

## DEMONS 221

### Chapter 221: a Minor breakdown

"No... no I don't think so" said Minor

"What?" said Kat without thinking. \*I just... I guess I expected Minor to just accept the help from my calming aura... but she said no...? What am I supposed to do now.\*

Kat sat there, letting the rain fall down on her and bounce off, it was a strange sensation she hadn't really experienced. The water didn't hurt obviously, but it didn't really stick, or soak into her clothing or hair like it should.

\*I guess I shouldn't use my power then... but I'm not sure how ok I am with that. And isn't that sort of a problem? I recognised and so did Lily and Vivian that this is a powerful ability, and that calming people unnaturally is something I probably shouldn't do...\*

\*But at the same time, nobody has ever just refused it. Then again, I guess there was no reason to choose not to take me up on my offer before. In the past it was fear or agitation, sadness, but not self-loathing.\*

"I... look this was my fault, and I think... I think I should be punished a little for that. I don't think getting rid of my guilt just because I can, is the right thing to do" said Minor.

\*And that is the crux of the issue isn't it. I don't really know what my aura does to other people. I can't. I might argue that with my aura Minor will only let her clearly see that she hasn't done anything wrong at all\*

\*But at the same time... she seems to think she has, and if I can flick a switch and remove that impulse... am I actually just calming people or am I doing more than that? The system recognised it as just a calming aura...\*

\*But then again, it has always been vague with my more mystical skills, and has only ever explained more about how they work after the fact. Does that mean that my aura might have more effects I just don't know about...?\*

\*But at the same time, once the system told me about a power, it seemed to know basically everything about it... probably seeing it before in other demons. Anyway I'm getting distracted.\*

\*What should I do about Minor? I think my aura has to be off the table. What is the point of asking people for permission to use it if I'm just going to ignore them and do it anyway. So what exactly do I do?\*

"Look, seriously Minor, I don't understand why you are beating yourself up over this. We discussed it first, we talked about the pros and cons, and then we went through with the test. The result is no more your fault than it is mine.

"If it worked exceptionally well, why, that would be something to celebrate, we would have found a great chance to break the scene faster, but it would be just as valid an idea to test succeeding as it when you fail" said Kat

Minor didn't visibly seem to react to this. \*Hopefully this works at least a bit. As much as I'd really love to take the time to sort out Minor's issues her life is quite literally on the line, alongside her sister's.\*

\*I didn't really feel the pressure before, but we are so close, and yet so far, and we can't possibly know how much time we have... and I guess... am I disappointed that Minor is falling apart now?\*

\*Well, that's probably the more reasonable response though right? She's been so strong through so much of this so far, reliving Major's most important memories, and likely being reminded that she was stuck with nobody to talk to for over a decade.\*

\*And then even through that, she clearly still loves her sister, and has been trying desperately to make sure we still save Major, and buoyed up by a series of good guesses she was able to hold off the terror... Until she failed. \*

Minor sniffled a bit as she started to speak "But... it was still my idea... and my failure with my powers to allow you to c-catch up"

\*Ok this isn't working. As happy as I am to continue to keep reassuring her it isn't her fault... it doesn't seem to be working... Any other bright ideas Kat? You've been using your calm aura as a bit of a fix all I think.\*

\*Why you're right Kat, but talking about yourself in third person can't really help now will it? Look I know that Kat, but look, I'm a bit worried myself and this bad comedy bit is helping me cope.\*

\*No it isn't. No, no it isn't.\* Kat shook herself out of the strange thoughts she was starting to have.

\*Perhaps a change of scenery might help a little.\* Kat examined the rock face and the deep gauges she had already left in it.

\*Perhaps I should just smash my way into the cliff. It would get us out of the rain at least, and maybe I can even do something about the wind...\*

"Hey Minor hold on tightly" said Kat. She didn't hear a response but when she felt Minor gripping her tighter she just assumed she'd be heard. \*Ok... so would it be better to like, scrape away at this wall or keep punching it?\*

Kat glanced at her fingers, and noticed her nails were completely fine despite the rock and dust that should have been lodged in them. \*Hmmm, let's try it like this.\*

Kat tried to push her energy into her fingernails. There was a very slight amount of resistance as she slipped the energy from the end of her fingers into the nails, but she was impressed with the results.

The energy dyed her fingernails purple to match the rest of her demonic energy, and it was very clear that something had changed. Carefully running her finger along the rock, she found that it practically peeled away under her fingers.

\*Well, that's good to know. Let's see if I can take out a big chunk.\* Kat pushed her hand into the wall and twisted, sliding her hand in further until she had her arm buried up to the elbow. Then, leveraging herself against the rock, Kat tried to push her fingers out and across.

It was a little difficult. She felt like she could probably bust open the rock if she required, but that wasn't what she was after, it was a more careful application of her power. Slicing the rock cleanly, Kat managed to free her hand and look at the cut she made.

Nodding in satisfaction Kat then set to work, using her nails to dig into the rock and slice it down as if she was excavating large cubes for construction. Once she ran her hand around the entire outside of the block, she dismissed the energy in her nails before slamming her fist into the centre and trying to pull the rock out.

Kat, however, realised a slight issue, she had made it a bit too wide so that she could fit her wings in the space. Changing tactics, Kat moved to the side so that only her arm hung off to the side.

Now, it was much harder to pull the rock straight out, but Kat managed. It was a bit of a drain on her resources, but she managed. Finally pulling the rock free, she let it fall down the cliff, and ducked inside.

The moment she did so, Minor flinched on her back "W-what did you just do?" she asked

"Just cut a bit of a hole in the wall to get you out of the rain and help you calm down" said Kat

"K-kat, you genius" sniffled Minor sounding more confident by the moment. Kat was about to say something when she felt Minor slide off her back onto the ground.

The kitsune quickly ran around Kat, despite the close quarters and beamed at her, still covered in tears.

"You've done it, the scenes almost completely shattered" said Minor

"What how? I'm just in the cliff. I don't see how that could be contrary to the purpose right? The wind kept blowing us towards it after all" said Kat

Minor shook her head "I don't know what it was. Maybe the theme was endless. Endless rain, endless climb, endless fall. Well you put an end to all of them. Or or maybe it was falling, down the cliff, but falling down and climbing up, while seemingly apposed aren't so different really, especially if they go on for long periods of time..."

"Or or, maybe it was motion? If we had just stopped long enough we'd have broken it? Like, perhaps those few times we stopped is what actually started breaking the scene?" said Minor, face lighting up and mood recover significantly

"Well, I'm glad you've recovered Minor. You might want to clean yourself up a bit. But let's be honest, the real question is what do we do now? The scene is breaking yes, but clearly we are still on the cliffs. Do we break first or march forward?" asked Kat

## **Chapter 222: a Minor desert**

"Um... how much energy do y-you have? I'm... well I'm fine" said Minor

Kat checked her reserves and found them still to be around a third, perhaps a bit better. \*Dam, I get some good mileage out of everything except my flame. I really have to wonder if I'm doing something wrong you know\*

"Turns out I'm still at like 2/3 full. So, if you want to weight around a bit I'll be back to full, or we can just head off" said Kat

"Hmm, better safe than sorry" said Minor "I can already feel the scene unravelling around us, so there is no reason to rush things. It might even break on its own."

Kat nodded and let herself slide to the side, and have her wing cover the entrance. It wasn't exactly a perfect fit, but it was enough to stop a large part of the wind and rain, and it wasn't so bad on her wing. A little uncomfortable perhaps, but better than simply letting the wind stream in. At the very least it didn't make her cold.

Atmosphere sufficiently improved, Minor let herself snuggle up next to Kat. Not that there was much choice. The crevice, by necessity, was only about as deep as Kat's arm when it was created, and neither felt the need to deepen the tunnel.

The pair sat in silence. Minor to further help herself recover from her slight breakdown, and Kat because she felt Minor's need for it. Additionally, she wished to ponder further on when she should and should not use her calming aura... but no real answers were forthcoming to her.

