

## DEMONS 191

### Chapter 191: Thinking Inside the Box

"So, how exactly has it only now gotten out of hand" asked Kat

"Well... um, you remember how I talked about how she rebuilt herself with the idea that she was me, and I didn't exactly go away?" asked Minor

Kat nodded "Right well..." Minor drew out the words "In the politest way possible, and do know I treasure our friendship when I... ah... say this. You basically did the equivalent of casting a flash freeze spell on her mind before hitting it with a giant hammer... um sorry?"

Kat shrugged "Don't worry keep going"

"Right ok... um... so this is where it gets a little more difficult to work out" said Minor "So um... keep in mind that this is only my best guess Kat... this is all rather strange even to me..."

"So um... when she found out she wasn't me, her mind which had been built up again around that idea just sorta ah... pushed me forward, because she um... subconsciously? No um... doesn't matter... she um, instinctively! Yeah, instinctively knew that I was in fact still around.

"So, I think her mind pushed me forward to take her place so that... I was still around? Rather than accept the fact that she wasn't exactly me, she was her, and so she basically trapped herself, and gave me control..."

Minor took a deep breath but seeing Kat's nod continued "Right so um... that, but see, her mind was still broken, it was just that mind was now in control... so uh... it tried to fix itself better

"That's because um... I was sort of the short-term solution, right? But ah... her mind was then able to recognise I exist, and it sort of started warring with itself..."

"So like... Um one part thinks she needs to give up on me... because of course I'm dead, and nothing she can do will ever bring me back... but ah, the other one knows that I'm real, and refuses to take any action against me

"So each part of her is sort of tearing into the other, and I sort of... ah got knocked loose in the fighting? So ah... now I'm stuck in our head again, and nobody gets the body" finished Minor.

Kat frowned. "How sure are you of this"

"Oh ah... not very... I mean... it makes for a good story and I like to tell it to myself... because um... then there are a few ways to win I mean. If I just... went away she might wake up... or if I can prove to be more real... then we can both stay? But like... she would always be fine?" said Minor wincing even as she spoke

Kat bopped her on the head "I was sent here to save both of you, and I'm going to do it. I won't have you talking about destroying yourself"

Minor nodded "Um... yeah, I ah... don't really know how I'd do it anyway... I might have tried a few... extreme things already"

Kat barely restrained the urge to glare at Minor, but apparently still failed as the girl flinched "But ah... it didn't work... and I ah... stayed away from the nightmares" *NovelNext.cOm*

\*Minor mentioned those earlier. And she seems a lot more scared of them then potentially dying\*  
"Minor" Kat said as pleasantly as she could "Can you tell me about the nightmares... is that ok?"

Minor gulped but nodded "Right so... ah... the um, nightmares. Right so... they change things" Minor spoke carefully not quite confronting the topic, but Kat tightened her grip on her and pulled her into a more thorough hug.

This seemed to calm Minor down a bit and she continued "Right... ah, so... change things. So, um... when a nightmare appears it sort of warps memories... it makes them evil, or ah... maybe not evil but not happy anymore

"And um... like... I just get the feeling that it could twist me... maybe not completely not the way it can the memories, but I think they can really hurt me"

Kat nodded "How safe do you think I would be? Can I punch them?" Kat said with a grin

Minor let out a tiny laugh she smothered in her tail "Um... I don't know... I can't. I have to run. I can't hit them with things because it just changes those too..."

Kat patted Minor on the head "It's ok. My demonic energy has been good to me so far. I bet I can punch them no problem"

Minor smiled but Kat more seriously consider the problem. \*Once again how real is this? The spell wasn't entirely clear... and whatever I do will certainly affect Minor and Major in perhaps big ways. I'll have to be careful...\*

\*Plus, these nightmares sound like they could be a bit of a danger to me. I'm not sure how much of the danger Minor feels from them is just because she is also part of this mind, or if they are just an inherent danger.\*

Kat bit the inside of her lip. \*For example... can I burn them? Minor said that anything she attacked them with would get twisted, but does that include spells? Does she have mana in here?\*

\*If she doesn't then why do I have my own demonic energy still? Will it work against the nightmares? I've not had it fail to affect anything before... even that extremely hot sand boat was still affected for at least a while especially if I really pushed some energy into it.\*

\*And I'm missing my system... is that because of the spell or something else? Is it just attached to my body? Or is it because it can't project answers in front of my face when my 'face' is inside someone else's head?\*

\*Like would Euko be seeing floating fire text in front of my sleeping body whenever I try? Assuming of course she could see it like my accomplices... And actually.\* Kat took a proper look at herself and realised she was missing the mist. \*Did I finish ranking up?\*

Kat didn't want to try and test any newfound strength while she had Minor in her hands.

\*Did I get any new powers? Because I think I was supposed to, but at the same time... was I sent in before my upgrades could finalise and I'm still at rank 1? I can't exactly ask the system to confirm...\*

\*Another thought is checking the shape of my demonic flame... but I'm not sure I want to bring that out while in Minor's head. If I tried to perform the motions and it instead summoned the flame in front of my real body it might cause Minor's Grandma... Euko, Euko, to falter and break the spell and we can't have that.\*

Kat shook of her worries. \*I haven't even seen what I'm up against. I can't be worried before I even fully understand the situation.\* "Kat we have to leave" mumbled Minor from in Kat's grasp

"What?" asked Kat

"Well... um... the nightmares... they sort of chase me around? So like... I need to move around the um... what did I call them? Unclaimed lands... right, that, so that they ah, don't find me or wreck anything" said Minor

"Ok do what you need to do" said Kat

Minor nodded and waved her arms. The scenery rapidly vanished and returned to the deep unending darkness that it was before. She then grabbed tightly onto Kat and Kat felt herself getting pulled.

The darkness didn't seem to change but she could feel that they were somewhere different. "Ok, we should be fine for a bit" said Minor

"How fine exactly?" asked Kat

"Well... ah... um, so like... in the unclaimed lands I can kinda just be anywhere? Um... same for my own memory sections. I can sort of do whatever I want? But the nightmares just sort have to trail along behind" said Minor

"Why not just go so far away they can't catch you?" asked Kat

"Um... well, I'm not quite sure... but I've tried... I think it's because the unclaimed lands aren't really 'real' exactly" said Minor "It's like... they are only real because I'm here, and when I leave they aren't quite real?"

"And the nightmares... they make it a little bit real... so if I went really really far away... all the parts in the middle would just sort of disappear again... because they aren't real? Does that make sense" asked Minor

"You know. In a really weird way, it actually kind of does" said Kat

"Ok good. So um... yeah I just have to keep moving, and I also need to um... not go near my memories. The nightmares can't find them if I don't take them there... so I think I'm mostly ok... and like... I'm a bit strange because I think I'm most of my memories if ah... that makes sense?" said Minor

"So... like what? You're concentrated memories then?" asked Kat

"Sort of... I think so?" said Mino

## **Chapter 192: What is Real?**

"I think we might need to look into that a bit further" said Kat

Minor nodded "Right um... well... so as I've always said I live in Major's mind. So um... like this whole place is sort of her memories? And like... I do have my own little corner, but a lot of my memories just aren't there

"Which is strange because I've been able to find basically all of Shizu- Major's. So I think... that for some reason this little avatar I have, this is most of me. My little hideaway is a few less important memories but almost all of ME is um right here?"

\*Hmmm, I guess that makes a certain degree of sense...\* "What about myself then? Am I just a roughly approximated version of my own thoughts and memories generated by the spell? Or am I closer to the real Kat" said Kat

Minor let her mouth hang open unsure of what to say. Around a minute passed before she composed herself enough to speak "I... I don't know. I don't want to think about it"

Kat shrugged "Doesn't really bother me either way. I'd just like to know in case I have to do something stupid later on. I don't seem to have..." Can't say that "Demonic insurance I normally would"

Minor tilted her head "What do you mean?" asked Minor

"Demons can't die while summoned, but I don't think I have that safety net at the moment. Or perhaps only my real body does? So like, the question is, am I copy where it doesn't matter what happens to me. Or am I actually me inside your head, and it would be quite bad" said Kat

Minor got a thoughtful expression. "I... I don't know. I'm not even sure about if I'm, ah, really me so I'm certainly in no position to tell you if your real or not"

\*Hmmm, I guess that makes sense but.\* Kat activated her mental acceleration and watched the world slow. \*Pretty sure that shouldn't work if I'm just in Minor's head. Because it speeds up how I perceive the world. But this isn't exactly the world is it.\*

\*Then again, I believe demons talked a bit about a soul, and that's what my outfit is attached to. Maybe I'm just a soul? That might make the most sense, because Shizuka has two souls living inside of her.\*

\*Or well... three now I guess.\* "Eh, don't get too twisted up about it Minor. I'm not too worried about it" said Kat

"But, but... shouldn't you be?" asked Minor

"Not really" said Kat "I can just treat this like it's real enough. Be careful sometimes, take risks others, and then at the end of it all I am a copy then it doesn't matter, because I bet I'll get the memories back" said Kat

Minor studied Kat for a while. During this time, she also made some effort to remove the snot and tears from her face. When she went to move onto Kat's outfit, she was surprised to see nothing on it, but didn't say anything.

