily, "First rule when duelling a fan user, keep your fans closed. Leaving them open makes

them too easy a target, and keeping them as more solid blocks of metal provides both superior defence, as well as an easier time with offence,"

Kat frowned but did as she was instructed and the pair clashed. A whirlwind of arms and the occasional leg as they tried to make their way through the other's defences. It didn't really go Kat frowned but did as she was instructed and the pair clashed. A whirlwind of arms and the occasional leg as they tried to make their way through the other's defences. It didn't really go anywhere for quite some time. With both combatants taking it easy and in such an enclosed space there really wasn't much room for flourishes. That's until, instead of block of slapping away one of Kat's strikes, Meng let Kat's arm slide forward past her guard.

Before Kat could capitalise though, Meng trapped Kat's arm under her armpit and smiled, "Second rule when facing a fan user. If they keep the fans closed, use that to trap their arm. Now, technically I'm down an arm as well, but I've got much more control over your body. I think you might have more physical strength than me, so freeing yourself isn't impossible, but it would take time I can use to brain you or slit your throat. Do you want an example?"

Kat shrugged, "Neither will kill me, so I'm not too worried about it, but if you want to use it as a teaching moment I don't mind,"

Meng rolled her eyes, "Damn kids these days. If I said as much to anyone else, even with a healer on hand they'd be screaming abuse but you're just straight up cool with letting someone who is still nominally an enemy slit your throat as part of a lesson because I asked?"

Kat shrugged, "I mean, when you can heal flesh wounds in seconds at most, the idea doesn't bother me... though... now that I'm thinking about it properly it WOULD get me in trouble with Lily so I better now,"

"You are one strange demon Kat," said Meng with a shake of her head.

### **Chapter 1060 The Twins Awaken**

The pair of fighters separated when the door started to open again. Kat's dress was in tatters. Once Meng realised that Kat was perfectly happy to fight her while Meng abused more speed and power, and further, was completely unconcerned about injuries, Meng let herself flex a bit. It was all in the name of showing off techniques, but Kat had a strong base and it was just a matter of training the techniques into her muscles. Meng was happy to oblige.

When the door opened to reveal both Bing and Feng exiting together, arms over their shoulders and laughing, neither Meng nor Kat would say they were surprised. They also didn't really think how it would look to the two newcomers. The room had a few chips in the floor, with a good helping of black blood scattered over the stone. Meng only had a few cuts and rips in her outfit, but as already mentioned, Kat's was much worse for wear.

Upon seeing Kat and Meng's state, Bing and Feng both got into combat stances, despite not seeing any drawn weapons. Kat blushed, realising her state of half undress, and tried to back off. Feng jumped to Meng's side of the room, daggers drawn, while Bing remained where she was, her own weapon drawn as she looked awkwardly between the two. "Um... give me just a second..." mumbled Kat as she ducked into the portal room.



Feng made to follow, dagger in hand, but Meng's hand on his shoulder kept him in place. Bing was still glancing between the area Kat was and the place Meng was sitting currently, trying to work out what was going on. When Kat had resummoned her outfit, she was much more presentable. In fact, as a demon, it meant she looked as she always did, with only the slightest touch of mess to her hair that already seemed to be smoothing out as she stood there.

"Ok... so we're not fighting anymore... what the heck is going on..." said Bing, an edge to her voice.

"That's a pretty long story. Meng... do you want to go over everything? I'm mean, they're your kids," said Kat.

Meng frowned, "Can't you just do it for me? You can't lie, and I made sure to teach my kids enough about demons that they really should remember that part. So it will probably be more believable if you go over it, plus, it is sort of your fault," said Meng.

Kat huffed, crossing her arms and glaring at Meng. "Hang on, I will take minimal responsibility for this fiasco. You're very much at fault in a few key ways. Plus, I only know it as 'the truth' because I heard it FROM YOU. So how does that make me any more trustworthy in this situation?"

"Look, I just don't want to say it ok?" said Meng.

Kat glared back at the adult, the adult she was starting to see more and more as a scared child. It was an overly generous interpretation. Kat KNEW that. Meng was much more responsible than a child, and she had committed far more atrocities. However, Kat could feel the part of her brain that liked to be responsible, that liked to help people. That liked to shield them from problems rearing its head and whispering all the reasons that she should be the one to break the news. Kat grit her teeth and thought it over for a few moments.

