

## DEMONS 231

### Chapter 231: Major's Summer

"Is it safe to carry you then?" asked Kat unwilling to leave Minor here if she was to move.

Minor nodded slowly, before turning her head to the side and coughing out blood. Kat was horrified and confused at this. "What! Why? You are shattered, and there is clearly no blood. Why now are you coughing up blood?" shouted Kat

As she said this though, a red light came over Minor's face and repaired the cracks that still remained on her neck as well as some of her chest. Minor clearly tried to answer but nothing but the same broken glass sounds managed to escape her mouth.

Kat glared at the fox. "Ok, I'll carry you then" said Kat

Reaching down, Kat went to pick Minor up in a princess carry, but as she lifted, she found something strange. Minor didn't rest in position, and was acting more like the broken glass statue she seemed to be.

Her skin felt smooth and solid, and while her knees did bend slightly there wasn't much warmth there. \*Ok... I don't know if this is a thing to be concerned about...\* Kat also noticed the Minor's tails were locked in place as well.

"Are you sure this is safe? I feel like I'm carrying a statue rather than a person" said Kat

Minor nodded once again, before turning to the side, and spitting more blood out followed by Minor's chest completely healing. Minor tried to speak again, and this time she succeeded. It was a raspy sound like there was still glass in her throat, clinking and grating against each other but there was clearly words. "I'll be fine. I'm going to pass out soon. It should speed up my recovery. Just don't worry, I can recover from this" said Minor

Kat glared down at Minor, and without her conscious choice, demonic energy moved to the back of her eyes making them glow as she glared down at the fox in her arms. Kat's mouth moved into a frown, and her horns started to glow as well. \*I really, really want to chew you out for this Minor... but I suppose I'll just settle for ratting you out to Major and Enuco once this is all over.\*

"I understand" said Kat

"Oh, and-" Minor was interrupted by a coughing fit, though there was no blood this time "don't break this scene. I'm pretty sure that Major is here somewhere... you just have to look"

Minor nodded once more before turning herself just slightly so that her tails stuck out in front of Kat and her head rested against Kat's arm before closing her eyes and letting out a deep breath.

Kat tried to fight down the rising panic as she realised the Minor hadn't continued to breath after that event, but she was able to keep herself together. Minor had said she'd be fine, and Kat could see the remaining cracks on Minor glowing slightly and occasionally shrinking. \*Ok... it does look like she's still recovering. But Minor I will have to pay you back for this one. At least I know that this is the end, or close to it. Finding Major will be a big step forward.\*

Once Minor was well situated in her arms Kat started to look out at the scenery in earnest. What she had originally thought of as walls, was actually tall wheat stalks. They swayed slightly in the end, but were densely packed together. This also explained the blue roof, which was just the sky.

Reaching out towards the golden rows of wheat, Kat used her tail to press against it so she could keep a good hold on Minor. To her surprise though, the wheat seemed to form an impenetrable barrier. Even empowering her tail and making a strike just bent them slightly.

\*Hmm, so it seems I'm stuck following the cobble path.\* Kat looked around following the path in either direction, but only finding wheat eventually blocking her view. \*A Maze perhaps? Should I risk trying to fly up?\*

Kat looked down at the girl in her hands and frowned. \*If it was just my, I'd be willing to risk bashing my head against it, perhaps literally, but I'm not sure I want to risk the shock Minor's body might receive if I try. At the same time though... I'm not sure I want to wander a maze that could be endless for all I know...\*

\*But I'm not supposed to break this one am I. Perhaps I have no choice but to walk the path. If I start flying and the scene breaks before Minor shows up I have no idea what I'll do.\* Nodding to herself for reaching a conclusion Kat started to head off, she simply picked a direction and moved.

In the end she turned left, it was the way she was originally facing before Minor collapsed and seemed as good a direction as any. When she reached the end of the corridor she found it branching off to the left and the right, before hitting dead ends, or perhaps intersections, it was hard to tell from her position.

\*Do I just go with the old, keep your hand on the left wall? I mean, I'll use my tail instead, but I see no better way to get through this, and nothing that is rushing me.\* Shrugging Kat decided to follow her thoughts and head left.

Taking the first left, led her to a second, then a third, and then a fourth... \*Ok something strange is going on here. I can already tell. I've just taken four lefts down equally long corridors, or near enough I can't spot the difference, and yet I didn't end up back in the clearing.\*

\*Well, this is just great. I can keep circling I suppose? I wonder if it has a limit.\* And so Kat set off with the most basic of plans in mind, which was to continue her looping. Time passed, and the loops showed no signs of ending. After the twentieth left turn Kat used her tail to scour a mark in the cobbled stone floor. Hoping to see it on the way around...

Of course, a full rotation later, and Kat was at a brand new intersection with no markings on the ground. Narrowing her eyes Kat scratched her mark once again and then waited. She let five minutes pass and saw no signs of the mark disappearing. Taking a corner, Kat very slowly walked around it keeping her eyes behind her looking at the mark.

As soon as her head past the corner, she then turned around and walked back the way she had come... and found herself in an open clearing with no other entrances or exits. Just a round circle with a little pond in the centre.

"Oh come on, at least try and make a bit of sense!" shouted Kat, in frustration. When she did this, Minor stirred slightly and Kat clamped her mouth down shut. \*Note to self. Curse the maze internally, because I don't want to be responsible for waking Minor just yet.\*

Kat did take this chance to examine her friend a bit more closely. She noticed that the cracks on Minor had certainly shrunk. They were closer to hairline fractures now. Still too large to be inconsequential, but much smaller than they had been.

Kat nodded to herself and examined the area. \*Well should I just head back? I don't need to drink, I don't think... and I doubt Minor does either... but perhaps there is something in the pool?\*

\*Is it worth investigating? I don't want to jump into it or anything with Minor in my hands just in case something goes wrong. I... I guess I'll look but nothing else.\* Kat moved forward and stood at the edge of the pond.

It was a perfect circle, and clearly unnatural. Despite the fact the path stopped slightly short and left it with some dirt around the edges it was the perfect circle. Staring into its depths Kat could not see the bottom. Even enhancing her eyes didn't help, though the main limiting factor was the angle she was required to stand at to keep Minor from just hanging over the pond. Kat was taking no chances in case something was to jump out.