Kat's lips curled into a slight smile. \*Dirt and grime getting repelled from me is a rather underrated ability.\* "So where do we go now" asked Kat

"One moment" said Minor, grabbing onto Kat and shifting the scene once again. "Ok, just in case I've moved us once more"

Kat nodded "So..."

"Right... ah, so, um, I mentioned I can do what I want in my own space and uh... in the unclaimed lands right?" asked Minor

Kat nodded

"Right... so, it's like this... In Major's memories I have a little control... it's ah... not much, but I can move around a bit" said Minor

Kat patted her on the head "Take your time, maybe calm down a bit first"

Minor stopped and took in Kat. She then took a step back and breathed in. All of sudden Minor increased in size back to her original height... still shorter than Kat, but not the tiny fox that had just cried into her kimono.

Minor fanned her tails out and righted her expression "Ok" said Minor, her voice now with an echoey quality "I can do this"

Kat inclined her head "Impressive, you didn't stutter at all. This is a fast improvement can you explain what happened?"

"Ah... well. I can sort of manipulate myself a little as well. I was a bit overwhelmed when I saw you and the fa?ade I had built up around me, so I reverted quite a few of the changes I've made over time to keep myself more stable" said Minor still with the slight echo to her voice.

Kat pursed her lips "Is that really for the best"

Minor shrugged "I'm not sure actually. I think quite differently like this. It's much better for problem solving but if my emotions overwhelm this form it simply cracks. It is incapable of dealing with more potent feelings"

Kat frowned "Wouldn't that include fear? If we run into any nightmares this could be a problem"

Minor shook her head "Perhaps? This form does dampen emotions quite a bit, and combining your calming aura with it should prevent it from failing"

"Is this really what you want though?" asked Kat "It seems like it can't be healthy in the long run"

Minor seemed to consider this "Well, you are somewhat correct, but it isn't as though either form is actually my true one. What you see before you is how I normally keep myself together while within Major's head"

"I lost the ability to regulate my emotions fully when you met me in the real world, and then once you showed up again, but keeping the emotional responses fully active is not conducive to completing our current task" said Minor

Kat narrowed her eyes "I'm not sure how much I like this. I think it would be better for you to deal with your emotions as they come, and perhaps find some less artificial stability" explained Kat

Minor nodded "Perhaps, but as I said, the other form is not my true one either, that perhaps is lost to time. Did you not find it odd that I was able to remain sane at all living in someone else's head? Though it is an interesting thing to note that even my emotional form prefers it in here???"

Kat frowned "Your emotional form does seem a lot closer to what you are actually like"

Minor shrugged "Perhaps, but please understand I have spent much longer in the form you see before you. Even the emotional form is not a true representation of what I'm like in the real world so if it is simply a matter of choice, this is the one I choose"

Kat sighed, "Is it possible for you to switch back for a little? Maybe have me increase my calming aura to help you deal with the emotions?"

Minor put a finger to her mouth and pulled at the sides. "Hmm, I'm unsure... we do not have forever. It seems that your presence here means that Shizuka, the body, is not long for this world. Grandma wouldn't have sent you otherwise"

\*Why! Minor and Major already share a headspace, why does Minor want to split her personality even further! Surely this can't be good for her either.\* "What if I insist" said Kat

This actually caused Minor to frown. "Would you truly" *NOVELnext.COM*

Kat stared Minor down "If I thought it would be best for you. Yes"

Minor tried to stare back, searching, but seemed to flinch when she found what she was looking for. "Ok"

Minor seemed to deflate once again, her tails falling slightly and her form shrinking drastically. Kat kept her end of the deal and increased the power of her aura, straining against her new range limitations to keep Minor enveloped.

When Minor's form settled, she spoke "Well... this isn't so bad" she said but didn't seem to believe.

"We've got some time Minor" whispered Kat as she moved to her side. "I'm here to help the both of you. If this makes it a little harder on me, then that's fine"

Minor gave Kat a light hug. "Ok, well in that case we need to get a bit of a move on"

Kat smiled "See, no stutter. Told you, this was fine"

Minor's hands flew to her mouth but she turned a glare towards Kat "I'm only fine because you have your aura around me"

Kat shrugged "Didn't work earlier did it? I might have increased the power a little but not that much"

Minor narrowed her eyes at Kat but didn't say anything. \*It isn't that much compared to my full aura, but it is more than double what it was when she started. Seems this whole wordplay business isn't that hard.\*

"Ok, so we need to start at the beginning" said Minor

"Again?" asked Kat confused

"No the beginning of Us" said Minor, with a strange emphasis on us. As she finished the world shifted and churned as Kat found herself somewhere else.

### **Chapter 193: The Worst Sound You Can Imagine**

The scenery shuddered as it came into focus. Though, even that was incorrect. The area surrounding Kat was a mosaic of colours that seemed to crack and shift in strange patterns as they surrounded a still figure sitting in a bed.

No... not still, the faint breaths could be seen when Kat examined the individual closely. They seemed to have fox ears and tails, but it was hard to make out. The shape was indistinct and fuzzy, almost like the radio wasn't quite tuned to the correct frequency.

Kat tried to get a sense of everything, but as she tried to focus on the scenery, she continued to have her eyes drawn to two vague shapes. One was an effigy of fire, and the other an effigy of ice. They were both being held by the distinctly fox-like person.

\*Is this really when Minor and Major were born.\* "What's going on Minor" asked Kat

"This is the moment we were born. Do forgive the poor ah... resolution. It remains as but the faintest of impressions, and even then, only because of its significance" said Minor

"Slipping back into calm and collected Minor much?" asked Kat

Minor flinched a bit at that "Perhaps a little... I'm just... a bit better like that"

Kat scooped Minor into her arms again and she let out a small yip "This Minor is much cuter, and is closer to the person I remember" said Kat

"Thanks" said Minor, "I guess this is nice"

Kat let the moment continue for a bit longer before speaking up, aware that they didn't have as much time as they might like "Ok so what now?"

"Oh right" said Minor "We can move on once the memory has played out"

Kat frowned, "Has it not played out?" asked Kat. As she examined the scene nothing really seemed to be happening. The fire on the fire-like effigy moved slightly, and the angle the light hit the ice effigy changed just barely. But to Kat's potent eyes nothing else seemed to really be happening.

Minor shook her head "This one is a bit weirder than the others. It will end when it's ready and then I can move us on"

Kat rested her tail under her chin "Is that safe? I mean what about the nightmares? Actually, more important question, should we be leading them through Major's most important memories?"

Minor shrugged "I did say the nightmares twisted things... but ah, it's not quite so bad for Major's stuff. It reverts after a while. I think it's because these are her nightmares. Perhaps she has like... anti-nightmare stuff as well?"

"The reason they scare me is because when I looked at them... they seemed a lot more frightening, and more... permanent... I think" said Minor

\*I guess that makes at least some sense. If Minor is only a soul and some memories having those changed at all could lead to dire consequences. But, in Major's case she has a brain... wait but didn't Minor have access to that for a while...\*

\*Damnation. I just don't really know anything at all about this dream state. And it isn't like I can ask the system like this, and Minor... she means well, but it's clear she doesn't really understand this all either.\*

"So... how safe are we in Major's memories" asked Kat to pass the time

Minor grimaced "Not as safe as I'd like actually. I can sort of leave whenever I want... but it isn't easy, it takes concentration and a bit of time. The nightmares can catch up theoretically, but it isn't a major concern

"The main issue is just that when they do, it would be hard for me to run away properly. And the ah... deeper I guess? Deeper we go, the harder it is for me to get out. That's why I haven't done this myself...

"The risk was a bit too great on my own. I tried but I only got as far as the attack before I chickened out. I guess it makes sense. I could tell that everything past that would be harder for me to access" said Minor

"Wait a second that doesn't make much sense" said Kat

Minor went to speak but then the room seemed to... flicker for a moment. "One moment Kat it seems we can move on"

Minor screwed up her face in concentration and the scene started to shift. The walls melded into something closer to a pure white, but it still had splashes of colour, like a painter had flicked their brush towards the wall after dunking it in paint.