\*I really don't want to be the one to break the news, and clearly Meng doesn't either. I'm pretty sure I could get her with the whole 'do it for your kids' line, and Meng would crumble under a minor assault with that logic... but I don't feel comfortable essentially using the love she has for her kids as blackmail material. Fuck I'm going to be the one to break the news aren't I?\*

"Fuck it fine. I'll do it," said Kat throwing her hands up in the air. "But if I'm the one breaking the news, I'm going to have to be clinical about it. I can't put much emotion into this that isn't frustration. Because that's what this is, a frustrating situation, and Bing can you please step forward so the vault door can close again?"

Bing glanced at Meng who nodded and she stepped forward, the vault slammed shut and Bing couldn't help but swallow. Something was very wrong here and nobody seemed interested in admitting to what that particular thing was. Kat sighed once more before she got started, "So it all began when I was watching the awards ceremony and I noticed that Meng, well..."

"She didn't look anything like either of you," Bing and Feng shared confused looks, both having inherited things from their mother, "and then I found out from Lily and confirmed with Lian, that there was a whole big show on that I wasn't seeing. It was all an illusion, Meng wasn't really there. So off we ride, Lian, Lily and myself, in an attempt to find out what was happening and protect you all from what we were pretty sure was an imposter..."

Feng remained still, but the grip on Bing's sword tightened as Kat continued to speak, "Lian cursed the teleportation array, and I left Lily to guard her while I continued on to find Meng here, just waiting. There was a lot of ranting, but what the truth boils down to, is two annoying little facts that I had a hard time dealing with,"

Kat waved her hand over Meng, "That right there, is Meng, but only because her real name is Meng, and not because that's your biological mother. She was replaced..." Feng started to step forward, aiming to attack Kat when Bing blurred into the way. Kat just kept speaking, "... quite a long time ago. Meng here might not be your biological mother, but from what I've gathered? She really does love you, and she raised you for longer than you can remember,"

Kat couldn't see Bing's face, but it was a mask of horror as she dropped the sword and stumbled backwards towards Kat. Feng whipped around and charged at Meng, who looked on in sadness. Feng didn't hesitate, he went straight for the throat... and Meng let it happen. Perhaps she knew she'd be fine, perhaps she thought she deserved it. Feng's blade sounded like it hit granite when it dug into Meng's flesh, leaving only the tiniest hint of blood.

Feng swung again, qi infusing his blade and Meng sighed but let it hit her again. Three strikes he was able to get off before Bing stumbled forward and wrapped her arms around Feng, dragging him backwards. "Let me go sis! I'll kill this bitch if it's the last thing I do!"

"She's our MOTHER Feng! How can you attack her!" hissed Bing. Feng was letting himself be dragged back, but he did not look happy about it at all.

Meng was crying, but Kat was certain she was hiding those tears behind an illusion so that her children couldn't see. It was unclear to Kat just how much damage Meng was faking on her illusion, or what her face looked like, but it was clear Meng was devastated. She just let out a long sigh.

"How long?" asked Bing as she continued to back up until she was in the centre of the room.

"Weeks after your birth," answered Meng.

Bing nodded, silently letting the information churn over in her mind. "Why were you here?"

"I was ordered to infiltrate and destroy the Holy Icy Wind sect slowly so that it looked natural by the end," answered Meng.

"What about our father?" asked Bing. She was trying to be the calm one in this situation as Feng continued to struggle against her grip.

"He was replaced not long after I replaced your mother, however he has no interest in children unlike myself, and I doubt he'd be willing to go against our bosses," said Meng.

Feng proved that he really was just playing along by ripping his arms out of Bing's hold and shouting, "And why should we believe that? Apparently you've been lying to us our entire lives?!"

Meng just shrugged sadly and said, "I don't really know. Kat seems to believe me, and I have no idea why. It's not something I can provide a lot of solid proof for. If you don't believe me, I will be sad, but I won't stop you. Though, we are somewhat stuck here at the moment because the array is broken so we've got time to talk it out I suppose,"

"What did you agree to do Kat?" asked Bing while Feng was snarling at Meng.

Kat sighed, "Well I agreed to help you all out, especially now that it seems like Meng has something in her soul that forces her plans to escape from her organisation to be planned poorly. The current best idea we have is for you two, and Lian, to flee together and just keep running until you stop being chased,"