After a few minutes passed and Kat returned her energy to full, she had a strange thought. \*If time isn't actually passing properly... how then is it possible I regenerate energy normally? I know it isn't noticeably slower than in the real world but... what does that mean?\*

\*Is it a conceptual thing? Because it should take say thirty minutes it does? Or is it because of the spell making this world more real, thus I am bound by that rule... or perhaps something else?\*

Eventually, Kat saw that her energy had fully recharged and she brushed aside her less important thoughts. It was time to move on. \*I'm already getting a little uncomfortable with waiting so long for me to regenerate my energy each time, but I understand the need for it... so I guess we continued.\*

"I'm ready" said Kat

Minor nodded, reaching over to the side of the wall, and pushing into it. The wall seem to melt into her fingers and flow around them for a second, before the scene shattered. Kat got a moment to ready herself for whatever danger was going to confront her next...

Before she found herself in a desert. The sun beat down on her from high above, and the wind didn't move in the slightest. There was nothing as far as the eye could see, and a slight application of demonic energy only reinforced that fact.

Minor stumbled slightly on the sand, before steadying herself. Kat however took a very different approach, practically melting into the sand underneath her feet and spreading herself out to get as much contact with the sand as she could.

"Kat! Kat! Are you ok?!" shouted Minor

"I'm great" purred Kat, actually allowing the rumble to escape her throat at the end.

"Did... did you just purr? I know you're called Kat but you're clearly no beastkin" said Minor

"Sorry it's just so comfortable" said Kat stretching herself out. When her wings spread out, they threw up a bunch of sand luckily away from Minor.

"How can this possibly be comfortable?" asked Minor.

"It's the perfect temperature" said Kat

Minor, seeing this reaction, let her immunity to the heat dissipate for a second, before a burning sensation set in. Shouting in pain she disabled the sensation, before tumbling over and rubbing her now sore feet. "What in the everfrost's name was that!" said Minor

Kat shrugged, even as she buried herself deeper into the sand "Well, I didn't exactly think it would be comfortable for you. The temperature here is clearly very hot, and I can tell as much but I'm practically fireproof.

"Small changes in temperature don't really do it for me, so a normal 'hot bath' is basically still lukewarm. Enjoyable, especially for the atmosphere, but the temperature is largely irrelevant. This on the other hand

"Well, I would put good odds that you could cook food on the sands as they are now, in fact I'm almost sure I've seen fire lacking in the heat produced by this sand. That and it is wonderfully smooth

"So, laying here like this is just exceptionally comfortable for someone like me. I can dig in and experience it. Plus dirt and grim don't stick to me, they just sort of slide off, so I don't have to fear this sand creeping into my clothes or other areas if I don't want it to" said Kat.

Minor stared opened mouthed down at Kat "You're telling me... that an endless desert, intended to cook lesser creatures alive is basically paradise for you?" asked Minor incredulously.

"Well, I wouldn't quite say paradise you know. I couldn't stay like this forever, it's just very relaxing. Really the hot bath analogy is by far the most accurate description I could wish for. Would you like to spend your days in a hot bath forever?" asked Kat.

As soon as the words came out of her mouth though she paused. \*Wait, would Minor even know what that feels like? Should I have found a bett-\*

"I guess that does make sense... I don't really know if I'm honest but it is comfortable when Major took baths occasionally, and it was nice when Grandma was cleaning me off in her massive bath...

"Though it's more like a pool really. I'm told it's a natural hot spring... but I seem to remember that those aren't supposed to smell great, and I didn't notice anything strange... Is that the same?"

"Um..." \*I don't really know? I mean... I think so?\* "I'm going to go with yes" said Kat

Minor nodded "Right that's fair... so, what's the plan now then Kat?"

"Well, we have to break this scene right? I know I'm enjoying myself but I should probably get on with it" said Kat

"Ah, actually your fine. The scene is already tearing itself apart as we speak" said Minor

"Wait what?" asked Kat

"Oh yeah, it's practically shredding itself. I'm not sure what the core theme of the desert was, but it really didn't like the fact that you love the environment. In a few more moments the whole thing is going to break by itself" said Minor

"Oh" said Kat. \*Well that's good then. As enjoyable as this is, we have a job to do... though why aren't we breaking the walls down?\*

"Is there a reason you aren't shattering it faster?" asked Kat

"Well... see I have an idea. The other scenes weren't breaking quite as fast as this, even now, if you look into the distance you can almost see it falling apart at the seams. So, I want to try something. Instead of using my power to break it, I want to wait for the moment it breaks then push us further along" said Minor

"What do you mean?" asked Kat

"Well, we are slowly approaching Major, but she keeps throwing up walls. Thing is, she can't build those walls until we are in transition, or well, she can build most of it but not put it into place? That might be a better picture

"So, I'm trying to get us to go as far as possible in one break. Not sure if it will work or not, but your enjoying yourself and the scene is about to collapse so it works out well as a test" said Minor

"Well, you're the expert" said Kat gazing into the distance. And to her surprise she could see what Minor was talking about. On the edger of her vision, looking a lot like a mirage was a long crack that seemed to run down the horizon.

The sand acted as if it wasn't there, and it extended into the sky, and it was almost like the crack was on Kat's eye rather than in reality, only a slight tilt of the head causing the crack to remain in place convinced Kat it was a fixture of the landscape.

"Well when exactly will it be breaking?" asked Kat pulling herself semi-reluctantly to her feet, to ensure that she was ready for the next scene.

"Why, it is about to happen, in just

Three,

Two

One

Now"

And the world broke. Unlike previous times when things seemed to reconstitute instantly, the shards seemed to hover and circle the pair as if waiting for a chance to strike. Finally after a few more seconds, they reconverged... and the next scene was a drastic departure from what the previous three had been.

"Well Minor... what do we do about this?" asked Kat

### **Chapter 223: a Major army**

Kat hadn't really been to hell. Of course, there was the accounting offices, but they had been pretty benign. And, if you were to ignore the strange inhabitants of the place, it looked downright normal. As if you'd visited a local accounting office, and not one in an alternate dimension staffed entirely by demons.

The scene in front of Kat though, it was a lot closer to the idea of hell. There wasn't quite any fire and brimstone, but it didn't need any. The sky was bleeding red, and that was to be taken more literally than Kat would like. There was a clear line on the horizon that seemed to let the colour bleed in.

Above that line wasn't much better, it was dark and cloudy, but at least it was normal. Everything else, from the sky to the mountains on the horizon, to the scene in front of Kat was dyed with that strange bloody red.

And the scene that played out before her. Oh the scene. The plains in front of Kat were extremely flat, with nary a hill in sight. There was only the cursed mountains in the distance, looking more like jagged teeth ready to clamp down than true mountains.

But, it was what was on the grassy plain that was cause for concern. At either end of Kat's vision, regardless of where she seemed to look, spewed forth a veritable wave of humanoid figures dressed in armour.

Even with Kat's vision she could hardly work out the details, but these armed and armoured figures... these soldiers marched endlessly together from each corner of her sight to clash in the middle.

That was perhaps the worst part, not the visual clash no, that was still indistinct even to Kat's extreme vision. It was the sound, the clashing and grinding of steel on steel, alongside the grunts of effort and the battle cries of the warriors arrayed before her. The sound of tens of thousands of marching feet, all trudging forward endlessly.

But the concerting part of the sound was actually what it lacked. There were no screams. Not a single scream of pain, of horror, of despair. It was as if every combatant in the mix of endless soldiers wanted to be there. Even as Kat watched the figures fall and be tread upon by their companions, not a scream could be heard.

Kat felt it as Minor pulled herself in close to her and she returned the gesture, wrapping her tail around Minor and pulling her in tight. Minor's ears tickled Kat's shoulder but she didn't react.

\*What in the world is this. How is this possible? What has Major seen for this to come alive in her mind...\*

"Minor, what do we do?" asked Kat trying to steel herself as much as possible for whatever task might lie ahead of her.

"I... I don't know... what could possibly be at the core of this..." said Minor

"Well, it has to be the army right" said Kat straining her voice to make it sound like a joke. She failed, and both her and Minor recognised that but they let out low chuckles anyway as if they could convince each other it really was funny.

"I-I don't know, but I think your calming aura might be necessary now" said Minor

Kat nodded, spreading her aura out... but as she did so, Kat felt something pushing down on her aura.

\*What is this? I've not really encountered something like this... except for fighting people specifically... Minor isn't fighting me so why is it like this.\*

Kat grit her teeth and felt her aura expand, finally pushing past the strange pressure she was feeling and over herself and Minor. To Kat's surprise, it evened helped calm her slightly. The effect was not as pronounced as Minor who relaxed instantly but Kat could tell the feeling of dread that had been welling within her had vanished.