The figures of fire and ice morphed into slightly larger ones. The fire one seemed to have some blocks in front of it, while the ice one had a spinning top. The top was a solid green, and the blocks all had one colour each, red, blue, green, and yellow.

There was a snap as the scene settled and the figures started moving. \*I guess these must represent Major and Minor. Major the ice, and Minor the fire...\* Kat then noticed the tiny tails each figure had. Even then, they still made up almost a third of the figures size. Kat hadn't seen them in the first figure likely because they were hidden in the larger figure, but now they were plain to see.

"Right, so... what didn't make sense" asked Minor

"That you can access the earlier memories fine but the later ones get harder" said Kat

Minor shrugged "It seems as though, Major started subconsciously to separate her experiences and mine. Later memories are more firmly tied to her and it makes it harder for me to slip out"

Kat let her tail wind its way around her neck and then loosened it a few times as she spoke "I guess... so what is happening here?"

"This" Minor said "Is the first time Major ever hurt me"



As if on cue the figures started moving. The firey one was moving the blocks around in a random order, and the ice one was staring at the spinning top... that wasn't moving to Kat's eyes.

Looking closer revealed that it had lines around the edges, giving the illusion that it was spinning, but the lack of motion shattered it rather thoroughly. Eventually, the top fell to its side. When it did the ice figure reached out for the fire one's tail.

Ice, pawed at fire, for a few moments before seemingly getting annoyed and grabbing a fistful of 'fur' and pulling. An ear-splitting shriek was let loose. Kat covered her ears trying to escape the sound as the world seemed to shake in anger.

Minor stood there as if nothing was even happening, but Kat was on her knees struggling through the pain. \*Why is Minor fine... what the hell is this?\* Kat grit her teeth and tried to bear the pain, but every few seconds it seemed to intensify... until it just stopped.

Kat looked up glad it was done. She was na?ve. The screaming redoubled and in her pain addled state she could vaguely tell that both figures were crying now. But Minor noticed her distress and walked over and tapped Kat's ears.

All of a sudden the sound cut off, but she could still see the figures 'crying' "What happened?" asked Kat

"It seems that your hearing might be even better than my own. See the key to this memory is the crying. The sound is what stuck with Major. It is what made the IMPRESSION" said Minor, with a strange echo on the final word.

"Right... but why were you fine?" asked Kat

"Oh... well, I ah... I sort of just turned my sense of sound off kinda? And well... I would have done the same for you but you have rather tiny ears and I just... I didn't think it would be that bad really... in fact you reacted even worse than I did the first time" said Minor

Kat frowned as she looked at the still crying figure "Is this really just the start?" asked Kat

Minor shook her head "Actually this is one of the worst memories. As we move through, they get clearer and become more... realistic? I suppose. Not for a while yet of course. Not till we are way into the future but eventually"

"Wait" said Kat furrowing her brows "Didn't you say you haven't been passed the attack?"

Minor nodded "I did say that, but that is only since this whole debacle went down. I've spent plenty of time in Major's memories, it's how I lived sort of. I didn't need to worry about getting trapped because they weren't all so closed off. I could leave when I wanted to. It was only after she really shut down that I noticed the clear divide between the oldest memories."

"Right... so no more ear destroying sounds?" asked Kat hopefully

"Well..." said Minor with a slight cringe "There might be a few more, but nothing this bad... I don't think... I hope"

\*Yeah I certainly hope as well Minor...\* said Kat fearing for her ears.

## Chapter 194: The Best and Worst

Eventually the scene shifted again. This time, Kat felt a comforting feeling settle over her quickly. \*I wonder if this is what people feel like in my aura. If I had to describe it... it's a bit like being under a blanket in winter.\*

While Kat was enjoying the feeling, the rest of the scene was coming into focus. There was of course the figures of fire and ice, to represent the infant twins. They were laying down in a mass of fluff which was now more clearly obvious as their mother's tails.

Kat couldn't make out particularly small details like the individual fur like she would in real life, but Chiharu's tails were clear to see, though she only had four in this memory. Her hair had a slight blue tint to it, but that was all it was. As if someone had stretched blue plastic over a mannequin and called the job good enough.

The figures were on a bed, which was rendered in rather spectacular detail compared to everything else. As far as Kat could tell, even examining the details, it looked to be perfectly representative of its real-life counterpart. The sheets had wrinkles in a few places, and while Kat couldn't make out the individual threads, she was some ways away from the scene and was saving her demonic energy for now.

The bed itself was quite large, even accounting for Chiharu's tails, she didn't even take up a third of the surface. It was clearly designed with a disregard for floorspace. There were also blankets near Chiharu's head that had been discarded, likely in favour of her tails.

The rest of the room was also quite focused, though not to the same level as the bed. It was clearly an offshoot of a larger area, because the room seem to continue 'forever' rather than the strange white walls that were present in the previous memories.

On a chair nearby was another indistinct shape. Kat couldn't see the details on them but considering the blue plastic like coating and the large circle behind their back, Kat assumed that it was Euko.

There were a few more details to the room, like a square to the left of the bed that must have been a painting, but contained nothing Kat was able to make out. There was a box with some other things on top of it, but if the box was a table, or a maid's cart, and what the items on top might have possibly been were unclear.

"This is a very calming scene" said Kat

Minor nodded "This is the last time we were all together before the attack. In many ways it is the happiest memory we both possess"

"Well, that is more than a little depressing" said Kat

Minor flinched at this "Well... I mean... No, I stand by that statement. I've not had the chance to truly make memories of my own outside of those few days with you. Everything else has been watching a play of Major's life"

"Major does have some happy moments, but I'm almost certain she couldn't shake the feeling something was horribly wrong. You haven't seen her, but she practically threw herself into training

"She is the youngest three tail in history for a reason Kat. It was only once she achieved that status that she finally took some time for herself and started to actually live a little. Then the beast king started his nonsense and well... I happened" said Minor sadly.

Kat used her tail to bring Minor into a hug "Don't worry, it isn't your fault. Plus once I'm done here you might be able to start making memories"

Minor frowned "I doubt that for myself, Major will be able to take over again"

Kat lightly thumped the back of Minor's head "It will be better. I'll make sure of it"

Minor smiled, and tried to soak in the atmosphere "I can almost believe you when I hear you say it"

Kat laughed "Don't forget, I can't lie. It will be better"

Minor smiled, "Pretty sure that's not how your curse works. But I'll try"

As Minor said those final words, the scene shifted again. Things started shifting. The world seemed to dark, and a chill started to creep into Kat's bones. \*Just lovely. The only way for me to get cold is with strange dream magic.\* Kat shivered as the scene continued to darken. Even with her true sight and night vision, the scene was eerie, and the shadows seemed to reach out.

The room was clearly defined. There was one large cot, with two sleeping figures of fire and ice intertwined with their tails covering each other for warmth. A blanket had been thrown off of the pair and hung around their feet.

The walls contained a number of colourful paintings that looked like beautiful vistas, covered with a layer of film hazing the details just slightly. There was a large window across from the cot, and the bright light of the moon shone a dark red.

"Minor, you don't have to watch this" said Kat suddenly realising what was about to happen.

"I've seen it before" said Minor with a hitch in her voice.

"That isn't my problem" said Kat as she snaked her tail up to cover Minor's eyes, and placed her hands where Minor's human ears would be only to find smooth skin. \*Right. Duh, she has fox ears Kat.\*

Kat now had the slight problem, of not really knowing how to be careful around fox ears. \*Is it safe to like... squish them down? Should I just put my hands over the entrance? How do these even work?\*

But the memory was not content to wait for Kat to brace Minor for what was to come. Kat heard the window shatter quietly and watched as the glass stayed floating in place. A figure flittered in through the window, dodging the glass that was held in place.

A second followed behind. Kat wasn't able to make out much, though not due to lack of quality. Both assassins were covered head to toe in tight black cloth with a mask covering each face. One was blue, and the other purple, but both in very dark shades.

The one in the blue mask took the corner next to the door, and clung to the wall above it, presumably to get the drop on anyone who might have come through. The purple mask one walked slowly over to the children.

They carefully removed a bottle from within the pouch Kat hadn't noticed attached to their side. Unstopping the bottle purple reached out to move the fiery figures face, seemingly so they could poison them.

Kat flinched as a loud boom shook the room. The assassins both froze in their movements and looked to the wall behind the twins, frozen, or perhaps waiting to confirm the sound. This proved to be their undoing.

A second explosion rocked the room as the wall shattered and the crystal-clear figure of Euko flew through the wall. She had armour or ice surrounding her, arms transformed into furred legs with claws, and tore the assassin in purple in half with little trouble.