Kat let out a sigh. \*I'm going to say that there is nothing here for us. Or if there is it can wait. I'll go along with Minor's request I carry her around, but jumping into potentially bottomless ponds in a dream world is not a risk I'm willing to take right now.\*

Walking out of the clearing, Kat found herself at a crossroads, and of course. She turned left, again, and again, and again. \*Perhaps I should be thinking up better strategies... or rethink the whole 'no flying just in case' rule I set for myself.\*

For just a bit longer though, Kat was willing to walk the left path. It was calm, and without danger, and the gentle swaying of the wheat put her at ease, and it was certainly the better option to jumping in the pond.

### **Chapter 232: a Minor amount of rain**

Kat glared angrily at the pond in front of her. She had taken a lengthy trip down the left paths, and even spent a while going only right. Nothing changed until she once again decided to backtrack, and of course, when backtracking you end up in the damned clearing instead of where you were supposed to be. Now Kat was debating once again, if the pond was evil or not.

Of course, instinctively Kat realised that a pond could not be evil in and of itself. Her mind had not left her, despite the likely, hours, perhaps longer, spent wandering the wheat maze. And yet, it seemed to be the heart of her problems.

It was the only thing in the maze that was different in the slightest. The round room with the pond. And so yes, it must be important... but trusting it to not be a trap was hard. \*I mean, really how many dream ponds have I even met? Surely not that many? So how can I trust it.\*

Despite her complaining though, it began to look more and more like her only option was to jump in. She slowly dipped her two in the water, with a frown on her face, as if she was expecting something to jump out and bite her foot off.

When in fact, nothing at all happened. Well, Kat wouldn't say she was disappointed of course, but her expectations certainly were not met. Frowning at the pool for another few seconds Kat sighed and steeled herself.

\*I suppose this is what it comes to isn't it. There is only so many times you can take a left or right turn in an endless wheat field before you finally decide to just end it all by jumping into a pool of water with no bottom.\*

\*Man, I hope Minor will be ok...\* Kat looked down at Minor, who was now for the most part healed. She hadn't woken up but almost all of the cracks had completely disappeared. Taking a deep breath and closing her eyes. Kat jumped forward

As soon as the water covered her head, Kat felt everything shift, then, the water covering her face disappeared. Opening her eyes Kat found herself in a dark area, where it was raining heavily. The details were hard to make out, but with the rush of air surrounding her she could tell she was falling.

Kat was about to stretch her wings out to their full length but stopped herself and instead threw some energy toward her mind to slow things. \*That was close. I don't know how fragile Minor is at the moment. Stopping my fall so abruptly could be just as bad as hitting the ground. Now I just need to go about this slowly.\*

Kat spread her wings out slightly, just enough to catch some more air and felt her descent slowing. Giving a few light flaps with wings half extended further slowed things down, until Kat felt comfortable spreading them out to full length and gliding the rest of the way.

Looking down, Kat saw a huge forest. It looked dark and ominous with the rain overhead... but also vaguely familiar. Kat was tempted to go back through her memories to pinpoint why but dismissed it as having more important things to do.

\*Hmm, this could be a hard landing.\* Kat bit her lip as she examined the trees. They were too close together for her to keep gliding. She required a bit of space and at least some horizontal movement if she was going to avoid flapping her wings and potentially jolting Minor too much. *nOveLNext.Com*

Considering the fact that the trees were so close, she likely couldn't even stretch her wings to full, let alone flap them or glide, Kat needed a different plan. \*Is it good enough to just land on these trees somewhere? The issue is where. I can't really tell which branches are stable from above, there is simply too much leaf cover.\*

\*And I don't want to just crash through the canopy. I'd hate to bash Minor through a bunch of branches... but I probably can't risk falling fast enough to snap them all because then I'm back to the whole falling to fast problem... \*

\*What about raising Minor above me... the issue really then is her tails. They still stick out a bit because of how fluffy they are... but that might be for the best... wait what about my tail? Can I do anything useful with that.\*

Kat chewed on her lip while looking down at the approaching canopy. \*Hmm, not really? Maybe I should improve my eyes, look for a spot, then use my tail and a bit of demonic energy to cut through it all.\*

Kat nodded to herself and followed through with her plan. Finding a thick branch beneath the leaves wasn't too hard, and just required her to make a slight left turn. Gliding over towards it, Kat empowered her tail, and got ready to slice through the branches

A swift flick of her tail was all it took to slash through the tree branches, causing them to crash to the ground. Gently drifting down past the now clear tree tops, Kat let herself drift to rest on a large branch, taking extra care with her arms to ensure that her legs and elbows took as much of the impact as she could managed

\*Huh... new problem. Cutting away a few branches is nothing... but that mess looks like it might take some time.\* Looking down, Kat saw a large number of trees and vines crisscrossing each other, all intertwining. Leaving nothing to stand on its own.

\*Dam, if I want to try and make my way through that I nearly have to take the whole section of forest down. Half the branches are snaked around each other and the other half are tied together with vines. Heck, I'm lucky I managed to find a good spot to stand with just a few swipes.\*

Kat bit her lip and tried to study the area closely. There really did seem to be nothing she could do to get around it. Even sticking close to the trunk, if it wasn't a branch from that tree, it was a competing branch from another.

\*Hmm, would it be safe to perhaps wrap Minor up in some of these vines, tie her to the tree and then smash my way down? I'd be worried that I might bring too much down. Depending on what gives way when, the vines or the trees, I might be pulling on a good chunk of forest. That and I really don't like the thought of leaving Minor unattended. If this is anything like the wheat maze, leaving her behind might separate us permanently.\*

Kat sighed. \*This might be the first time I really wish my fire was the burning kind. I can only flash freeze things...\* Kat slapped herself in the face with her tail. \*Which I'm more than capable of doing. I'm worried about the trees rebounding and hitting Minor or something but if I freeze them, then shatter them I should be fine. Why didn't I just think of that the first time.\*

Stretching out her tail, Kat summoned a bead of fire on the end. It seemed to almost understand her desire and easily slid onto the nearby vine. Once there Kat started to overcharge it feeding it more and more energy until she'd used up about a third of her reserves.