This still left her scared and worried, never before had she seen such battle playing out before her... but it was not an all encompassing fear that made it hard to breathe. Now it was a subtle pressure telling her that something was very wrong. Which was of course, more than obvious to Kat.

"Thanks" said Minor breathing out a sigh of relief "I wasn't sure if you'd have been comfortable doing that after I'd previously asked you not to use it on me"

\*Well... now that you mention it maybe I should have been. You clearly weren't in your right mind to decide if you really needed my calming aura... but of course that's the issue isn't it. Nobody needs it when they are sound of mind, that's the whole point unless I'm trying to use it to put people to sleep.\*

"No problem. I think it might actually be something to do with this scene, like there is an additional effect permeating it. I had to... push against something for lack of a better word, and I'd only ever experienced that when someone was fighting my influence before... so I'm not sure what it says, just that it says something" said Kat

Minor nodded "I- I can't really begin to consider what we need to do to break this... I mean could you fight them all?" asked Minor

Kat narrowed her eyes and let her demonic energy circulate "Maybe? I suppose it depends. They are quite far away... and I don't really know how strong they are... but they seem endless. I'm not sure that even I can fight an endless army, and considering that's what they are already each trying to do... I feel like that won't break the scene" said Kat

Minor put her tail in her mouth and started to chew lightly on the end. "Hmm, I think you have to be right Kat... fighting probably isn't the answer... but I think we have to get closer. We have to know what is going on with them"

Kat nodded "Ok"

And so, the two set off. After a short time, it was clear that Minor was slowing Kat down, so she simply scooped her up and started running again. Kat debated a few times if it was a good idea to burn some energy to get to the fighting faster but...

Decided that using up her primary offence and defensive resource just to get to the fight earlier was a gross misuse of her abilities. Even still, carrying Minor was easy even running at high speed and it didn't take long before she arrived at the edge of the carnage.

Kat wasn't really paying attention, simply marching one foot in front of the other and concentrating on keeping her energy expenditure at around the same level as her regeneration so that she'd be full when the fight started.

It was a surprisingly enjoyable and slightly difficult task. She didn't want to be too slow, and be wasting energy as she kept at full, but using enough energy to see that she was starting to move faster than her regeneration to keep was also not ideal.



She made quite a few minor adjustments along the way. The easy way out would have been to just run faster for a bit then slower, but Kat tried to find the perfect balance. She'd gotten really close, traveling only burning the slightest fraction too much energy, likely so small that if her full attention wasn't on her energy she would say she was at full.

That was when Minor shouted something breaking her perfect concentration "What are they!"

Kat looked up, and finally the sight before her registered properly to her brain. The army in front of her was filled with humanoid figures to be sure... but that was the most accurate description figures.

Faceless wooden things when weapons and armour of steel, or some other metal endlessly crashing into each other. Each trike chipping away at both attacker and defender, as wood splintered and cracked under the weight of heavy swords.

What she had thought were blood splatters, were instead splinters of wood breaking free from their original home, and she could now clearly see each defeated 'soldier' cracking and breaking as they were tread under foot, until they were broken into tiny pieces and absorbed by the soil.

"Where the heck could Major have even seen something like this!" said Kat

From Kat's arms Minor replied with a quiet voice "This is like nothing I have ever seen, there is no way Major has either???" there has to be something else... some reason for this. This is a dream, sure as any other, so she can bend the rules...

"This doesn't have to have been real... but if we can figure out what it is based around then we might be able to discover what the central crux is. That way we can find out how to break the world"

"How are we doing so far" asked Kat

"No progress... it's as stable as it could possibly be" said Minor

"Of course" said Kat narrowing her eyes as they wandered across the mannequins.*novelnext.COM*

#### **Chapter 224: a Minor amount of confusion**

Minor and Kat just stood and watched the mannequins throw themselves at each other for around five minutes before it started getting dull. Oh sure, it was so horrific, but they were just wooden statues, this was all a dream, and really, the only thing still keeping them on edge at this point was the awful noise they made.

\*I really just have no idea what to do with this. We've seen before that we need to attack the central idea... play along with it a bit to shatter it completely but honestly I'm at a loss. Sure this was pretty scary originally...\*

But now it's kind of comical watching the mannequins flail about. Now that Kat was up close and no longer afraid, she could see them bending and shifting more like those blow up figures in front of car lots.

\*Besides, what do we even do? There is this awful red tint on everything, but it doesn't really matter, not once you get used to it. What about the dark clouds? Are they important? Should I have flown up to them to check out?\*

\*But they just seem so unimportant, like they are barely even part of this scene... so it all comes back to the mannequins... Maybe I should poke one? Is that dangerous? I mean none of them even have a bow so I could just fly away... but it seems a bit risky.\*

"So Minor you got anything?" asked Kat "My best idea is just to see what happens if I try poking one with my tail or something and backing off... but that seems like it can't be worth the risk.

"At least for the moment the mannequins seem rather content to just fight each other, and I'd hate to have to plan things out while I'm running away from a bunch of homicidal mannequins... but I'm really not coming up with much else"

"Hmmm, see, I'm trying to figure out where this could be from. I think it's a bit too specific to just completely made up. See, for dreams like this, you need at least a little reference, even if it's only a story or something...

"But I just can't think of anything relating to mannequins or the like. Even war was pretty far from Major's mind. See, she had a good deal of combat training but she was never trained for warfare specifically...

"I believe Mother said something like 'War is not for the faint of heart or young of age. While I still live and your age numbers less than 50 you shall hear nothing of it' which, Major didn't exactly protest

"She just didn't have any interest in war really. It didn't give her any more personal power and that's what she was obsessed with. Perhaps short-sighted, considering two people is stronger than one in any situation...

"But Major has her difficulties, and I have mine... though I do wonder if she will lose that particular one... Anyway I'm getting distracted, the point I'm trying to make is that war isn't something that she be blocking us" said Minor

"But why not? I doubt she's ever been to a desert or a cliff or something" said Kat

Minor nodded "Well, yes, those weren't exactly memories, well the blizzard arguably" Minor shook her head "I'm getting distracted again. The thing is, those were all rather generic, based on the weather and just generally bleak situations

"We can see this with how easily you broke the desert just being happy about being there. They were all places Major knows about and would never want to go, so that's easy. Now I thought, this was a war, another thing Major didn't really want to see

"But the mannequins kind of throw me. I mean, if they were just meant to be people stand-ins then they would look different. Possibly just armour, or more likely something roughly approximating the guards in the palace

"But no, it's specifically wooden mannequins and I can't help but feel that it means something you know?" said Minor

\*Well... I guess it is a bit strange, but I mean this whole thing is strange. Why is it all red? Does that mean anything? What about the fact that you can't quite see where the mannequins come from? If you try to look they always seem to come from just out of sight...\*

\*Hell take a step back further, we are inside someone's head who has two souls and one of them is helping me... honestly we are already in crazy town Minor. Even if this is a magical world, this cannot be normal.\*

\*Hmmm, though that does make me thing... what about stories? Books perhaps? Or movies would that work?\*

"Could this be like... a scene from a book? Or a movie? Or a video game?" asked Kat

"Um... no to the first I think, but what is the third?" asked Minor

"Er... well, it's sort of... an interactable light projection?" said Kat. \*Technically true and I really have no better way to think about it really.\*

"Huh... I don't think we have anything like that. That sounds like quite high levelling enchanting or spellcasting" said Minor

"Yes it i- would be" said Kat stumbling. \*Dammit, I can't say that it IS because there is no magic involved and that would be a lie.\*

If Minor noticed Kat's minor fumble, she didn't comment on it, she did however say, "Tell me a bit more if you don't mind Kat... I feel like there is something right on the tip of my tongue"

"Um... I don't really know? I mean... I never really had the chance to play them myself I just heard others talking about them... I... I think you sat down and tried to... I dunno I guess play out a story?" said Kat.