The poison shattered on the floor as Euko scanned the room for any other intruders. Minor was shaking in Kat's embrace at this point but Kat just pulled her closer. In the memory the twins were very awake and crying now. Holding each other for comfort.

The blue assassin didn't stay hidden for long. Euko managed to spot them hidden above the door and charged at them arms outstretched. Snarling as she struck the assassin who jumped forward into the attack. *NOVELnext.COM*

Euko's arm went straight through the assassin in question. Ripping out their heart and a number of other organs, that splattered against the wall. However just as Euko went to lower the 'corpse' on her arm it flicked out its left hand.

Kat could see Euko's eyes widen in horror as she tried to grab whatever the assassin had thrown but miss by a hair's breadth. Slipping slightly on the ice she had created, Euko overbalanced slightly and had to throw away the assassin in question to recover her balance, before charging over towards the twins.

This all happened in just a split second, but it was too late. The small bead the assassin had thrown tapped lightly onto the twins. Euko's eyes widened in fear, and she threw out some ice to counter whatever it might be.

The chunk hit the bead and catapulted it into the wall. Where it buried itself there. Euko turned, ready to ensure that the two assassins on the ground were dead. When one final explosion rocked the room.

Pure mana exploded from the two corpses on the ground, the figure of Ice wrapping itself around the figure of fire, as Euko quickly tried to throw up a shield and then... the memory stopped. Everything froze, like someone had pressed pause on a dvd.

### **Chapter 195: Not Quite Over**

"Ah... what" said Kat slowly releasing Minor "Shouldn't this be over"

Minor shook her head, while the rest of her body shivered "Not quite. This is where Major lost consciousness... or I guess she was still Shizuru back then. Because we see the attack and her.... Ah, resurrection? Healing? Whatever, as one even it is stored as sort of one memory"

Kat inclined her head "Right, but why has it all stopped"

"Because time must pass" said Minor with a wavering voice

Kat looked down at her shaking companion "Hey, it's ok. It's already over. It's ok" Kat bent down and hugged Minor against her face. The shivering didn't entirely stop, but it subsided slightly. Kat ramped up her calming aura further really hoping it wasn't about to put Minor to sleep.

As Minor's shaking started to subside the room started to shift form. The walls pushed themselves out and became circular with clearly defined pillars, the beds melted into the ground and spread out into two separate large sigils.

The light of the moon shone down into the centre with two figures. They had so much detail now, that even without context Kat would have been able to pick them out as Minor and Major respectively. They still had their tell-tale ice or firey form.

Enuko was running around using a small pointed shard of ice to scrape runes into the floor. She had split into three, however, each copy only seemed to have two tails. The rest seemed to be see-through and glowed slightly, with one of the copies having three instead, presumably the original.

As Euko's blurred movement continued, the runes still shone brighter and brighter as more and more were added. The moon started to shine through the gap in the ceiling which once Kat looked up at, was revealed to be a circular hole cut through the ceiling rather than a window as Kat had originally presumed.

The moonlight started to line up with the centre of the circle and shine down on the two small frames. The firey one was breathing heavily and seemed to have one broken arm based on the way it was held to the side.

The other twin, the one of ice, was hardly moving at all. Only the fact that the hair from the firey one had blown in front of ice one's form. The ice one, Shizuru, hardly moved and didn't so much as twitch even when the light started to reach greater intensities.

The Euko copies all looked up at the ceiling as one, scowling, before splitting again. The Euko presumed to be the original split twice, and with the one in the centre releasing a hacking cough once it was done, blood leaking out of her mouth as she did so.

When the blood hit the rune she had just been working on, the whole room transformed. Blood red light now shone from the runes even as seven Euko's worked desperately to complete the sigil. From the corner of this however, a figure started to rise up.

Kat turned when she heard Minor gasp. Out of the drops of blood a large figure rose up. They seemed to have a mixed mask of red and purple and were twice as tall as the Euko's easily looming over the whole thing.

Kat felt a mounting sense of dread as she watched the whole thing "This isn't supposed to happen right"

Minor shook her head "Nightmare" the word was barely whispered but Kat felt the weight it seemed to convey. Kat pushed Minor back behind her. The Euko's seemed to not even notice the figure as it strode towards the twins.

"What is going on" asked Kat

"I think... I think the nightmare is trying to stop us advancing" said Minor barely above a whisper.

"How?" asked Kat more than confused, as she watched the figure stride forward with confidence.

"If ah... if it can break the memory, twist the sequence maybe we can't progress. I don't know... I ah, never really had this issue before" said Minor

Kat nodded and strode forward. \*So things have gotten a little more complicated. That's fine I just need to stop this blood guy from interfering.\* Kat tried to project confidence she wasn't feeling as she walked away from Minor and felt her aura's range fail to stay encompassing Minor.

\*I really hope this doesn't cause issues for Minor. I was laying it on pretty thick before, or at least, rather strong compared to the first time I met her...\* I think. The figure stopped its careful walk towards the twin's stand ins and turned to Kat.

She could now see it in its full glory. It's was still wrapped all in black, but its clothes were tinged with what looked to be dried blood. The figure was easily three metres tall and loomed menacingly with little effort. The mask split into a grin seeing Kat's approach, the strange wood substance it was made of shifting to reveal rows of sharp teeth that leaked a red mist when they smiled.

Kat started pumping demonic energy around her body, ready for anything it might throw at her. Kat let her wings spread out, and while she was careful to avoid the rapidly moving Enuko's, they were at the edges of the sigil now so it was an easy task.

\*I wish I had my fans... I didn't exactly plan to need them when I went to rank up today. I might not know how to use them but they'd still be at least a little threatening. Plus I'm not sure I want to actually touch this thing.\*

Kat pushed her aura forward trying to feel out the strange thing before her, but when her aura reached the figure in question it was as if nothing was there. \*Ah... what does that even mean? I know my aura isn't gone it still works on Minor, even if the range is a bit shorter. This shouldn't be happening I don't think...\*

Kat stopped just out of arms reach for the demon, which was luckily just barely within tail distance for Kat. She kept that hidden behind her back though, letting it lazily swish around as if it wasn't her best combat option in the situation.

\*I don't feel some sort of overwhelming terror. And I really don't want to glance back at Minor to tell if she does or not because I can't take my eyes off this thing.\* Kat pursed her lips and pressed some demonic energy into her voice box and mouth so that she could let out low growl.

The figure reacted subtly when Kat let out her growl. Only because she was watching for the slightest movement did she catch it. The figure shifted slightly to its back foot and Kat barely noticed the flash of light as something shiny dropped into the back of its hand.

Kat eyed off with the figure, not making any more movements, trying to keep everything except for her tail as still as possible. \*As long as this thing doesn't move, I'm in the clear. I just need to keep it distracted until the scene changes. Hopefully it can't easily follow us.\*

Kat kept her breathing steady, and her energy primed. The figure, matched her, still as a statue, with only the slight breeze from the opening in the ceiling ruffling the tattered edges of its wrapping to indicate it was still alive.

\*How long do I have to keep it busy like this?\* Kat managed to suppress the need to glance at the Enuko's still moving rapidly and covering the floor of the room in runes, presumably to complete some sigil of sorts.

Kat didn't let her attention waver for a second, so when the figure lunged, she was ready. A good thing too, because instead of lunging at her it lunged to the right, towards one of the Enuko clones.

Kat was ready to intercept though and lashed her tail out at the arm she knew to contain whatever weapon it had on it. Kat's tail slammed into the arm knocking it away, blowing the arm backwards as if it had no bones.

Kat went to follow up the attack but paused, bringing her tail up passed her eyes, as she watched the figure stumble and recover eyeing her once again. Kat could see the end of the tail was bent now. Just slightly, but it had been fixed in that position.

Kat let more energy flow to her tail and found it quickly righting itself, but burning through much more energy than the minimal amount healing would normally take. \*That isn't what I wanted to see.\* Kat checked her reserves and found she'd lost around an eighth over her full capacity.

\*That's really bad.\* Just as Kat was about to strike again, there was a large clap, as the Enuko clones all reformed into one figure again. Kat tried not to let her eyes wander, and luckily could watch Enuko with her slightly expanded vision.

Enuko said something, but Kat couldn't understand it, then slammed her hands down onto the sigil.

### **Chapter 196: The Nightmare Ends... For Now**

If Kat thought the light was bright before now it completely coated the room. The blood red shifting back to a pristine white as the firey figure started to disappear. It was slowly being dissolved from the legs up and flowing into the ice one.

Around halfway through the process two things happened. The first was the nightmare screeching as it vanished with a pop, the second was the ice figure sitting up and looking at the fire one.