This was more than enough for the fire to spread greedily across perhaps 10m<sup>2</sup> of land. Kat watched as the vines froze over and started to turn slightly blue, likely the water inside them coming to the surface and freezing them.

Once the fire head blazed for around a minute Kat took a step forward so that she was partly on the frozen surface and stretched out her wings, ready for the fall, before slamming her tail as close to the centre as she could manage.

With a crack, the support structure failed, and shattered, allowing Kat to start gliding down. As soon as she did so, though, Kat noticed that there was still a few layers of branches between her and the

ground. She had taken out at least two maybe three, but there was another five or six left so she'd have to repeat the process a few more times.

\*No rest for the wicked I guess.\* Thought Kat as she set about removing the last of the obstacles in her way. It wasn't hard, simply a matter of repeating the idea. It did make Kat especially glad that she'd come up with it, as trying to bash her way through such an immense amount of foliage would have been a large inconvenience.

Finally, Kat managed to catch a glimpse of the ground below. Kat's eyes sharpened as she searched the leaf covered floor for anything strange, looking for the slightest movement, or some disruption that would indicate a trap.

### **Chapter 233: a Major thud**

Nothing seemed to be strange about the ground other than the abundance of roots. Looking closer at the leafy cover, it seemed that once you got past the thin layer on the surface it was all knotted roots. The trees as well, were rather close together, even for a forest. Kat hardly had the space to stretch her wings if desired.

That didn't matter though, because with Minor in her arms it was simply too risky to jump from tree to tree with so much foliage in the way. Letting herself fall down slowly, making sure that her wings didn't catch on the nearby trees Kat dropped to the ground and let out a sigh as her body relaxed.

This of course, was a herald of bad things to come, as a large thud resounded from behind her. \*Oh come on. We've finally gotten out of that stupid endless maze, and while infinite trees isn't great, it's at the very least not wheat.\*

Another thud rang out, getting closer this time. Kat turned to face the direction but angled Minor away from her in case something was going to come flying out. She couldn't see anything approaching, even as a third thud rang out, but with the large tree cover that was hardly surprising.

You could have the best eyes in the world but without the ability to see through walls, or trees in fact, you were just as blind as any other. Kat was thankful the darkness from the rain wasn't affecting her, and that the rain bounced off her.

It was at that moment though, as the fourth thud sounded, that Kat realised Minor did NOT in fact have her strange relationship with liquid, and was slowly getting soaked through. Her tails had already started to collect water.

Seeing this, Kat pulled her to the side and tried to angle her wing so that it was over Minor. It worked... well enough. Shifting herself to the side as another thud rang out Kat positioned herself under some of the canopy, she hadn't broken to help shield Minor further from the rain.

As she moved though, everything seemed to still. As if by some unspoken sign, the forest had ceased moving. This should have been ridiculous. Kat could see with her rather exceptional eyes that it was still raining, but somehow the silence permeating things.

\*This can't be normal.\* Kat put some demonic energy towards her ears hoping for some hints, but heard nothing. \*Seriously, this can't be normal I can SEE the rain still, why isn't it making rain sounds.\*

That was when she heard it. The horrifying roar of a monster. It shook the trees, sending cascading droplets of water down on Kat, and it was all she could do for Minor to block most of it with a wing as it spilled over her.

Then, Kat looked towards the sound... not sure what she was supposed to see, but what she found was a nightmare. Sorry, a Nightmare. It was in its ink form, except this one seemed more solid. The strange liquid that made up its form still seemed to cascade down towards the ground but it seemed to have an endless supply as it dripped onto the ground from its outstretched arm.

Kat couldn't see the rest of the thing, as it slowly started to bend and twist itself around the tree. The only thing that was clear, was that it was above her weight class. With an arm longer than she was tall, and almost as thick as her with wings fully extended, Kat didn't wait a second longer before turning away and sprinting.

\*Dammit.\* Trying to keep her wing above Minor to protect her from the rain, while she ran over uneven ground made out of roots, while also trying not to jostle her companion in the slightest was a real task.

She was burning demonic energy in her arms to absorb the shock, as well as pushing it towards her leg for more speed as she metaphorically flew through the forest. Her feet touching the ground for only fractions of a second as she quickly jumped from perch to perch, abusing her naturally good eyesight but refraining from burning yet more demonic energy.

All the while the thud, thud thud, of what must now surely be the Nightmares feet chasing after her rang out. It sounded like it was slowly gaining on her, as the noise got increasingly louder as Kat moved. She didn't want to risk glancing back though. It was already all she could do to keep juggling her tasks without tripping over or slower down.

\*Dammit. What am I supposed to do? I don't want to fight the thing, especially not with Minor in my arms. And I mean, how would I beat it?! The dam thing sounds huge. I'm not sure I have enough fire to coat the thing without going all out.\*

\*And that might not be possible anymore. I didn't use too much up freezing those leaves... but now that I'm running with such minute care, I'm starting to see the strain on my energy pool. Should I just risk it then?\*

\*Burn through all my energy and hurl as much fire as I possibly can at the thing? I don't know I can risk that though. If I pass out it can get to Minor which is something I really really don't need.\*

\*So what the hell do I do? I need to get out of this damned forest somehow but I don't know what I'm looking for. This almost seems like a completely different scene... but the fact that everything didn't shatter is a point against that.\*

\*Minor also said not to break it... so should I be looking for Major instead.\* Kat bit her lip as she ducked under a particularly low hanging vine before straightening up and continuing her run. With no destination in mind, she was just running straight ahead as fast as she could.