\*How do you explain video games to someone with no concept of tv's without revealing you're from a world without magic...\*

\*Huh, though hang on... would I be allowed? The system doesn't seem to be around... so perhaps I could tell Minor... but it probably isn't worth risking.\*

"Huh... play out a story you say... that's ringing some bells actually... I'm so close... I think I do know what this is from, but I just can't quite remember it" said Minor

"So what it is from something then? Not a book though?" said Kat

"No it couldn't be... I remember most of those well. Major kinda just stuck to training manuals most of the time so I know the few other books she's read extremely well. Is there anything else you think it could possibly be? Some other leisure activity?" asked Minor

"Um..." said Kat

\*Other leisure activity... I mean there is trivia I suppose? And Gramps rather enjoyed playing ball games when we still had those old soccer balls... Huh, what did happen to those? Kat shook her head and tried to refocus. Something else... wait what about board games? Like chess and stuff...\*

"Have you heard of board games?" asked Kat "No... not quite but... WAR, war games I have heard of" said Minor.

"Right... what are they exactly" asked Kat

"Well, just based on the name, and the impression I get when you speak, I think they might be the same thing actually" said Minor

\*Why would... oh right translation. I actually forgot I had that... Guess it's nice to know it isn't a system feature.\*

"See, Major did actually play a few, but um... ok what could this be" said Minor "I think, it has to be one, but it clearly isn't anything like the original... but it should just be what they represent that might be enough and also explain why they are mannequins"

"How so?" asked Kat

"Wooden game pieces. Even we as royalty still used them... and in fact they were very important for one particular game, called Rally... now that I think about it, this has to be based off Rally, there is nothing else it could be" said Minor

"Right... well how are we supposed to break it?" asked Kat

Minor bit her lip "Well, that is where this gets a bit harder. I do think this scene is based off it, but we are rather far from the source material if I'm being honest. I can't be quite sure how everything ties in... maybe I should just explain the rules? Do you think that would help?" asked Minor.

"I guess so? I mean, otherwise I go back to staring at mannequins while you puzzle it out on your own. I've never heard of Rally at all, so I won't be able to help you otherwise" said Kat

"Well... I suppose Major will appreciate it in the end, she loves the game, because it lets her train her mana control... though I guess you'd never be able to play with us..." said Minor shaking her head.

"Anyway the rules are rather simple at the end of the day, it's the details that start to get complicated. See, it all starts with the gameboard..."

### **Chapter 225: a Minor reading the rules**

"So... how much of a history lesson do you want here?" asked Minor

"Uh... aren't we just going to talk about a board game? Why do I need a history lesson exactly" said Kat

"Well, it's just that I realised that this particular game is very important to my family considering that my grandpa made it. Same as the tunnels, and Major actually played this a lot" said Minor

"Wait... if she plays this game so much, how did you not recognise it" said Kat

Minor looked slightly abashed at this. "It scales, that's sort of the whole point of it? So, like, the few figures that she'd use can actually be rather easily scaled up to this point if I'm honest" said Minor

"Right... so how could it possibly scale to this" said Kat waving her tail towards the endless army of wood and steel

"Well... ok, I'll just start with the basics. So, the rules get a bit more complicated as you move on but there are three main rules, that matter the most. The first one is that upon defeating your enemy's figurine, you can field that many extra units

"The second is that if you have slots remaining you can summon a figure every thirty seconds and it must be placed behind the centre line. Finally, to win you need to field twice the number of units as your opponent.

"The tricky thing is though, is that you have to be able to control all of those figures to do a rather intricate set of motions with all of them, as chosen by a random card that comes along with the deck.

"This might not seem like a big deal but it really can be, and games have been lost when people bite off more than they can chew" said Minor

"But why would you increase your army size if you don't need to?" asked Kat

"Ah, well that's where things start getting complicated. So, firstly, the figures have a chance to just fall apart when attacking. If this happens you don't want to risk being overrun. See if your opponent manages to sneak a single figure to the backline the game is declared a draw

"So you avoid that if you can, but you really need to take that into account. Also, though we don't see it in this scene there are different kinds of fighters, and some special figurines can more easily combat large numbers

"So it is all a balancing game. For the best players, the rule is changed to be fielding double your enemy's cap, or fielding fifty percent over the cap, and having them all step over the line at the same time.

"Some matches can go on forever but then mana becomes an issue. Honestly, it's a really fascinating game all things considered, and I see why Major gets a little obsessed with it. To explain properly why though you need the history lesson part" said Minor

"Well, I am interested but at the same time... maybe not just yet. Firstly does this information help us figure out what to do exactly?" asked Kat

"Not really?" said Minor unsure "I mean, I can guess that the reason the army is endlessly fighting each other is to increase their soldier cap, and they just keep fielding soldiers trying to win...

"But what exactly would be breaking the scene Kat? Fighting them would lead to us building our own forces, but because that game, oh it's called, Concentrated Assault, can be played with basically any number of people

"So just adding a third playing by taking things out wouldn't break things. Honestly if you joined in the fight I doubt the world would waver much at all, you'd just be considered a very special unit type and that would be the end of it I'd assume" said Minor

Kat frowned "So what exactly can we do then?"

Minor bit her lip "Well, the issue really is that I still can't figure out what the core could be. Playing along sounds all well and good until you remember that we are trying to break things...

"The issue being that the best way I can think of to break a scene built around a war game is to just not play it at all... but clearly that won't work because we aren't playing and the scene remains stable none the less" said Minor

"Could the game be considered in progress with two players or something?" said Kat

"I don't quite follow" said Minor

"Well, say for example the scene is centred around playing Concentrated Assault. Does it matter if we are the ones playing or not? We already have two players else we wouldn't see that massive army. So maybe it counts as the game being played regardless of what we are doing" said Kat

"Hmmm" said Minor chewing on her tail "That actually doesn't seem to far out of place... so then would we be able to break the scene by stopping them...? But how would you stop them? Eliminating them would be considered playing so..."

"What about more perspective tricks?" asked Kat "Like with the fire, you could make me really big to the background and crush them"

Minor shook her head "That isn't quite how it works. I can't really change you because you are quite... firm in your existence for lack of a better word. I can move you as I do myself without issue, but changing you in any way is beyond my power

"I'm not sure if you helping me would do anything if I'm honest. It's not like you resist that part of my power... so much as you just... hmm... Ok, here is how you look at it. Think of the dream like a bowl full of water.

"You and me are ice cubes. Sort of made from the same stuff, but clearly separate. I can move the ice cubes around and even shape the water to some extent but I can't change the ice cubes physically" said Minor

"But didn't I see you changing your own form right at the start of all this?" asked Kat

Minor bit down hard on her tail and went red "We-ell... I can change myself a bit... not too much... a bit, and it's easier out in the unclaimed areas, here I have a more concrete presence... and like... it's just different" said Minor

Kat suppressed a laugh at the adorable floundering of Minor "It's fine I understand. What about making them small instead? That way I can still crush or block them without changing anything about myself"

Minor shook her head again "It is more possible yes... but there is just too many of them for me. I'm not able to affect this place quite so much. I could possibly do one mannequin, maybe even half a dozen, but there is countless before us Kat"

Kat nodded "Ok... so what about we build a wall or something? Stop them fighting" asked Kat

*nOvElnExt.cOm*

"That actually sounds like a good idea... except for the fact we have nothing we could build it out of. Look around, there is not a tree in sight. Perhaps we could pile up dirt but that would be an issue, and I don't know how much I could cheat if it was a dirt mound..."

"It might feel a bit too much like the rest of the ground? If that makes sense. A wall at least is clearly a wall so I can twist things a bit better... though... maybe a wall of your flames? The main concern with that though..."

"Well, actually it is two concerns. Firstly it would be a lot of energy, and secondly it might just destroy them anyway. Your fire is pretty deadly and can even take out Nightmares, so I doubt wooden puppets can really stand up"

Kat stroked her chin with her tail "Yeah... that would probably be an issue. You've shown me I don't HAVE to burn things, but then it's even more useless because I've just made the battlefield come with a splash of purple really..."

"And even though my fire freezes stuff I don't think I could build up a wall of ice or anything. Even though my fire is that cold, it just doesn't seem to work like that" said Kat

Minor leaned into Kat and sighed "Seems like Major really has stepped up her game for this one... the only thing I can think of is maybe I can twist the purple off of your fire and use it to coat the area instead of the red maybe?"