The ice figure, Shizuru, started to cry and tried to hug the firey figure, but they just went through it, Haruka's old form. Shizuru clawed at Haruka's vanishing form before falling over completely, and dispersing what remained.

The energy in the room kept rushing towards Shizuru, and she started to flash, going from red to blue, keeping her ice like appearance but rapidly changing colours. A scream ripped forth from the lonely twin's mouth, but Kat didn't feel it powerfully, nor did the room shake.

Eventually, the colour in the Shizuru stand in started to settle. Instead of the clear blue, it was now a slight purple. It still looked icy, and it was a very light purple indeed almost still blue, but it was definitively changed.

As the light faded the figure collapsed, with a second tail sprouting from the figures back, but it was unnoticed as Shizuru, now Shizuka, wailed and beat at the ground. Kat could see Enuko trying to walk forward to comfort the girl, but she collapsed after just one step. Falling to the ground, tails splayed out behind her.

That was when the Queen rushed in. She scooped up Shizuka and looked her over, before pulling the small form into a tight embrace. Chiharu still had some wits about her though. Carrying her crying daughter, she lightly jogged over to the collapsed form of her own mother.

Chiharu bent down and got a firm grip on Shizuka with one hand and used the other to check over the still form of Euko. A few sigils appeared above Euko, as Chiharu frowned, letting a soft light flow into Euko.

Euko stirred slightly, her tails curling to the side before stilling once again. This seemed to be enough for Chiharu, as she quickly summoned a few other sigils and grew a platform of ice below Euko, before walking back out of the room, platform trailing behind her.

Kat let out a deep breath she hadn't known she was holding and walked back over to Minor who was holding it rather well. She had tears streaking down her face, and she was shivering slightly once again, but she looked alright, all things considered.

"Hey, are you ok" asked Kat

Minor nodded. Words were slightly beyond her for now but, no longer crying. The scene started to fade to black. \*Well... is this actually good?\*

Kat started to look around as the scene stayed black. "Hey Minor? Is this meant to happen?"

Minor gave Kat a pained look "I'm... ah... not quite sure... I think so... like, this should be around the time Euko placed that spell on Major. I think... that she doesn't really remember most of it so we get to sit in the void instead"

Kat frowned "I thought we were supposed to only see important things on our way to Major"

Minor winced again "Well ah... that isn't untrue, but like... this is important to her. Even if she can't remember it's important"

"She can remember less about the days following her healing than she can about being an actual baby?" asked Kat

Minor shook her head "It... it isn't quite like that. These are impressions as much as they are memories, and ah... perhaps this section is best represented by the void. I can tell you that things are progressing, I can feel it, but... it's a little strange.

"It's why the scene froze instead of disappearing after the attack, Major must have felt trapped, or frozen in time, instead of just asleep, and um... like, the bed for example. She knows what that looks like because we've seen it afterwards

"So like... even though she doesn't know know, that it was the same in that memory, her mind extrapolates sort of. You can't think of these things like the real world" said Minor

Kat rubbed her chin with her tail "Ok, well, seeing as you seem to know. Did I do well with that nightmare?" asked Kat

Minor nodded "I think so. I'm not sure it will always be so easy but just preventing it from ruining the scene seemed to work. Once we got past the point of no return, that is, ah, the spell triggering it



vanished. I'm not sure if it was in the memory the whole time, and barely managed to gain a form towards the end

"Or if it could have just arrived. I'm not sure what matters more. That the memory was long or that we are a bit closer to the source of everything" said Minor, with a slight frown towards the end.

"Ok, well, I seem to be able to fight them well enough. It didn't seem particularly damaged but if I can just stall, I should be fine right?" asked Kat

Minor frowned rather spectacularly "I... I hope I'm not insulting you with this, but I doubt it" said Minor "See... I know that memories past this point, despite not being quite so friendly to my own manipulations, get more extensive

"Like, we've seen, more or less, just individual snippets. I know that going forward we will start to see much larger things. Like... perhaps a few training sessions? Voices for sure, and a bit more besides"

Kat tilted her head "Didn't you say you've done this before the whole nightmare issue"

Minor winced but nodded "Yes... but, well, what memories are considered important can change. Especially considering the state Major is in at the moment I don't want to tell you we'll see this, that, and those, memoires when I'm wrong. Plus, they aren't perfect exactly.

"I've watched a few memories I'm almost certain are copies I have in my own area but are completely different. I ah... I'm not quite sure who is more correct but that isn't important. We will need to do what we can with whatever shows up next"

\*Well... that does make this a lot harder. I was able to 'fix' that memory because Minor told me the story before and there was certainly no masked man interfering with the ritual. Minor was also able to point that one out... \* **NOVEL**next.COM

\*But going forward? If things get more subtle the difficulty could increase drastically\* "Hey Minor, how confident are you in identifying Nightmares when they show up?" asked Kat

Minor bunched her mouth to the side as she thought. A few expressions passed over her face before settling back into her slight worry which was rapidly becoming default. "Um... I think, I can at least be certain when one is around. I'm not sure I can be certain what is a Nightmare though...

"About the only thing I can be certain is that it will never be Shizuka, herself. The reason we see them as just ice, is because it's standing in place of her. The Nightmares shouldn't be able to change that, so if there is only two things around and one of them is Major, we can easily figure it out" said Minor

"Well, you seemed pretty confident in the previous memory, was that just a fluke" asked Kat

Minor winced "Well... see, I could tell when it was manifesting, and it was the only thing it could possibly be. Say if... say it had been smarter and tried to look like an Enuke clone and was writing bad runes down

"I'm not sure I could have told you which one was causing the problems... and that would be really really bad" said Minor

Kat frowned but nodded. \*I can think of a few ways I might have been able to figure it out but that would have been much harder. Plus I'm not sure how much interference constitutes throwing us of course. Like, say one of the Euko clones was destroyed.\*

\*If I pretended to be it and just wrote down random gibberish would it work? Major shouldn't know the spell, and it's just a memory... but would knocking out the clone itself be enough to break things.\*

\*And once broken can things get back on track?\* Kat glanced at Minor. \*I'm not sure I want to worry her with these questions. Worst comes to worst I can buy her some time to back out and we can start again. I'm not sure we have time for that exactly, but if it has to be done.\*

\*I'll make that call.\* Kat patted Minor on her head and let her go. Noticing that she'd turned her aura back towards Minor somewhere during the conversation. Sighing internally at her lack of control Kat waited for the next scene to appear.

### **Chapter 197: Elemental Testing**

When the next scene started to crystallise, Kat was surprised to find the location was certainly not the palace. In fact, it looked much more reminiscent of Euko's place from the outside. However, as the surroundings came into view it was clear it was not.

The found themselves standing outside an old-style Japanese house with well-kept gardens almost as far as the eye could see. At the edges of Kat's rather impressive vision she could make out pure white walls, and through some of windows make out a few shapes beyond.

Refocusing on the scene in front of her Shizuka, in her purple ice avatar was walking slowly up a garden path made of stones towards the front door. Kat could see some indistinct shadows following behind her, but Minor didn't give an alert about them being nightmares and chose not to act.

As Shizuka approached the door she rang the large bell that was off to the left side before stepping backwards. A few moments later the front door was pushed open to reveal a strange man.

He had long hair, longer than Kat, which collected around his ankles. His beard was of a similar length, ending just slightly above the knee. His beard was a pure white, and his hair a pure black. To contrast this, he was wearing a dark blue kimono held in place by a dark red sash, and he held an old-fashioned smoking pipe to his mouth. Oh and he had bull horns.

The bull man took the pipe from his mouth and blew a long gust of smoke from the corner of his mouth directing it to the ceiling, making sure to keep it away from the small form of Shizuka.

"I see, the young princess has arrived. Come on then, and leave your guards" said the bull man.

Shizuka nodded "Yes Master Resho"

Resho nodded and turned leaving the door open for Shizuka to follow. As she started moving, the scene slowly crawled along with her dragging Kat and Minor along for the ride. Resho moved with purpose, striding slowly but unerringly, as he took turn after turn, until finally exiting a door into the backyard.

It was a sparse affair. There was a small pond to the left, and a large amount of bamboo on the right, in the centre though was a large pagoda with tatami mat flooring. Stepping over the stones Resho paused

at the edge of the mat and replaced his shoes before stepping onto the mats and taking a seat on one of the two cushions.

Shizuka awkwardly, but successfully managed to copy his actions and take a seat opposite him. "Are you aware of what we are doing today?" asked Master Resho.

Shizuka nodded

"Now, I'm aware I agreed to teach the Queen's children as payment for my asylum, but don't you think you are a bit young for the elemental testing? Most children haven't stabilised their mana cores yet" said Master Resho

"Mother said that I have achieved awakening already" said Shizuka with the slightest lisp.