\*So, this is the same scene, and I can sort of move between what? Mini-scenes? Somehow, or rather, with special places. I can't try the turning around trick that I used in the maze to find the pool because there is a Nightmare chasing me...\*

\*And I can't run endlessly because I'm losing energy. Not much, and most of it is from flash freezing the leaves earlier, but I am losing some. I can't take off and fly away because of course, now the canopy completely blocks that exit.\*

\*Dammit, I should have flown back up through that hole in the trees. I didn't even think of that! I can fly dammit, so why did I just run away! Kat growled to herself. Should I try and turn back?\*

\*I'm mean, if I can find that gap again that would be great but... I'm not sure I can make a specific enough turn that I'm heading back where I want to. Sure I'm heading mostly straight but the roots make that hard to be entirely certain off...\*

\*But I think I might have to try. I don't really see any alternatives other than to keep running. Now the question is how sharply can I turn. I don't want the damned thing to catch me, so it can't be too sharp... but I need to be able to actually turn around 180 degrees within almost no error considering how fast I am.\*

\*Hmm, could I perhaps get away with making two 90 degree turns? No that wouldn't work anyway because then I'd be however far off course, shit. Ok, so that isn't an option... I guess I'll have to go with the gentle curving around and hope for the best.\*

\*I really hope my memory is up for this. Sure, perfect recall sounds perfect on paper but when all the trees look the same, its pouring rain and you are running for your life, the details still get lost. \*

Kat grit her teeth and started to turn anyway, taking just a slight left tilt to her forward direction hoping that she wouldn't be giving away too much ground to the monster this way. Risking one glance back, Kat could just barely see the things fingers in a gap between the trees, pulling itself along.

The thick, inky black fingers stood out even in the rain and darkness. To Kat's night vision the substance almost seemed to repel, light, as if the mere presence of the thing was the antithesis to anything bright and colourful. Where it touched the tree, a dark black patch seemed to spread across the rest of the trunk. Kat didn't have time to see how much of the tree it would spread to before she focused on what was in front of her again.

Steeling herself, Kat tried to order her legs to run faster, but alas, a demonic body was nothing if not efficient, and without adrenaline she couldn't just will herself to be faster. Her energy was already helping her reach what was basically top speed when taking the horrible terrain into account.

Didn't stop Kat wishing that she could move faster but... well, she was a beggar at the moment, and choosing to move faster didn't even make top three right now.

### **Chapter 234: a Minor awakening**

Once Kat got herself set on her angle, she used the mundanity to take a look at Minor. The girl in her arms was looking a lot better and was actually breathing now. It was just a soft rise and fall of her chest but it was a significant improvement over nothing at all.

Her tail still seemed to be strangely rigid, and her outfit didn't seem to be moving as Kat ran along, but she was unsure if that was just because she was careful with running or if they were still in their more solid state.



Minor's hair did move slightly, but it seemed to be affected by the wind slightly and was angled... but it was all bunched up, as if instead of hair Minor had a curtain or some other large amount of clothing pasted to her head that all moved in sync with each other.

This only further confused Kat when she noticed the hair on Minor's ears was behaving somewhat normally. It didn't seem to bounce as she stepped, but it was swaying in the wind, but it acted like the collection of hair it was.

\*Can't you just get your body to act normally dammit! Why do you have to make it so hard for me to tell if you are ok Minor. Like can I do some riskier movements and stop burning so much energy to keep you stable?\*

\*Or do you need as much of a chance to recover as you possible can? Will you need sleep afterwards? We are in a dream but a lot of other things are consistent so why wouldn't you sleep?\*

\*Or even if you won't need sleep, will I still be carrying you? I mean I don't mind but... well no.\* Kat glanced back to check on the monster chasing after her and paled slightly at the sight. \*Shit.\* Kat stopped her slightly curved path and returned to her completely straight heading.

\*Dammit, I'm almost exactly the same speed as that monster. If I slow down at all, even to curve myself slightly that thing can catch up... Does this mean I need a new plan? Should I risk the sharp turn then?\*

\*But I'd have to stand in place, for just a second. I can turn on a dime, much better than I have any logical right to, but I can. Even still, it's not completely instant and that thing might be able to reach me...\*

\*I could maybe use my tail to swing myself around a tree, get the turn in that way... but I can hardly imagine the g-force would be good for Minor... but does she know enough about gravity for it to actually be a problem?\*

\*Shit, I mean, it has to be right? In a world like this one, running extremely fast is probably a reasonable thing to see, and you can feel it when you turn, so even if they seemingly have no vehicles I doubt Major or Minor are ignorant of that particular rule.\*

Kat ducked out of the way, flinching her head backwards and to the side as a particularly low hanging vine was about to slap her in the face. Sadly, she still wasn't used to the extra height from her horns, and so, even with her ducking out of the way it clipped the ends.

Kat felt the vine tugging on her horn and starting to pull her head backwards. Acting quickly Kat pushed as much energy as she could into her arm. Swinging her tail around to support Minor where her hand was about to leave, Kat acted fast.

Kat slipped her tail under Minor's knees as she moved her right hand away, rising it up past her head and pushing away the vine in question. There was a split second where it looked to not be enough, but the vine slid away.

Kat then managed to return her arm to its rightful place and retract her tail all before taking her next step. Letting out a large breath and releasing some of the tension in her muscles Kat refocused on the pathway before her.

\*That was close. I should have probably used my tail instead... but my nails are better for slicing things... if it was unwilling to give up perhaps this was actually the best way to go about things... dam.\*

Kat considered looking behind her but didn't want to risk that slowing her down any further. Listening instead, Kat reached the conclusion that the monster was much too loud to determine if it had further caught up to her during the vine issue.

\*I need to be more careful. If that vine took a bit longer to dislodge I might already be toast... even still I can't keep this up.\* Checking her reserves Kat found that she was already sitting below the halfway mark.

\*That is much too low... It seems like I don't actually have that much left in me... though maybe it was freezing the canopy that cost me the most? Urgh, I just don't know what to prioritise. How fragile is the person in my arms! If I just had a sign, or something.\*

Suddenly, a hacking cough tore its way out of Minor's throat. Minor's head started turning towards Kat. \*This is going to hit me whatever it is... dammit, and the wind will just make it hit Minor if I face her the other way.\*

Kat was right. A second hacking cough, and a mouthful of blood spat towards Kat. It hit her as she was running, and rapidly slid off her outfit. \*Small victories... but is Minor ok? That was a lot of blood... but at least she has blood right?\*

Minor let out a groan, and started to shift in Kat's arms before carefully opening her eyes. They were unfocused, clearly not experiencing the world around them until a second cough shook Minor's frame.

Minor started to turn away from Kat this time, but... \*I'm going to regret this I'm sure.\* Kat moved her tail around and forced Minor's head to face her once again, before Minor's eyes cleared.

A look of panic spread across her face, as a cough worked its way out of her throat. A second mouthful of blood hit Kat. When it did, Minor's already pale countenance paled further. "I'm so sorry" said Minor voice raspy.