"But I doubt that it's central to things, and even if that does help. Let's say it breaks it by hmm... I give it 20%, the scene can recover pretty quickly if we don't make any other progress" said Minor

Minor's words however gave Kat a slightly interesting idea "Who says we have to do in one go through... what if we figure out a few ways to break things, then we just keep piling them up until you can break the scene?" asked Kat

#### **Chapter 226: Ignoring the square cube law**

"That... that could work actually. I mean, that is sort of what we did the first time actually. The fire was just step one, and even though they all fit together nicely, the story, the fire, and a bit of time all added up to break it properly" said Minor

"Ok...?so we have the purple sky thing, and you said that was worth 20%?" asked Kat

Minor nodded with a slight grimace "That's just a best guess. It probably isn't super integral to the scene but because it's just so ever present and takes up so much 'space' so to speak, then I think it will make a difference

"Plus, because it's just a slight change of shade it won't be impossible for me despite the fact it is so large a change in other ways" said Minor

Kat nodded "Well, what other things can we do... we don't exactly have a tonne to work with I don't think"

Minor nodded but didn't say anything.

\*Well, let's just go over everything that we have. First is the strange red filter but we have our plans for that. Then we have the mountains in the background. I feel like they are more like a border for the scene than a part of it, but maybe attacking them a bunch would work well? Or maybe it will hardly work because they aren't properly part of the scene\*

\*Then of course there is the storm clouds in the sky. I could perhaps fly up and try and do something with them. Maybe disperse them or something? I'm not sure how much I can affect them, but I think with Minor's help I should be able to move them a bit.\*

\*Then of course there is the two separate armies and the spawning spot I can't quite seem to spot. I wonder if I can do anything better by trying to find that... but it does seem to curve a bit if I look too far in one direction, and I'd guess I won't find it.\*

\*So that just leaves interacting with the army itself, but we established that would be involving us. I do wonder if my fire would make them disappear a bit more permanently but... I doubt it for some reason. Maybe it's because they just keep spawning?\*

\*So even though they disappear after being broken, maybe they are not the same? That would make a lot of sense. I mean, in the rain and blizzards the water just appeared didn't it, so it isn't as though I need to figure out a proper system for these things.\*

Kat watched as the nearest mannequin was shattered in front of her sending splinters flying. One landed by her side before sinking into the dirt slowly afterward. \*Huh, thought it only sunk because they got trampled, but I guess they sink after a bit of time anyway.\*

Kat stared at the spot the wood had disappeared from, as her brain turned, and an idea started to form. "Hey Minor, could you perhaps enlarge one of the broken pieces of mannequin? We could use it to block off a large section of the army, just have it fall down between them.?I'm not sure if it would be safe to grab a piece, but if it is perhaps you could do something with it"

"Um, yeah, should be no problem" said Minor uncertainly

Kat felt her eye itch slightly "Why do you say with such hesitation?" asked Kat

"It's nothing" said Minor

Kat stared down at Minor "Please tell me Minor. I don't know why now of all times you'd try to hide something like this. It seems so small compared to everything else"

Minor grit her teeth "Look... it's just... I can do it... probably, but I'm not sure I could do anything else. So no purple skies or even breaking the scene and moving us along, and that part is very important, because I truly have no idea how to completely shatter this one so I'll need to make use of my power for it"

Kat nodded "Well, hmmm" \*That does throw a bit of a wrench in things... Minor has been rather skilled so far, and I just hadn't consider that she might not quite be up to the task. What about... doing it halfway maybe? Or perhaps resting it somewhere instead?\*

"Ok, I have two solutions I think" said Kat "The first is to make increase the size, but not all the way. Then you can increase it in two or three lots, however many it takes, so that you aren't quite so strained

"The second idea would be for us to set it up as large as possible, as well as making it really light. Then we can rest it on top of the mountains and move it later, or perhaps if you can make it light enough I can carry it, but I'm not sure how well I can do that, or if I can be holding it when you start the size increase"

Minor bit the end of her tail "Hrnh... that, seems like it does have potential I suppose. I'm not quite sure if it will be just as hard to increase it in one go or multiple... my power is a little vague in the dream round... but I think I might be able to do it.



"As for making it lighter... I think that would be a bit too much for me. Increasing the size of things is rather easy because I can abuse the malleability of dreams... making things heavy is a bit harder, because we have a surprisingly accurate sense of how much things should weigh

"So... hmmm, I could perhaps make it hollow instead? I mean we can't see inside, so you'd not know the difference... the problem is I'm not sure if that would make it lighter if I don't also change it in that way... At the very least we could give increasing the size in stages ago

"I just worry about the final stretch. If we make it to close the required size how are we supposed to lift it? The army is quite large, and I'm not sure you are strong enough to lift something even half as long as the army is wide" said Minor

\*That is a good point. I don't think I've ever really had the chance to test my absolute limit... though I might just have to make do. I mean what else can we do? Wood is rather solid after all... wait. It doesn't have to be. In fact it's quite porous.\*

"Hey Minor, when you scale up something like wood, what happens to the little holes in it between everything? Some wood is a shockingly large amount air" said Kat

Minor pauses "I... I didn't know that actually. Are you sure?"

Kat nodded "Yeah, why do you think a solid plank of dead wood can absorb water if it doesn't have any space to hold said water in it"

Minor nodded "Yes, that makes sense, and that is why we apply varnish to wooden things yes... Ok, I think I see where you are going with this Kat. When I make the log bigger I should try and make the holes grow larger alongside it"

Kat nodded "Yup, then we just have to worry about the square cubed law" said Kat

"The what?" asked Minor.

Kat whipped her tail end around, careful not to do so near Minor. \*Should I answer that? Dream logic seems to really work in this place, and perhaps not knowing about the square cube law will prevent it from being a problem\*

\*I mean, if Minor just assumes things should work, why would making a log larger make it suddenly collapse? On the face of it that makes more logical sense than the truth if you are just giving it a casual glance. \*

\*Sort of like how a kilogram of steel and a kilogram of feathers both weight a kilogram. So if I just pretend that the square cube law doesn't exist maybe it just won't. Or at the very least, if Major and Minor don't know, it won't matter.\*

"I think... after a bit of consideration it's best you don't know it. I believe some of our dream logic tricks will work better if you don't know" said Kat

Minor gave her a strange look, she couldn't quite place "I trust you can't... I don't think it is a bit of a strange thing, but if you truly think it best I won't ask... though could you tell me once we've freed Major?"

Kat nodded "I'll try to remember"

"Ok good. So we have, the sky, the blockage... and is there anything else? I worry that still won't quite be enough to break the scene. I think the blockage will do a lot of good, maybe 30-40% all by itself, but we need, something close to 70? Just to be safe with how much effort I'll need to expend" said Mino

### **Chapter 227: a Minor planning session**

"So, we are still a bit short than. 20% ish right?" asked Kat

Minor nodded, and Kat continued "So, what about those mountains? Would somehow causing massive damage to them break the scene a bit the same way the filter would?"

Minor bit her lips "No... I don't think it will. I think we'd have a better chance messing with the clouds. The mountains act more like a boundary because this scene isn't that large all things considered. The clouds though, add to the atmosphere, so I think we should work on them"

Kat nodded "Ok, well, I'm not really sure what to do with them" said Kat

Hmm, Minor brushed her chin with her tails, and a mimicry of Kat's own nervous tick she had yet to notice. "So... ok I can think of two ways actually. One, may or may not require my help, and the other certainly will"

Kat gestured for Minor to continue "So, I think we can perhaps either, use a bit of my power along with your wings to push everything away. So, that should be fine because wind is mostly hidden, and maybe if you do your whole creepy demon presence thing I can make the wind brush away the clouds

"Secondly, if you can spread your flame throughout the clouds, depending on how well made they are they might start hailing, which should break the scene a bit as the piling snow slows down the armies as well"

"What demon presence thing?" asked Kat

"A-ah don't worry about it too much... it just... sort of happens sometimes. It makes you feel really important, but it's also very calming? It's weird. I think it might be your aura that does it but I can't exactly be sure about it" said Minor

\*That's a little strange to hear... I'd love to ask the system if that has any sort of wider implications. I doubt that fear aura also comes with a respect component... other than respect given through fear of course...\*

\*Though maybe that explains it? Anyway, ignoring that, I think I should use my fire on the clouds. Minor will already be stretched a bit then as it is and I don't want to make her do even more work. I'm not sure she can handle anything else even if she'd say otherwise...\*

\*Though hang on. How come she knows that you can cause blizzards by cooling down the clouds and forcing them to turn from a gas to a more solid form... especially when she is missing something like the square cube law. Guess I can just ask\*

"I'm surprised you know that you can create snow and rain by messing around with the clouds" said Kat

Minor shrugged "It's pretty simple. I mean, Major has studied quite a lot of spells that create localised weather phenomenon with her water magic. They are a bit beyond her, but she's been sure to research everything she can get her hands on"

\*Oh... that actually makes a lot of sense.\* "So, will that be enough? The purple, the wall, and the snow?" asked Kat

Minor nodded "I think so. It has to be" the second part of the sentence was barely whispered, but considering the close proximity Kat could easily hear, and she wasn't entirely sure Minor actually meant to keep it from her.