Master Resho frowned "I see. Well, at the least my testing should not cause you any harm even if she is mistaken" *nOvelNext.cOm*

"Mother wouldn't lie" said Shizuka indignantly

Resho smiled but didn't comment on anything "Please feel free to ask any questions about the process. This is important for all aspiring magicians"

Shizuka nodded

"Minor" whispered Kat "I somewhat need this information so I'm going to be concentrating on it, but please let me know if a nightmare shows up"

Minor nodded in response. \*I might need this for Lily. As much as I'm unsure if I'd like to bring them into a world like this, if I can teach her magic and I don't she'd never forgive me, so I might as well learn what I can.\*

"Right, so first I will be testing you for healing magic, and then other advanced elements you might have like me. Any questions so far?" asked Master Resho

"Why are you testing for the rare ones first?" asked Shizuka

"Well" said Master Resho as he lifted the floor beside him and started to pull out a large box. "Some of the rare elements don't play nice with the more generic testing methods. For example, if someone with magma affinity tries the fire test, they are very likely to destroy the nearby area. That, and people with rarer magic types sometimes have secondary basic elements, so we don't stop till we've covered at least one of each"

"Conversely, they can still use fire magic, it's just that the testing for it is extremely dangerous" Master Resho began to pull out a strange flower, it was pure white, with a dark green stem.

"Now, sadly, the test for healing magic requires me to prick your finger. Are you prepared for it?" asked Master Resho

As soon Shizuka started to nod, there was a glint as Resho swiped his hand past Shizuka's outstretched one, pricking it and then placing the flower below. "Forgive me, healing magic is one of the more expensive to test safely" said Master Resho

"This is safely?" asked Shizuka

Master Resho nodded as the blood dropped onto the flower and promptly died the whole thing red in an instant. Resho threw it away over his shoulder as soon as he saw that "So no healing magic"

Rummaging around in the box Resho brought out a red stone. "Ok, now I need you to summon your mana can you do that yet?"

Shizuka nodded slightly "Ok, so... this is the magma test. I'm going to very gently lower this towards your hands. You ARE NOT to touch it. If it starts melting when it comes into contact with your mana you will be fine. If it doesn't melt you will still be fine, I'll just take it away"

Master Resho held the stone over Shizuka's hand and rotated it a few times as if he was trying to cook something over a flame. "Hmm, no Magma either" said Master Resho gently putting away the magma stone back in the box.

"Now, that those two are out of the way, I should probably test the most likely, ice. Considering your lineage, I find it very likely you've inherited it despite your red coat" said Master Resho

Shizuka flinched at this but nodded. Resho pulled out a box from within his trunk and pulled out a small ice cube from among many "Please keep your mana flowing" said Master Resho

Gently lowering the ice cube down onto Shizuka's hand he packed the ice box away "So, we have some time, determining if that melts or not. Do you have any questions for me?" asked Master Resho

"Um... what elements do you have Master Resho?" asked Shizuka

Master Resho took a long puff of his pipe, and started to draw shapes with the smoke. Creating a small fox as well as a bull, along with a bunch of flowers before running out of smoke. "I'm a smoke mage. Quite rare, and I'm double unique because I didn't get the fire affinity with it, just smoke" said Master Resho.

"Isn't that... bad?" asked Shizuka unsure if she should voice her question

Master Resho shrugged. "I suppose it depends on who you ask young one. A magician needs mastery over all of the elements under their control to advance, so I have less work this way, but many believe, perhaps rightly so, that the strongest mages have two affinities"

Shizuka's eyes looked like they were shining, which looked really weird on her ice avatar form "What about three or more?" asked Shizuka

Master Resho sighed. "I'm afraid that isn't really possible... Well, no, it isn't completely impossible. One would need to be lucky enough to have, Healing, a rare element, like say Ice" Resho pointed at the still unmelted cube "And then one of the basics like water. That is the only way"

Shizuka frowned "Surely not right... what about all those wizards in the stories that can call down thunder, while setting people on fire, and shooting ice at them"

Master Resho smiled "Well, young one. Once you get to the more advanced realms like me" Master Resho summoned a glob of water "You can branch out a bit if you must. But!" the water vanished "They will never be your specialty. Nothing but cheap parlour tricks for all but the truly strongest magicians. It

is simply so unbelievably inefficient otherwise. That water ball cost me about as much mana as it would take me to fill my entire house with smoke"

Shizuka's eyes shone "No way!"

Master Resho broke into a smile "A little thing like that for a grand magus like myself? Why that is simple"

Master Resho blew a long gust out of his pipe and started to create runes out of smoke forming them into a large three ring sigil. He raised an eyebrow and smiled at Shizuka before taking a deep breath and blowing.

### **Chapter 198: Testing Continues**

Kat and Minor could see from their position outside of the pagoda that Master Resho, did not in fact coat the entire manor in smoke, only the pagoda itself. Kat took a quick glance at Minor to ensure that she hadn't missed a nightmare, but Minor just smiled and went back to watching the scene play out.

When the smoke retracted everyone was much in the same place but Shizuka was giggling, so much that she dropped the ice cube. As soon as it slipped from her hands she stopped and tried desperately to catch it, but it fell to the floor.

Shizuka was looking down at the ice cube sadly when Master Resho spoke up "Do not worry child, you have passed the test. It seems you have the ice affinity. This will mean we need to be a little careful when we are doing the wind affinity test, but it is no matter" *novelnext.com*

Shizuka frowned "But I failed... I couldn't hold onto the ice cube"

Master Resho smiled "Please calm yourself child. The test was to keep the ice from melting. It is an easy task for an ice magician as your mana does it naturally. You'd more than proven yourself when you dropped it"

Shizuka frowned but nodded "So I have ice magic?"

Master Resho let out a small chuckle "You have the potential for ice magic. You will need to learn many runes before you really learn it. Would you like to test your base elements now?"

Shizuka nodded. "Ok" said Master Resho as he put away the large chest "We will need to go down to the basement for each test. Sadly the base four elements are harder to test for despite their widespread use"

Standing up, Master Resho pulled up the two tatami mats next to Shizuka revealing a staircase and heading down himself. Shizuka followed carefully and the scene started to shift. Kat and Minor found themselves pulled down the staircase after her.

The basement was extremely well lit, with several strips of crystal on the ceiling keeping it from seeming dark or creepy. There was another staircase next to the first, presumably for even lower levels, and to the right, or front, was an extremely large number of sigils carved into the walls, and floor.

"This is the test of wind. Because you have ice potential, I'll need you to wear this" said Master Resho, pulling out a small but very thick coat that clearly wasn't designed for people with tails.

Nonetheless Shizuka put it on without complaint, though the back was supported by her two tails, leaving most of her legs exposed. Master Resho frowned "You know. Considering where I live, I'd have thought when I requested such a coat, a tail slot would have been a given"

Shizuka looked back at the coat then over at Master Resho "What do I do?" she asked worried.

"Hmm" Master Resho let out a short grunt as he considered it. "Well, we can skip the wind testing... because you have ice affinity, if you don't also have wind you'll create a small blizzard and I'm not sure your mother would be happy with me"

Shizuka pouted "I'm strong, I'll be fine"

Master Resho took a long puff "I don't doubt it when you already have two tails" Shizuka flinched slightly "But that doesn't mean I'm willing to do something irresponsible. One moment"

Master Resho blew out a significant amount of smoke and summoned a four-circle sigil. The smoke then flew quickly out and up the stairs staying attached to Master Resho's mouth "Wait just a moment"

"What are you doing?" asked Shizuka curious

"I'm sending my smoke to search the house for some blankets. If the enchanted coat won't fit you properly. A few moments later a hand of smoke returned carrying three large blankets. The hand then grabbed Shizuka and placed her in the centre of the room, in the middle of the sigils before piling blankets on top of her.

Kat stole a quick glance at Minor, but she had no negative reaction "Ok" said Master Resho "Just let your mana flow"

Master Resho channelled his mana into the sigils in the floor, which lit up in a faint green light. Wind then started to howl, encircling Shizuka in a nearly visible gust storm. As this happened flecks of white started to appear. Building and building until the room started to turn into a veritable blizzard.

At that point Master Resho stomped on one of the runes running his foot through it. As that happened the wind instantly cut off. Shizuka was now buried in snow, with just her eyes poking out from within the blankets.

"One moment" said Master Resho. Carefully shovelling away the snow with his smoke arm that had yet to disappear, he carefully used his realm arms to unfold the blankets around Shizuka.