"It's fine" said Kat "See, already washing off"

Minor watched shocked as the blood was in fact, sliding off as if it wished to be anywhere other than in contact with Kat. "What's going on? Why are we running?" asked Minor

"Ah, clearly your hearing isn't back yet" said Kat "So, basic rundown, we are being chased by a nightmare through a rainy forest. You can't see it really because my wing is blocking the few water droplets that fall towards us..."

"The forest is huge, not really sure where to go or how to leave, and I got here by jumping into a pond in the corn maze. How healthy are you? I'm burning a lot of energy to keep my arms steady. It won't be completely horrible if I stop, but at the moment it's taking a lot of energy just to keep running. Oh, and are you going to pass out again?"

Minor tried to shake her head, but winced "I should be fine about passing out. That's not really a thing here" rasped Minor "It should be fine to stop using the extra energy... and I'll have to think about what is going on"

Kat nodded, relaxing her arms slightly as Minor settled into them. The drain on her energy reserves dropped rapidly, and Kat could now see that she wasn't losing any at all, or perhaps very little.

And so Kat kept running. Minor was still unwell, but conscious and needed some time to collect herself. Kat was happy to keep running now that things had changed in some meaningful way, but she couldn't shake the feeling that something was going wrong.

Eventually Minor spoke up "So, was it raining in the wheat field?"

Kat shook her head, "No not at all"

Minor nodded ever so slightly, keeping her movements to a minimum "Ok, well, I'm pretty sure we are still in the right scene. You haven't broken anything I think... and I have a guess as to where we are."

Kat nodded "So, where are we?"

Minor gave an involuntary light cough. "I think, we are in the garden. Summer Autumn Winter Spring, and maybe that fountain or pond, in the middle. We've been through Summer and this is Autumn"

Kat nodded "So... how do we get to Winter then?"

Minor grimaced "Well, Kat, that is the real question we need to be asking. Sadly... I don't really know" rasped Minor

Behind her, Kat heard a roar of indignation. "Hey, shut up just because you're lost too doesn't mean that we can't be" shouted Kat back. She was half surprised that she heard nothing in response.

### **Chapter 235: a Katastrophic miscalculation**

"Should we go over everything again?" asked Kat "Perhaps that will get our thoughts in order"

Minor shook her head "No, I've just never come across something like this" Minor rasped. "I'm not quite sure what the rules are and we really don't want to force the issue"

Kat nodded "Yeah I guess that makes sense. Is there anything we can do about this thing chasing us? I think it's a Nightmare and I'm not really sure I have the energy to take it out anymore. It's the largest we've seen"

Minor frowned "Well, I can't really see it... but it doesn't feel like a Nightmare"

Kat shrugged "Neither did that endless goop from back in the tunnel and we know how that worked out for us" said Kat pointedly

Minor's frowned deepened but she nodded. The memory of the event causing her to flinch. "Are we safe to keep running then?"

Kat nodded "Yeah, if you're comfortable I'm fine. The only issue before was keeping you from jostling even the slightest amount. It was killing my arms"

"Sorry" rasped Minor

"Don't worry about it. I still need to chew you out for nearly destroying yourself. Seriously Minor what were you thinking? I'd hassle you more about it but we have bigger problems such as your recovery and escaping that thing behind us" said Kat

Minor winced and said "Can we outrun it maybe? Or fly away?"

Kat shook her head "I can't really run much faster than this I don't think. As for flying, well the canopy is too thick to easily break through. I mean, I could maybe do it, but likely not before tall dark and inky catches up to us. *nOvElNExt.cOmm*

"If we could find the place broke the canopy when I dropped in then that might work, but I was trying to angle my way there and our excited follower was able to catch up to me slightly, and I wasn't sure if I could make it back without getting grabbed" said Kat

Minor frowned "Could you just smash through the trees above us? Maybe with some demonic fire?" asked Minor

Kat wanted to shrug but couldn't afford to break her running posture. Holding Minor was already bad enough. "Not really, I mean, yes, it's probably possible technically, but I think I'll get caught before I can break through.

"There is a few layers of branches and trees, and I'm not sure I freeze them all fast enough. My fire is good at applying cold to a very small area unless I have a large amount of it. It doesn't really spread like normal fire, which I guess makes sense because it isn't. On top of that, I'm holding you still. You say you're fine but you can still hardly talk. What if one of the branches nocks into you and does serious damage" said Kat

Minor frowned. She started to speak before turning and coughing up another mouthful of blood. When she spoke, it was now with only a slight rasp compared to before "I'll be fine, I can take a few hits. Damage doesn't really accumulate the same way on me as it does in a real person"

Kat glared at Minor and spoke with a sharp discontent "Indeed, you just shatter into a few pieces when you overdo things. I, WILL NOT be letting you get hurt again Minor. You said that Major was here somewhere. What am I supposed to tell her, or Enuke that right before the end you fell apart? Literally"

Minor frowned but didn't say anything further. The silence started to stretch on as Kat ran without faltering. Making sure to pay attention to the surroundings and not get caught on any stray vines or clip the edge of a tree with her wing.

It was after they had been running for perhaps another twenty minutes that Minor spoke up "What about using your fire as a shield?" asked Minor, sounding almost completely normal "You could send it behind us and use that to hold off the Nightmare while we bust through the ceiling"

Kat grimaced, as she thought over Minor's answer. \*It's not the worst idea... but to put up a wall by myself would likely take way too much energy. Then I'd have to bust through multiple layers of branches and vines, and I just don't see how it could be fast enough.\*

\*Even if I accept that Minor is capable of taking some damage now that she's recovered a bit I don't see how it matters the time aspect is just the main issue. I can't believe that I will be able to break through it fast enough. It takes a moment just to freeze it.\*

\*In the end, if I just go for it, but get trapped both of us are risking a lot. Maybe death, maybe not? I think Minor at least would be.\* "I just don't think I'd be fast enough Minor, plus it would take a lot of energy I don't really have to form a wall" said Kat

Minor was silent for a while, with only the growling of the monster and its heavy footfalls to fill the silence. After a few minutes Minor spoke again. "What about heading back to that clearing?"

Kat tilted her head to the side "Well, it's more possible sure, but the issue of it catching up is still a big one"

Minor nodded as if she expected this "Ok, but what if I put up the wall, you just fuel it. Same as we've done before. Can you find the clearing?"