Still Kat chose to say nothing "So now it's a matter of order. What do we want to do and when do we do them" said Kat

Minor chewed on her tail for a moment before saying "Well, I think we have to build the wall first. Then we can deal with the filter... but maybe we should do that at the same time as the dark clouds? Maybe we can work together on it instead?" said Minor

"Are you sure? I can fly pretty easily through it all" asked Kat

Minor shook her head, more confident this time "No, I think it will be much more effective doing it both together. It will only take a slight bit more effort on my part, though it will still take a large chunk of your reserves"

"How much do you think I should use?" asked Kat

"Well, I can't really know exactly how your powers work, but I'd say somewhere between one third and one half" said Minor

\*Oof, that's quite a lot of energy to lose in one go. Even with my poor control and worse planning I'm not sure I've ever used up so much in one attack. Repeated attacks in short succession? Yes, otherwise n... actually I did use everything against Grace... dunno if that counts though\*

\*I just sort of decided to use literally everything and threw it all into my flames... though I guess that's what I'm doing here anyway, and Minor is going to help me.\*

"Ok, sounds like a plan. How do we want to order this?" asked Kat

"I'm thinking, splinter first to around half size, then wait till I recover, change the sky, then wait a bit if necessary then do the blockade" said Minor

Kat shrugged "This will probably be harder on you than on me. I trust your judgement" said Kat

Minor nodded "I'll be fine, now can you please grab a bit of wood. The more regular the better, and size probably doesn't matter" said Minor

Kat nodded, and narrowed her eyes, giving them a bit of demonic energy as well as some sent towards her mind to slow things down. She watched the figures clash in front of her, splinters broke off and fell constantly

For the most part though she ignored them. Many were out of range, and she wasn't going to risk alerting the army by going after anything out of tail reach. That still left plenty. It took only three destroyed figures to spot a piece that suited her needs.

Kat watched as the figure in question had its arm cut clean off by its opponent. Kat lashed out with her tail, having prepared for the moment in question, and easily grabbed the arm before it hit the floor.

Now it did also come with a wooden sword, but that was just more material to work with. That was until Kat realised... \*It's so much better to just use the sword isn't. Why did I not even see this. \*

As Kat stood there awkwardly, moving the sword from her tail to her hand, Minor noticed the same thing Kat did and blushed in embarrassment "Th-that's perfect... I can't believe I didn't just ask for a sword" said Minor

"For me, its because I thought I'd have to grab it after it left the mannequin, but that's no real excuse" said Kat

Minor shrugged "No harm done, pass it here" said Minor "Ok, we are going to have to step back to do this properly"

Kat and Minor ran backwards, with Minor slowly increasing the size of the sword as they ran. It was a little strange. She'd line everything up with her eyes, then the sword would shift so it was in front of them and a little larger.

She'd then pick it up and repeat the process. Kat didn't start to see noticeable strain on Minor's face until around the tenth attempt. At this point, the sword was now twice as large as Minor, and she was able to wield it fine, though she was now short on breath.

Kat put out a hand to stop her "Are you ok?" asked Kat

Minor nodded "I'm fine?? I just... didn't quite realise how bad it would be to do this repeatedly. I'm better of doing enlargements as much as I can rather than this rapid fire nonsense but I'm worried it will start to sink if I place it too far away for us to pick up quickly" said Minor

Kat gave a dismissive wave "I can just run ahead if you want, and make sure it doesn't"

Minor bit her lip "Ok, but you'll need to close your eyes. Wait until you hear it land please" said Minor

Kat nodded and sprinted ahead. After around a minute of going full speed, she could just barely make out Minor in the distance with her enhanced vision. \*That doesn't seem quite right. I don't think I travelled that far... unless Minor managed to do something... or maybe the scene is just messing with me.\*

Improving her vision slightly Kat watched Minor give her the thumbs up. Closing her eyes, Kat readied herself. She didn't have to wait long as not ten seconds had passed since closing her eyes when she heard a deep thud.

Opening her eyes, Kat started forward. The once hand sized wooden sword was not easily twice as wide as she was tall. \*How the hell am I supposed to lift this. I get it won't be heavy but... where do I grab it?\*

\*Kat saw the sword starting to wobble a bit as if it was going to fall over, and so she made her move.

## Chapter 228: a Major break

With seemingly no better options for grabbing onto the sword in question Kat pushed some energy into her hands and slammed them into the ground. It was an odd sensation for her. Her mind was expecting the strange grit and sense uncleanliness that came with playing in the mud.

Instead, it was almost like she had a bubble around her hands, and they remained rather clean. This threw her for a second, but as the sword continued to wobble, she refocused on her task. Wrapping her fingers around the 'sharp' side of the blade, which, even had it been sharp before, now at its drastically increased size, was almost as thick as her hand, and pulled.

Kat was not prepared for how light the sword actually was. When she wrenched her hand back to try and move it at all, it instead went flying. It was extremely light and Kat had put a large amount of her strength behind it.

The sword shot up out of the ground and into the air flipping several times as it did. \*Well.. shit. That was not what I wanted to do.\* Kat spared a glance over at Minor, who looked just as surprised.

Turning her attention back to the sword Kat contemplated what to do. \*So, I'm going to need to catch this. I can't let it sink into the ground, and it's so light that even if Minor doesn't know about the square cubed law and whatever benefit that provides us, I can still see this breaking if it lands wrong.\*

\*I don't want to just jump straight up to it though. If I do that I might crash through it... Could I jump past it and grab onto the hilt? I'm not sure I'd be able to fly with it. Even if it isn't heavy the surface area will pick up a lot of wind.\*

\*But, if I can just lower it carefully to the ground and... actually I was going to lift it from the handle afterwards but is that safe now? Its very light still but I'm not sure the handle won't just snap off... dammit I just don't know how physics is supposed to work here.\*

\*At the very least I???ll catch and lower it. Then I can just try and keep it from sinking until Minor gets here and she can advise me.\*

Kat launched herself up after the sword, spreading her wings as she did so. The air whipped past her, and she had to angle herself slightly a few times so that the rotating sword didn't clip her. She was more concerned about what an impact would do to the sword than her, but it was still a concern.

Once she got close to the sword, Kat watched its rotation. It was flipping around and slowly flattening out. Kat waited until she was sure she could grab the handle before snapping her hand out and trying to grab it.

This turned out to be a mistake. Her hand wasn't large enough to grab the handle properly and it continued to spin and slide around her hand. Grimacing, Kat lashed her tail out as well, wrapping it twice around the handle and tightening her grip.

The sword started to slow and eventually came to a complete halt. Kat didn't have time to rest though, because as soon as her grip was complete she felt the sword dragging on her wings. Letting gravity do its work, Kat flapped her wings lightly and let herself get carried to the ground.

\*Now, do I keep it upright, or do I drop it down sideways... normal logic would probably suggest sideways on the edge, but I think I might be better off going straight down, then holding on either side of the blade to keep it from slipping. I might have to risk putting small handholds in the thing, but it's the best idea I have.\*

And so, Kat followed through with her plan. Allowing the sword to slide into the ground. There was a slight hiccup as the weight didn't actually force it into the soil, but the strange property of the ground activated and started to absorb the sword.

Allowing this, Kat let go and moved to the ground, taking a wide stance and placing her hands on either side of the sword. She was just about to try and lift it when she felt the sword stop sinking.

\*What?\*

Carefully releasing just the one hand, Kat expected the sword to continue to sink... but it didn't. Releasing the other hand though caused the sword to start to sink again instantly. This time, Kat placed the flat part of her tail on the sword, just barely brushing it, and it stopped.

\*Well ok then. I guess as long as something is touching the wood it won't sink any further. Good to know.\*

Kat stood around for a while and waited for Minor to catch up. The whole sword catching fiasco only took a few seconds, so she was quite a while away

So Kat relaxed while she waited for Minor. Making sure not to actually be looking at her, just in case she wanted to skew perspective a bit and catch up to Kat faster than before. Kat wasn't sure how much time passed until Minor caught up, though that was a large part of the point.