"How did you do that Master Resho. I thought you said it was really hard to do other elements" asked Shizuka

Master Resho nodded "That is true. The runes in this room have been painstakingly studied and refined to be the perfect set for testing for wind affinity. They have numerous redundancies and contain a number of things even I don't understand.

"However exactly they work, it makes it easy for anyone to cast that one specific spell for testing purposes. The runes aren't too hard to memorise but the placement is quite specific" said Master Resho as he led downstairs.

"They are also tuned to spill unattuned mana into the area so that it will mix with whoever is undergoing the testing. Nobody has enough mana or control at such a young age to cause the things you see in the test, so we have to cheat a little" Master Resho continued.

Shizuka pouted at this, seemingly taking offence at the idea that she couldn't have managed a blizzard on her own. \*I wonder how true that is... Having a second tail is a big deal, and so she's perhaps twice as capable as she should be. Is that enough though? I don't really want to ask Minor.\*

The next room, was mostly covered in sand, with only the area around the staircase not covered. Kat couldn't see any sigils or even singular runes, at all. \*Well this is a bit sparse. How does this test even work then?\*

"Where is the magic?" asked Shizuka \*She knows that she's talking about.\*

Master Resho let out a barking laugh, letting some smoke leak out "Earth Magic is actually the easiest of the lot to test for. Simply try walking across this sand pit"

Shizuka looked at Resho strangely before following his request. Exactly two steps into the sand she fell down up to her neck. Craning her neck, she tried to look back angrily at Master Resho but failed to turn far enough.

"Don't give me that look girl. Clearly you don't have any earth magic" said Master Resho.

Moments passed as Shizuka struggled to try and get out, made much harder by the fact her hands were pinned to her sides when she slid into the sand.

"Can you get me out?" asked Shizuka after a minute

Master Resho's face split into a grin. "You only had to ask"

Reaching down he let his hands sink into the sand and placed them under Shizuka's arms and pulled. There was a quiet popping sound as Shizuka came free. Master Resho stumbled a bit but managed to stabilise himself without falling.

Shizuka was practically coated in sand. Her attire was hard to make out in her ice form, but sand seemed to be clinging everywhere especially her tail. Shizuka did seek to rectify this, pawing at her tail, trying, and failing, to remove the sand. "Don't worry" said Master Resho "Next test will clean you up"

Shizuka looked at Master Resho uncertainly but nodded. Following him downstairs was a bit harder this time. They had to travel down three flights of stairs, instead of the one. \*Must be because the sand pit sinks so far into the floor.\*

Once they reached the next landing, Kat was surprised. The room was easily twice the size of the others. There was a large pool of water about the size of an Olympic swimming pool. The walls here were a strange ceramic looking surface instead of the wood of the first to levels.

Shizuka took one look at the pool and frowned. "I can't swim... and I um... sort of hate water"

Master Resho shrugged "With your ice affinity it is almost certain that if you have a secondary element that element will be water. As much as I might be willing to let you skip the earth test, or even the air, this one you'll have to do"

Shizuka's frown intensified. "Can I choose to skip it anyway?"

Master Resho thought for a moment "Hmm... Nope"

Master Resho picked Shizuka up by her shoulders again and threw her into the pool.

### **Chapter 199: Some Major Questions**

Kat was surprised when Shizuka sunk into the water without so much as a splash. Even straining her eyes, Kat could hardly see a ripple in the water. "That can't be normal" said Kat

Minor nodded, "Yeah, that means she's a water mage"

"Wait, so you can just throw people into a body of water and if they don't splash they're a water mage" Kat said incredulously

Minor shook her head "Of course not. That water is supercharged with mana. If mana was a more physical thing, you could say that pool is almost half mana. That mixing with a water mage is what makes it stay calm"

Kat nodded, but started to frown as the seconds past and Shizuka didn't resurface. Kat's worries were quickly assuaged when Master Resho grabbed a huge log from underneath the final step and threw it into the water. He followed this up by breathing out another smoke hand and reaching into the water to put Shizuka up on it.

"What sort of a water mage are you" barked Master Resho

Shizuka just pouted.

"Now don't look at me like that. You've proven yourself to be a water mage, you should be celebrating. Sure it's rare to have ice alone than ice and water, but being a dual element mage is something to be celebrated" said Master Resho

Shizuka stuck her tongue out at the old man.

"I see, well, I guess I'm just going to have to test you for fire affinity then" said Master Resho with a smile. Manipulating the smoke hand to grab her by the midsection.

Master Resho walked downstairs with Shizuka in tow. As they descended to the final level Kat was surprised to find it looked more like an oven than anything else. There was a big glass door with steel edges. The inside contained a bunch of runes etched into what looked to be steel, but seemed to suck in the light instead. Shizuka started to pale as Master Resho opened the door.

"Now, don't worry this is perfectly safe" said Master Resho throwing Shizuka in and shutting the door.

Kat looked worried over to Minor "Is this safe?"

Minor nodded "Oh yeah, it's actually much safer than it looks"

Kat was willing to believe her until Master Resho activated the runes and giant gouts of fire leapt to life covering the whole area. Shizuka was covered in flames and Kat sucked in a panicked breath of air, sure that something was about to go horribly wrong.



That was when the flames all seemed to pause. Frozen in time before pushing themselves away for Shizuka. They looked as if they wanted nothing more than to escape her presence. Master Resho started frowning.

Master Resho quickly summoned three sigils blowing into them to summon three small smoke hands. Throwing the oven door open he had them scratch out the runes on the floor ending the test prematurely.

"You must never speak of this" said Master Resho

"It... it wasn't me" said Shizuka

Master Resho frowned "Child, I may be old but I'm not senile quite yet but I know what I saw. Not quite the standard reaction but clearly fire affinity" said Master Resho with slight shaking in his voice.

Shizuka shook her head violently to each side "No... no I can tell, this isn't the same. I think someone is interfering in the tests"

"That someone being you Minor?" asked Kat

"Eh..." said Minor

Master Resho carefully put Shizuka down on the ground. "Look, I... I understand this is scary. Heck, I wish I didn't even know. Hopefully you can become a magician with only two elements. You cannot. And I mean, cannot let anyone know you have a third element"

"Things for the first few years were a little fuzzy. I was mostly just putting myself back together. Pretty sure it was me though, I just sort of pushed it away. I didn't want to let fire of all things hurt my sister" said Minor

Shizuka turned her gaze slowly to Master Resho "What about momma"

Minor let out a small squeak "Ooh, I forgot about this, whenever she gets nervous, she reverts. It's so rare because even when she was four, like in this memory, she already had 'mother' down pat"

Master Resho stopped and thought for a moment, as if realising it wasn't the usual teenagers he was teaching or even the young eight-year-old noble brats, but an innocent four-year-old trying to learn magic years ahead of the others. "Hmmm"

Master Resho looked away from Shizuka and let out a long puff of smoke that even started to fill the room. Smoke covered the ceiling, and sunk until it was just barely touching the hair on Master Resho's head, covering most of his horns.

"I don't know child" said Master Resho finally

"What... what do you mean" asked Shizuka

Master Resho sighed "I suppose I deserve that. What I mean child, is that I'm not sure anyone should have this knowledge. If it would be less suspicious, I'd try and find someone to destroy this memory with prejudice.

"It is simply that valuable. You cannot allow this sort of news to leak. The issue with removing it, is that lets people know you HAD something to hide in the first place, and in this instance. It isn't as though you can just remove an affinity from someone without taking the rest of their magic"

Master Resho let out another long puff "So that means even if we removed it, you'd find out again, and people would be on the hunt for the secret. So it is better we never so much as hint at it.

"But" Master Resho raised a hand "Your situation is hard. Not only are you a young child, much too young to bear this burden, you are also a princess. I do not fear your mother, I trust her to take care of her child..."

"But truth spells are commonly used on royalty, and sometimes they like to throw curveballs at each other such as asking for rumours of seemingly legendary but almost possible things like say... someone with 3 elemental affinities"

Shizuka paled, or Kat assumed that is what happened. The light inside of the ice sculpture Shizuka seemed to dim, mostly around the face, and it was the only thing Kat could think of besides nightmares.

"But... but" said Shizuka

"Master Resho carefully rested his hand on her shoulder "Perhaps, your grandmother can help you? She may know what to say. That allows someone to know your secret without risking yourself or your mother. I won't push you into anything, just... understand you can't say anything"

Shizuka nodded and the scene started to dim.

"Well... that was... something" said Kat "Did anyone figure out it was you"

"Well..." said Minor "Grandma certainly knows now it was me. And at the time... eh maybe? I'd guess she would have thought it was due to the spell that merged us, but based on how she reacted when we showed up, I'm going to go out on a limb and say she didn't know I was still around"

Kat frowned at the memory "A shame. And did anyone figure it out?"