Kat let out a long breath "I think so. I've been trying to keep track of it... But!, but!, you are still weak. Are you really fine to use your power like that?" asked Kat

Minor started to speak, but Kat glared at Minor. "Ye-" Kat pushed some energy into her eyes and made them flash. Minor faltered but continued "P-probably?"

Kat raised an eyebrow "I'm not willing to risk your safety for a probably" said Kat

Minor frowned "But risking yours is all fine and peachy? I don't like that you have to risk yourself for me any more than I'm sure you enjoy it going the other way around"

Kat shook her head "Yes but I am much safer than you. First the Nightmares don't permanently damage me, secondly, I regenerate really quickly, remember the gravel, and finally, if I'm about to die the system will return me to my home dimension" said Kat \*Though we haven't tested it trapped in dreams, and it might deal permanent damage to my mind... but I'm not quite willing to tempt fate by saying it out loud... that and worrying Minor is not on my to do list.\*

Minor grit her teeth at this but didn't immediately retort. "I... I guess you're right. I don't like it but you are right. Ok, but I think we still need to head for the clearing. It's the only thing different right?" asked Minor

Kat nodded. "Ok, in that case, ready the flame"

\*Am I sure this is the right idea? Thought Kat as she brought her tail up next to Minor. No, no I'm, not but something has to change. I can't risk trying to tire the thing out with Major still out there somewhere.\*

Kat sucked in a deep breath, and recalled the location of the clearing. It should be back and to the left... roughly speaking. She was pretty sure she'd run past it at this point, but with her memories so mixed up it was hard to tell.

Giving a nod to Minor, Kat dismissed her doubts and summoned the flame. As she did so, Kat sent the rest of her demonic energy into her legs and prepared to bounce off a tree. Kat didn't look behind her, but when the thudding stopped and Kat heard a different kind of roar, one she was hoping was a roar of pain, she moved.

Jumping forward and to the right, Kat angled towards one of the nearby trees. Kat pulled Minor in close, not willing to risk her moving too much and disrupting her balance. Letting her legs take the impact Kat slammed into the tree.

She was not prepared for it to start to crack. Kat tried to pull back her legs but the damage was already done. Her momentum had been killed and the tree was starting to fall. Gritting her teeth, Kat kicked her left leg that was lower down the tree into the trunk, giving her what speed it could.

Kat bounced off the tree, with lacking finesse. Stumbling slightly as she fell closer to the ground but managing to abuse her flexibility to remain upright. She was lucky that Minor weighed almost nothing in her arms

As she straightened, Kat set forth on her path. But not two steps later a hand reached out. Surrounded by purple fire it was clear whose hand it was. Reacting purely by instinct Kat placed her wing more firmly to the side, blocking Minor from view but allowing the rain to drip onto her.

Still Kat had bigger things to deal with.

### **Chapter 236: No Bad Pun This Time**

Kat's eyes widened as the world slowed. She looked over towards the flaming fist and started to plan. Taking in as much detail as she could. The fist itself was clearly burning a familiar purple, and under that it was frosting over. It seemed frozen solid, but the arm was continually extending and seemed to imply this couldn't be the case.

At the moment, there was nothing but the soft leather of Kat's wing between that fist and Minor, or herself. \*Ok, what can I do here. I don't have a lot of time to move out of the way... and I'm not sure I could anyway. I'd have to stretch out my wings and use them if I wanted to change my course at all\*

\*And the trees have been a large issue with that the whole time, now add into the mix the fist of a Nightmare and it's basically impossible for that to help. I think I'll need to do something better than just having my wing block it.\*

\*I could maybe use my tail? Enhanced with energy it might be able to stop it from hitting Minor... but I don't think I can absorb that much kinetic energy so I'm likely to just go flying. And isn't that the crux of the issue?\*

\*I also think just abusing my flexibility is doomed to fail. That fist is going right for my centre of mass, so I can't move it around too much. Should I just try and take the impact on my legs? Perhaps... but I might end up slamming into a tree if I can't watch where I'm launched.\*

Kat bit her lips, she was running out of time to debate the best course of action. Without knowing any better way to go about it, Kat brought her feet up and pushed them out to the side.

She wasn't fast enough though, and the fist was going to strike too high. Twisting her back instead to protect Minor, Kat let the fist impact her in the small of her back. She managed to squeeze her tail in between the strike though, and made sure to keep it alight just in case the Nightmare was going to try twisting her.

As the fist slammed into her, Kat heard a crack, before getting launched away. Kat started to panic and instinctively tried to twist herself around to see what damage had been done to her back. But she was able to swivel without pain.

Confused, but undeterred Kat tried to correct herself. Flaring her wings out Kat pulled herself into a stop... though not quite fast enough. Slamming the side of her head into a nearby tree, Kat let herself bounce off slightly and tried to get her feet under her.

She stumbled a moment before heading off once again, trying to get away as fast as possible, hopefully leaving the Nightmare in the dust. Kat wobbled slightly as she ran, but made sure not to hit anything.

Minor was looking a little green from the rapid changes in velocity, but she didn't complain, only wrapping her arms around Kat so that she was less likely to fly out of her arms. \*That was too close... but I don't think I hear it chasing us anymore do I?\*

Kat couldn't help it and took a glance behind her. There were only trees. She couldn't see or hear any sign of the Nightmare "Is it gone?" Kat whispered to Minor, unsure if speaking aloud would lead it to them

Minor replied, also keeping her voice low. "I don't know. Remember I can't feel them nearby in the last few scenes. I doubt we did enough damage to destroy it, but if we are lucky it's enough to get away"

Kat nodded as she ran. She was careful not to go too fast and start creating gusts of wind as she moved, trying to further reduce the chances of being found. And like that, the pair managed to head back towards the clearing, but, when they got closer Kat had to slam her feet into the ground letting her boots catch under one of the roots to halt her in place. Wrapping her tail around a nearby tree to prevent herself from falling over, Kat felt the strain on her body, but let it pass. It was necessary.

Instead of pristine trees with green leaves and vibrant brown bark, that showed the health and care this forest of trees seemingly received. It instead looked like the black ink from the Nightmare had started to infect things.