"Nice job Kat. Though why did you send it flying?" asked Minor

"A bit of a mistake on my end. Cool thing is though, I found out you just need to have a hand on the sword and the ground won't take it" said Kat gesturing to her tail pressed against the sword.

"Huh, that is pretty cool. Well, I've recovered anyway, so we can go on to the next stage" said Minor

Kat felt her eye twitch as she looked at Minor. "Are you sure? This takes literally nothing for me to hold up, we can wait for a while if you need?"

"Do I look tired to you?" asked Minor quietly

Kat had to admit, that Minor looked fine. She wasn't sweating, or panting, she seemed perfectly comfortable at the moment, with a slight smile on her face. \*But why don't I believe her?\*

"If you are sure Minor. What's the order of things" said Kat

"First you summon your fire. Then I stretch it out over our vision and convert the sky, then you push as much as you think you need to into the fire and I send it into the clouds. Finally, you let go of the sword and close your eye while I extend it to block off the armies" said Minor

Kat nodded "Ok, give me the signal"

Kat watched as Minor took a deep breath. Gathering her energy just below her palm so that she could let loose a gout of fire on command. When Minor finished her breath, her eyes took on a sharp glint, and she said "Now"

Kat's hand burst into flames and Minor moved. She swiped at the air, and Kat's fire surrounded them, before twisting, and allowing them to see through it. A second past and then the flames seem to shift again, and the wall disappeared, but the purple haze stayed.

"Next" said Minor

Kat was ready, pushing a full half of her remaining energy Kat's flame burst forth from her hand. Kat wasn't worried it would hurt Minor anymore, and it showed, the flame engulfed the area, turning everything into a fiery field of purple.

Then Kat heard Minor take in a deep breath, even over the crackling of fire. Kat felt a tugging on her fire. Knowing she could resist its pulled, whatever it was, Kat gave it up allowing the fire to follow the pull.

The area of flames disappeared, and Kat felt them leave her connection, before the clouds in the sky started to shift, and burn, going up in purple flames themselves. Where the purple tint was still more of a dark colour, the clouds went up in Kat's signature deep purple flames.

The snow started soon after. Kat could see Minor panting, but she wasn't stopping. She turned her gaze to Kat and spoke. The words seemed distorted slightly, but Kat heard them all the same "Push over the sword and close your eyes"

Listening to Minor's command, Kat released her tails hold on the sword. It started to shift for a moment, but Kat grabbed both sides and pushed it up and forward, heaving it into the air, before closing her eyes.

A moment passed, and Kat could hear a large crashing thud signalling the landing of the sword. A second later, Kat heard the world shatter. \*Yes! We've done it.\* Kat opened her eyes as she watched the world shatter around her and start to move to the next scene. \*Finally, we were stuck there so much longer than the rest.\* Kat's joy was short lived though, as she spotted Minor a moment later, killing her excitement completely.

### **Chapter 229: Minor Panic**

As Kat watched the scene in front of her, the world slowed. She would never learn if this was a matter of the dream realm, or if she had instinctively thrown demonic energy into her mind to watch in horror. Or if it was simply her brain going into complete overdrive as it tried to contemplate, every second of the crushing scene in front of her.

As Kat stared at Minor she watched Minor fall. It was unbearable slow and distinctly inhuman. Instead of bending at the knees and collapsing as if she had fainted or her knees had given out... instead, Minor cracked.

It started slow at first. Thick lines glowing with a soft red glow slowly snaked their way around Minor's knees. To Kat's surprise and horror this wasn't just visible over her outfit, but included it as well. When the cracks reached around halfway a sickening crack was heard and the circle was completed.

Minor's feet and upper body seemed to disagree as to which direction they wanted to go. Separating at the crack her feet fell forward, and her body fell back. Kat tried to push herself to her limits, move forward, catch Minor, do anything at all, but her limbs were locked in place by the scene transition that even now had yet to complete.

As Minor's upper body fell towards the ground, more cracks started to form. Starting this time from the hands instead, they spiderwebbed out from the centre of her palms. Endless sounds of cracking echoed out one after another, as Minor's hands became riddled with more cracks than veins

Once they'd taken over Minor's hands, they made their way up her arms and outfit once again. Three large cracks, spreading over the top. As the cracks widened and sheared the red light beneath leaked out more and more, revealing a strange fiery insides that were nonetheless frozen in time.

It was at this point Minor had collided with the floor, and Kat had taken her first step forward. She was just barely able to move at all, and was straining against everything she could to try and get to Minor as fast as possible with no effort spared. She wrenched her energy away from her core sending it into her legs with as much force as possible, accomplishing less then if she'd sent a calmer stream, but this was the panicked movements of a desperate demon who knew no better.

When Minor hit the ground. No new cracks appeared immediately. There was only the heavy thud of a body hitting the floor. Any relief Kat may have felt at that moment was short lived though, as in one single moment and a huge tearing sound, a massive series of cracks appeared all at once.

It looked like a glass statue of Minor had been punched in the shoulder and then the cracks had spiralled from there. Large, cracks pulsing with red lights covered nearly every remaining surface on Minor's body and clothing.

As they reached up to her face they continued without fail. Splitting her features with rifts of fire and glowing faintly like everywhere else. The only solace Kat could find, is that even with the cracks that separated pieces of Minor's eyes, Kat could still see the parts moving, as if they had all been connected.

Once again, Kat's hope was crushed though, when a loud shattering sound rang out. Widening her eyes and trying to drink in every detail, Kat realised the problem. Minor's left ear had completely snapped off, with that eery red glow emanating from the base of the chipped piece and presumably from the join.

This was followed by another series of cracks reaching into Minor's tails. As soon as they reached halfway up said tails though, they halted. Stopped for seemingly no reason, but in a clear line despite the numerous cracks that riddled them.

Kat skidded to a halt, scraping her knees and quickly regenerating as she went. Digging herself into the ground to stop from barrelling into the girl now possibly literally made of glass. The world still refused to speed up as Kat looked Minor over.

*\*What the hell do I do! This isn't supposed to happen! Minor! Why\*!*

*Kat didn't have time in her slowed world to shed any tears, or choke them back. Her mind was running through as many options as she could possibly think of for what she should do. \*Pick her up? Leave her? Coat her in fire? Look away? Put her together? Is she ok? Is this my fault? Could I have done something better? Is it this scene instead? Did we get separated, and this isn't the real Minor just a part of the scene?\**

*\*No, I can't think that. This Minor has to be real, or even if it's not I need to do everything in my power to make sure that she survives. I can just barely see her eyes moving. I can see her pupil contracting as I panic, it's extremely slow but I can see it even with the cracks\* **nOVElnext.cOM***



\*And what do I do about her tails? They seem to be in the best shape. But does that mean I should stay as far away from them as possible or do I instead need to start whatever I'm doing there.\*

\*Seriously! What can I possibly do? I wasn't taught how to perform first aid on someone made out of crystal... wait no, that isn't right. Think Kat, what was Minor made of...\* Kat quickly cycled through her memories as best she could to remember Minor's thoughts on herself.

\*Memories. Minor thinks that this body in front of me is her largest repository of memories. But how the hell do I fix that? It isn't as if the memories are really destroyed or damaged, it's the container...\*

\*And even if it was the memories that needed to be fixed, it's not like Minor is unconscious and I can go into her dreams. We are already in a dream!\*

\*Of course, that likely means I should use a bit of dream logic to heal her... but how can I do that. Minor is the one that has the twisting perspective trick! I can't do it, I don't even know how, or if it's possible for me, and I really don't want to test it as Minor falls apart\*

\*But what else can I do? Should I just wait? Will Minor need to literally pull herself together? If that's the case is it safe to stay here? I haven't even considered the surroundings.\* Kat tried to tear her eyes away from Minor to try and survey the surroundings, but they still hadn't entirely finished crystallising into a scene.

The ground was paved stone, and the walls seemed to be a strange golden brown, with a blue ceiling but it was clear that the details were missing. Dammit fine. I can do this... right?