This got Minor to mirror Kat's frown "Well... I would love to say no, nobody could have, because we didn't end up telling anyone... but... with everything going on with the Beast King I cannot be certain"

"Wait, why does that matter? Does he want her for his kingdom or something?" asked Kat

Minor looked at Kat like she was an idiot "Really?"

"What? What am I missing here?" asked Kat genuinely confused.

Minor groaned "You really don't know?"

"I swear with my demon magic that makes it so I can't lie ever. I have no idea why you seem to think I'm an idiot" said Kat

Minor sighed and bit her lip "Fine... magic affinity is inherited"

"Right? That only makes sense with most of your family being ice magicians" said Kat

Minor slammed a palm into her face. "They would want her to pass it down onto the Beast King's lineage"

"Ooh" said Kat, realisation hitting her. "That's pretty bad"

"Yes it is. Doubly so because it would never work. They wouldn't have an extra soul to pick up the affinity. Besides, Shizuka doesn't even have fire affinity" said Minor

Kat caught the strange wording. \*Interesting phrasing Minor. I may be a little naïve but fear my intellect is better than that.\* "You said in the past that Shizuka is in many ways both of you

"Does that mean that neither of you have fire affinity" asked Kat

Minor winced "Oh... um... well... ah... I mean... I guess... Ok, so you can't spread this around... but I have true foxfire affinity. I think"

\*Minor you sweet dear. I have no idea what that means... and I'm not sure I should ask either. Seems it would be better to just not know\* "I suppose that's rare then?" asked Kat *nOvelNext.cOm*

"Yes, very" said Minor.

\*Well, this just gets better and better.\*

### **Chapter 200: Once again no 100-milestone special**

The next scene started to return to clarity, but it seemed to instead be more reminiscent of the early ones. They were in what Kat remembered to be Shizuka's room, with the smooth black marble walls, blue flower like crystals in place of lighting fixtures. The bed's details were terribly warped, much like the road on a hot day.

Only Kat's memory of the carvings let her identify the bed at all, though the mattress and sheets, which were plain white in Kat's own memories, were instead a soft blue to match the lights. The room's desk was directly next to Kat and Minor's forms, though it was completely coated with papers of various sizes and shapes.

On the opposite side of the desk was a slightly raised platform for Shizuka to meditate on, though it currently had a massive ice cube blocking the entrance, warping the fixtures behind it even further than they had before.

Shizuka's herself, or at least her stand in during memories, was laid out in the bed. There was a strange plant that seemed to be holding water or some other liquid was hooked up to the young kitsune's arm.

Just as the details started to settle Chiharu slammed open the door. Though based on the look on her face it was more accurate to call her 'The Queen' she had a smile on her face, but it did not reach her eyes.

They contained pain and rage, in massive quantities barely restrained by a flash of love as she stared down at her daughter in bed. "This. Has been completely unacceptable. I am of mind to prevent you from training ever again" said Chiharu

"No" coughed Shizuka "You can't"

"I can and I almost certainly will Shizur-ka" said Chiharu stumbling slightly. "I have warned you repeatedly about pushing yourself to far, and so far you have refused to listen to me"

"I'm fine" Shizuka wheezed from the bed.

This was clearly not the correct answer as ice started to sneak out from under Chiharu's well embroidered kimono of a similar quality to Kat's own. It did have designs on it, but because of the memory they were too fuzzy to make out, and the colour was wrong for it to be the one Kat remembered, this particular article was a maroon with light blue highlights.

The ice slowly spread out in something approximating a circle, but the ice was carefully leaning away from Shizuka, perhaps in fear of her hurting her. "You are not fine. This is the eighth time just this month you have collapsed during your training. If this continues, I'm of half a mind to rip out your mana cores to save you the trouble" said Chiharu

"You can't!" said Shizuka again

"Look" said Chiharu "I will not lose a daughter to her own stupidity. If this is what it takes to prevent you from finding an early grave, I'll do it. For the pain of losing your potential is much lighter than that of losing you completely"

Shizuka grimaced "I... I promise to do better"

Chiharu's ice cracked and grew, as spikes started to reach up like the hands of damned souls "I don't want you to do better I want you to rest!" Chiharu hissed, barely restraining a yell "You've made this promise before, and I've listened because Shizuka I do love you, but, I'm putting my foot down here

"If you wish to continue trying to send yourself to an early grave, I will put in place permanent and drastic measure to prevent this" said Chiharu

Shizuka's eyes flickered to the growing ice spikes as a flash of fear came over her face before she managed to school it into a false calm mask. "I understand" said Shizuka trying to prevent her voice from wavering and giving her away.

Though, this was not enough to fool the Queen. Chiharu froze as her ice shattered, standing there like a sculpture of herself. Despite Shizuka's current icy countenance, if Kat was asked who the ice sculpture was, Chiharu would be the answer.

After ten seconds, Chiharu started moving again, and her demeanour rapidly shifted. The air warmed up and Chiharu gained a weak smile, smaller than before but much more genuine as she shifted herself to be sitting on the bed next to Shizuka's head where she proceeded to stroke her daughter's hair.

"I don't mean to scare you Shizuka... or maybe I do" said Chiharu voice fading. "Just, please understand that coming to visit you like this is rather painful for me. I..." Chiharu cringed and cut off the next part of what she was going to say

"Listen Shizuka, just, understand this is scary for me and I'd do whatever I could to keep you safe. Perhaps if I didn't have your grandmother's example that personal strength is so important, I would have already stopped you"

Shizuka looked away from her mother for a moment before turning back. "I... I just feel like I've lost something... and that training is the only way to make up for it. I don't know what it is, and I don't really think I ever can, but it's the only thing that helps"

Chiharu sighed "I've noticed. You look even worse after I invited other children over for you to play with" Chiharu said with a wry grin.

Shizuka giggle a little at that before getting cut short by a hacking cough "Yup"

It was at that moment, that there was a knock on the door. "Come in" said Chiharu

The door opened to reveal someone in a pure white coat with a nurse's bonnet with a vaguely familiar sigil on it. "Your Majesty I am here to change over the vitarus plant"

Chiharu nodded "Of course, please do what you must and don't mind me"

As the nurse stepped back out through the door Kat raised the question "What is that sigil on her hat?"

"It is the sigil for calm magic, one of the first anyone training in healing magic learns" said Minor "Not super useful on the battlefield because it can be easily resisted, but with skin contact and a few herbs very effective on patients randomly lashing out"

Kat nodded and was about to turn back to the scene when Minor froze "A nightmare is back" Minor whispered as if speaking the words aloud would give them power.

Kat scanned the room, waiting for the nightmare to appear. When the nurse walked back in Kat tensed for a second, but saw she was the same as before, just carrying a cart with the vitarus plant in question on it. *NovelNExt.cOmm*

Kat's relaxation didn't last long though, as directly behind said nurse was an identical copy with another vitarus plant. \*Oh no.\* "Minor what do we do" said Kat

"I don't know" said Minor slight panic in her voice "If we stop the wrong one the memory will still collapse and we will need to return to the start"

Kat grit her teeth as she eyed the nurses setting up. They had both walked over to the desk and left their carts there, before walking over to grab the vitarus plant already attached to Shizuka.

Kat pushed as much demonic energy into her eyes as she could. Walking forward to stand right beside the two nurses who were now on either side of the plant in question. Each of them was poking and prodding it in seemingly random places.

The problem was Kat could see the plant shuddering and flickering as this went on. Kat waited for the other shoe to drop. Eventually, the nurses reached over together as one to pull the plant from Shizuka's arm. Kat tensed... and they each managed to pull a separate spike from Shizuka's arm

As Kat was still reeling the nurses continued as if nothing was wrong plucking the vitarus plant from its stand. When it did so reality seemed to shiver as the plant split in two as they both grabbed on in either hand.

Walking over calmly they both placed it on the second rung of their carts before picking up the viratus plant and heading back to Shizuka. "You have to stop one of them Kat. Don't let the fake place it on the stand. They might just topple it"

Kat stood in front of the two figures and glared down at them, but neither so much as flinched. \*What the hell do I do? Is there anyway for me to bluff them.\*

Struggling to think of a good idea, Kat set her hand on fire. Neither so much as blinked at the sight, but something caught Kat's eye. The fire was shining, but only off of the left nurse's eye. Shit! Kat felt panic rising up inside her. \*I don't know if this means that one is real or fake.\*

\*Ok, let's stay calm.\* Kat forced the demonic energy into her brain letting time slow, though not as much as she would like, as the nurses slowly continued on their obvious path towards Shizuka.