Everywhere Kat looked was signs of its passing. The trees were now a dark black, with leaves that dripped ink onto the ground, slowly spreading across the floor every time a drop hit the roots.

Kat sucked in a deep breath. \*We aren't at the clearing yet. I think there is still a bit to go but... can we make it through this?\*"Minor what's the plan?" asked Kat

"Can you break through the trees here?" asked Minor

Kat nodded "I... I think so. It might be a bit hard to keep my wings from clipping the branches but if I'm careful it should be alright. Do we want to back up a bit though? It will take some time"

Minor nodded. With that as the signal Kat spent a good thirty seconds backtracking. She was unwilling to risk the ink spreading while she was halfway through breaking the trees. Finding a spot where said trees were slightly further apart and would allow for some flying if she was careful, Kat checked her energy reserves.

They weren't doing well. All added up she had around a quarter left. It seemed that fiasco with the Nightmare put her worse off than she thought. None the less, Kat got working. Flying upwards and

setting a medium sized section of the canopy on fire, making sure it was large enough to fit her wings comfortably.

Kat repeated this process twice safely, before she heard a roar in the distance. Kat froze in place, letting her wings take her back to the ground. She shared a look with Minor who hurriedly gestured for at the last layer of the canopy.

Kat bit down on her lips in worry. \*I've been trying to pace myself but I'm still running low on energy. I'm just barely above the levels required to knock me out.\* "I don't know if I can Minor. Breaking that last layer might be enough to cause my body to stop working" said Kat

Minor frowned, glancing back where they heard the roar from. It was some distance away, and the heavy thud of its feet couldn't yet be heard, so they were safe for a time. The question was how much. "Is it safe to rest on the canopy?" asked Minor

Kat grimaced and said "Well, I don't know anymore. I'd have thought so, but seeing the mess the Nightmare left behind and infected the trees with, I can't say that I still believe that"

Minor frowned but nodded. All the while the tension in the air was beginning to rise. Kat could just barely hear the sounds of the repeated, thump, thump, thump of the thing's feet some ways off. It still wasn't clear if they were being followed though.

Sadly, an unexpected threat approached. Kat hadn't been watching the ground properly, and now as she examined the clearing for a sign of the Nightmare catching up movement in the corner of her eyes caused her to freeze completely. Focusing on that spot she saw the inky taint of the nearby forest spreading to their tiny clearing.

\*What! It wasn't moving that fast! How could it have caught us!\* Kat nudged Minor to get her to face the direction of the ink, and the kitsune's face paled. "Kat, we might have to risk it" hissed Minor under her breath.

Kat grit her teeth and checked her reserves more closely. \*It's enough... I think... I can bust through... probably... but... I'm not sure how much more I can do...\* Seeing Kat's worried face Minor gave a suggestion "Cut a smaller hole, just enough for us to squeeze through and maybe jump all the way up with your wings flat against us"

Kat bit her lip and examined the gap. \*It might just work. I need to fly to keep the flame burning and turning everything to ice, but... if I just need to slam through the last layer once... I might be able to manage\*

Kat nodded, and started to fly up carefully. Trying to ensure that she made as little sound as possible when she flapped her wings. Carefully, inching her way close to the gap in the canopy they'd managed to make so far. Kat let a small ember blaze to life on her finger as she carefully applied it to the leaves, making sure to supply it with enough energy to spread slightly and freeze them solid.

Gritting her teeth, Kat had to make sure she keep tight control over her fire so as not to waste any more energy. Even as the last of the designated leaves started to freeze, Kat was worried.

### **Chapter 237: a Minor wardrobe discrepancy**



As Kat finished the final section of leaves, she could hear the thuds approaching. Now wasn't the time to go through everything in her head. They had a plan, and she just needed to act. Kat let herself drop like a stone. Disregarding the safer gliding alternatives for simply tucking in her wings and shooting towards the floor.

Kat took the impact in her knees, funnelling energy into her legs both to cushion the blow to her muscles as well as prepare for the inevitable spring up. As Kat was forcing her energy into her legs a roar shook the clearing

Following the sound Kat's eyes found the source of the noise. It was the Nightmare. Instead of its fluid inky blackness, it was now dotted with small a spattering of purple fire, spread all across its body. Various parts were clearly frozen over, but they were cracked and broken and oozed a paler grey liquid that almost looked like a strange twisted version of pus

On top of this, the thing was clearly shorter, it had shrunk by around half a head, but that hadn't slowed it in the slightest. It lunged for Kat and she kicked off at the same time. As she started to leave the ground though it was clear she wasn't going to be quite fast enough.

Tucking her legs in as far as she could Kat watched as the arm barely missed her by a hair's breadth. However, before she could relax, a smaller arm shot out from the Nightmare's main arm, grasping towards her feet.

Kat panicked, and tried to pull her legs up even further, but that was impossible. Her body was already as tightly packed as it could be. The arm, in question slowly nearing Kat's leg. The instant started to stretch, and Kat tried to get a handle on her thoughts, as she considered what she could possibly do.

Stumbling on a crazy idea, Kat lit her shoe on fire and kicked down. The hand instantly grasped onto the foot in question, and Kat tried to manoeuvre her foot out of her shoe and leave it to the Nightmare's grasp

Instead however, the shoe started to twist. As the Nightmare grasped more firmly the shoe started to snake around and dig into Kat's leg. Reacting purely on instinct Kat dismissed her attire, and her foot came free.

Giving herself just one flap of the wings to make up for lost momentum Kat continued to climb up through the trees. Shooting through the small gap she had made for herself. The leaves scraped along her shoulders as she climbed, forcing the whole to be slightly larger than she'd made it, but luckily she wasn't caught.

Once she was safely above the canopy, Kat spread her wings wide, and started to fly upwards, cutting through the downpour, even using a bit of energy to speed up the process just in case the Nightmare had any other tricks up its sleeve.

Once Kat had managed to fly up for at least three minutes without suddenly being accosted, she let herself level out, and released a breath she hadn't realised she was holding. "That was much to close" said Kat

Minor shifted in her arms before letting out a cute "Eep" sound.

"What's wrong?" asked Kat quickly scanning the horizon for anything that could pose a danger to them but couldn't see anything. There was something faint in the distance, but it certainly wasn't anything making its way to them, so Kat dismissed.