As Kat was panicking she saw Minor slowing begin the process of letting out a shuddering breath. Her chest was going down just slightly as the milliseconds inched past. \*Ok, she's still breathing even with her chest in fucking pieces.\*

\*That's something to be endlessly thankful for. I don't know for how long though. Everything points to Minor being much better off than she should be considering I can see her glowing insides, frozen red fire and all...\*

\*But that doesn't mean she's well... I should do something. I have to do something. I just don't know what could possibly improve the situation... some things like the cracks can't even be just forced together...\*

\*Like look at her hands. They are still in one piece despite the fracture. It's only her feet and ear that have broken off really, so I'm not sure if I should touch anything else. Her eye is split into pieces, but those pieces are still very much attached to her head at least...\*

\*Dammit I just don't know. Enuke! This sort of thing is important. Why couldn't you have told me anything about this. Is this how we are going to find Major as well? Shattered and in pieces?\*

\* Bad Kat, getting distracted. Worry about Major and Enuke later. Focus. Focus on Minor. Ok, what else can I do other than moving her and putting her back together. I have my fire of course, but even though I trust it not to hurt Minor in normal circumstances\*

\*These are not normal circumstances, and I doubt I have magically acquired healing powers for others. There is my aura... but I really don't see what calming Minor down can possibly do for me...\*

\*Then again that's at least a step isn't it? With my aura, if Minor needs to put herself back together without me she will be able to think more clearly. And if there was ever a time to use it without asking now sure as hell would be that time. \*

\*The only issue is that it sometimes causes drowsiness. Minor CANNOT fall asleep now. That could be the end of things, regardless of what I want.\*

### **Chapter 230: Minor pieces**

Kat was very careful as she started to apply her aura to Minor. Watching for the slightest of reactions as she applied the smallest increments of calming pressure she could. Kat needed Minor at the top of her game.

After a couple seconds of tiny increments, Kat thought she saw Minor nod her head ever so slightly. Dragging her memory of the last few moments out and carefully examining them to see if Minor had moved at all, revealed that, she had indeed, tilted her head slightly. \*I'll take that to mean no more, or that this is good enough. I don't want to risk overwhelming her and sending her to sleep.\*

With her aura usage carefully monitored Kat reached out to Minor's legs. They were the largest pieces and, in some ways the most well kept. Despite the large crack that broke them off, if you just ignored the fact they weren't attached to her body Minor's legs were in good shape.

Kat carefully placed one hand under each side with her tail in the middle and flapped her wings so that she could hold herself in position. It caused her back muscles to burn as she held herself in place while flapping her wings. \*Clearly, I'm designed for at least some extra movement when I fly. Doing it this way is rather painful, but when I glance at Minor, I realise this is nothing. \*

Lowering herself down next to Minor's stumps Kat carefully lined up the leg piece with Minor's thighs. Kat made sure to line things up perfectly, making sure that every crack and divot was perfectly aligned so that when she moved the pieces together the fit with a satisfying click.

\*Ok but now what.\* Kat stared at the leg in her hands. She could tell she was still holding the weight of the limb in question, and the crack was still there she was just holding the pieces together now rather than separately.

\*Dammit... am I waiting for something? Like a flash of light? Do I need to do more? Perhaps just rubbing my hands over the gaps as if I was casting a spell? But I don't want to risk putting demonic energy anywhere near Minor... I feel like injecting it into her would be disastrous... but maybe fake cauterizing the wound could work?\*

As Kat was worrying over what to do, Minor let out a strange sound. It was unlike anything a humanoid creature could make, should make. It sounded something like pieces of shattered glass grating on each other while fire burned in the background. It was completely indescribable, even this description lacks the ability to convey the strangeness of the sound. Perhaps it was something that could only exist in a dream.

Nonetheless, it seemed to indicate an effort on Minor's part, and as that sound left her mouth a flash of red light appeared around the crack before it disappeared, and Minor's right leg was whole again. Seeing this Kat couldn't help the slight smile that graced her face even as she moved to start on the second leg.

The process was much the same and no less painful. Kat made sure to send some energy to her back to ensure that the damage was mitigated somewhat, but otherwise the process was the same. She held steady and allowed herself to wait for Minor to reattach her leg.

Then Kat moved onto Minor's ear. It was such a strange texture. Whereas Minor's legs still felt like legs at the end of the day, when Kat picked up Minor's ear and it felt like a strange dusty piece of glass, she was rather shocked.

This didn't stop her from carrying out her purpose carefully and with great attention to detail. When Kat placed Minor's ear onto her head though she noticed something. The barest hint of a missing piece appeared. Despite lining up the ear perfectly, and fitting around the cracked line, there was a single chip missing.

\*Dammit. What the heck am I supposed to do!\* Kat scanned the area nearby searching for anything that might be the missing piece of Minor's ear. Letting her eyes glow with energy Kat scoured the nearby area, and managed to spot something. It was just barely different from the grey floor, and had a slight red tint to it.

The only issue was it was out of grabbing range. "Minor, I just have to grab the missing piece of your ear. Don't panic or do whatever you are doing to repair things just yet" said Kat as soothingly as she could, unknowingly lacing her words with her aura.

Putting Minor's ear down next to her, Kat placed her arms on the ground and used them to lift her carefully away. She didn't want to risk standing up and losing sight of the piece, and by the same line of thought, couldn't risk flapping her wings lest the small piece be blown away by the attempt.

Kat reached over to it, lifting it with the edge of her nail and gently letting it flip onto her palm. Kat examined the piece. It looked more like the internal frozen and cracked fire that Minor had rather than her ear, but it was the only piece in sight. \*Now how do I get it back.\*

Kat let her tail stroke her chin. \*Is it safe to risk flying? It's not on the ground... but I'm sure some wind from my wings will impact my hand... and I don't want to just close my fist around it. I have no idea how weak these pieces are... so that's out as well.\*

\*I could try using the one arm... but perhaps standing up is just the safest option. I'm in a bit of an awkward position sitting on my legs, but I'm strong enough that won't matter. Just got to be careful going up and down.\*

Kat pulled herself back up to her full height. Careful to ensure that she didn't move too quickly before taking slow, small steps back towards Minor and returning to her seiza position. Kat then carefully moved the piece onto the end of her tail and held it still.

With her tail holding the missing piece, Kat then proceeded to use both hands to carefully place Minor's ear against her head. Once in place, Kat made sure to keep a flow of energy to her left hand which was holding onto the end of Minor's ear as well as supporting the bottom.

Carefully, making sure her tail didn't move an inch, Kat picked up the missing piece and gently placed it into the gap in Minor's ear. "Ok, when you're ready Minor, no rush at all" Kat breathed out, calmly, but with a tell-tale sigh of relief.

With a quick glow, Minor's ear once again bonded itself together. There was no sound to accompany it this time, and Kat glanced over to see that with the reattaching of her ear, Minor's face had been somewhat repaired.

Her neck still had cracks in it, but everything above the chin was completely clean. Kat barely resisted the urge to grab Minor into a big hug and celebrating. Kat could see Minor watching her but she wasn't saying anything.

\*Ok... it seems like Minor still can't talk. I guess it might be something to do with the cracks in her chest but... what else can I do? Her face is in one piece, and her legs are back on. I know that she still has a bunch of cracks... but they have no obvious fix to them.\*

Kat glanced over at Minor, who shook her head lightly. "What's wrong Minor?" asked Kat

Minor glared back at Kat.

\*Ok... can't talk right. So I should ask question then.\* "Are you ok?" asked Kat

Minor nodded, then shook her head. "I'll take that as a 'you're dealing with it'" said Kat

Minor nodded

\*Ok, so Minor is dealing with things. What should I be doing then? I don't want to just leave her here, so if I'm moving she'll need to be carried... but at the same time I'm not sure how safe it is to move her.\*

"Is there anything else I can do for you Minor? I'm not sure how much you can see, but your body is still very cracked. Only your head, lower legs, and the top half of your tails are in good shape" said Kat

Minor paused at this, looking thoughtful, before slowly shaking her head in small amounts. "Nothing I can do huh... ok we can just wait till you're all better then that's fine" said Kat

Minor however, shook her head once again. \*What? You don't want me to wait then?\*

"Well... ah... um" Kat looked uncomfortable as she tried to find the words. "Do you not want to wait here?"

Minor shook her head. \*Dammit Minor. You just broke into pieces. If you could talk to me properly I'd make sure you understood that this isn't acceptable... but I understand you need to rest... dam. Ok fine.\*