"Eh, ah, um..." stammered Minor carefully looking away from Kat [novelnext.com](http://novelnext.com)

"Seriously Minor what's gotten into you" said Kat

Minor shakily returned to facing Kat, but her face was bright red and she was shivering "Do you have a cold or something? Did the Nightmare managed to get you? I was so sure I managed to keep you safe" said Kat

"Um... your clothes" murmured Minor under her breath as quietly as she could.

"What about them?" asked Kat confused.

"They um... aren't there" said Minor

Kat paused. Well, her wings were beating, but the rest of her froze. Looking down at herself revealed that Minor was in fact right. She was currently naked. \*Huh, it's not even cold.\* "When did that happen?" asked Kat

Minor squeaked, but responded with "Why is that your first question! I can use my powers to get your clothes back I'm sure" said Minor

Kat shrugged "Eh, it's no big deal. I mean, I can summon them back, but even still it wouldn't really be an issue"

Minor shook her head "That's very inappropriate"

Kat couldn't help herself. She let out a hearty laugh. Something about the situation just lent to the ridiculousness of Minor's statement in Kat's mind. \*Hahaha, we are in a dream, attacked by Nightmares, searching for the remnants of her sister's consciousness, and instead of telling me to hurry up, or resting herself more she's concerned I'm not wearing clothes.\*

"It's not funny" said Minor pouting, and letting her cheeks puff up.

No, when a younger girl starts pouting at you, puffing up her cheeks and telling you something hilarious is in fact 'not funny' well, there could only be one reaction. Kat's already hearty laughs started to shake her entire frame.

It was all she could do to keep Minor in a relatively safe position as she laughed. Her wings, keeping them afloat solely through instinct. Kat's mind was long gone.

Finally, after a full minute of breathless, laughter Kat managed to recover enough to smile down at Minor and simply resummon her Demonic Attire. "See no problem" said Kat

This was not the response Minor was looking for. Huffing and turning away from her demonic friend. Kat had to do everything she could to make sure she didn't burst back into laughter. Kat's own cheeks started to fill with unreleased laughter, and her shoulder shook slightly.

She even called up some demonic energy for her elbows to smooth out the motions to prevent Minor from noticing what was going on behind her back. It took Kat another thirty seconds to get a hold of herself.

\*I really needed that. I think I might have been a little tightly wound since Minor shattered. I mean sure I was panicking a little before that, but seeing her like that was perhaps the straw that broke the camel's back\*

\*It really drove home that as crazy as this dream is. It's Minor's whole world, and while hopefully I can fix that as well, if she dies here that's the end of it all for her.\*

Kat hugged Minor closer. "See, everything is fine Minor. Thanks for everything"

Minor stiffened in Kat's arms for a second before leaning into the hug. The young kitsune could tell by Kat's tone it that she wasn't being thanked for trying to preserve the succubus' modesty, but it was the thought itself that mattered. It gave her a surprisingly warm feeling, one that spread through her limbs just like her foxfire would when she was angry. This was in stark contrast to the downpour covering them, but for the moment it didn't seem to matter.

But it was such a soft feeling. Like she was being hugged by Kat twice over. And it was nice. Sadly though, all good things must end, especially when you're on a timer. Shortly after the hug was started it ended, and the world was dimmer for it, though still brighter than it had been before.

"Let's go find your sister" said Kat with newfound conviction she hadn't realised she'd lost

Minor nodded "Yes, let's" responded Minor.

Kat headed off towards the distance. Heading in the direction of the disturbance she had seen from the air it was a little hard to see from this distance with the pouring rain. It was in the same direction her hole in the canopy should be as well, and this reinforced the idea that it was something to investigate.

As she got closer and closer, the scene came with further clarity. This only confused Kat though, as she recognised fully that the strange shapes in the air were in fact snowflakes, and they were falling down towards the ground.

\*Why the heck is there snow here? Was it there before? It's hard to tell with the pouring rain before but now I'm closer I can tell it's snow. It has to be.\*

Kat flew, lowering herself closer to the blackened canopy where the light snow stood in stark contrast to its inky surroundings. A beacon of pure white shining through the rain, and darkness. This, of course, Kat found strange considering that clouds covered the sky and the sun couldn't be seen, even in the bright white shining down.

As Kat got closer and closer the full picture came into view. The snow was falling into the original clearing. It had piled high into a massive mound that reached up past the canopy. It seemed an awful lot of snow considering the time Kat was gone but she simply talked it up to dream logic.

\*Now... do I jump into this same as last time?\*

**Chapter 238: a Major amount of Snow**

"So... just jump in again?" asked Kat

Minor shrugged "I really don't know. You know more about this scene than I do. If it worked last time I'd say the chances are good, but I cannot be sure" said Minor

Kat frowned and looked over at the surroundings. The snow seemed to be untouched by the inky corruption of the Nightmare, but that might just be on the surface. \*I'm not sure if I want to risk jumping into a whole pile of the stuff hidden under a bit of snow...\*

\*But the fact that it is snowing instead of raining might imply this is the real deal. As creepy as the ink might be, it seems like it can't change anything it can't touch and I doubt it somehow managed to reach the cloud covering...\*

\*Though maybe I should fly up and check?\* Kat glanced at the sky in question before letting her frown deepen. \*Then again, there is just as much of a chance that the sky is fake, and the rain just pours down anyway.\*

\*Am I hesitating too much? Would the me of a year ago hesitate like this? Hell would the me of two months ago hesitate like this?\* A traitorous dissenting voice whispered into Kat's thoughts. \*You didn't have two friends lives on the line.\*

And Kat knew that to be the truth. Kat grit her teeth, and gazed down at the snow. \*Now I kinda want to jump in to spite myself, but that's foolish. I may have lost at least some of my uncaring attitude, but I will not lose my rationality.\*

\*Still... it does seem like the best idea we have.\* "I think we should go for it" said Kat making sure she was entirely calm before suggesting it.

"I think so as well" said Minor. \*Huh, I didn't think she'd have such a snappy reply.\*

Taking one last breath, Kat dived down. She was tempted to dive head first into what looked to be fluffy snow, however for the safety of herself and Minor, Kat kept herself falling legs down. She also tucked in her wings. If the ice was weak enough to let her legs pass through but tough enough to stop her wings that would be horrible.

When Kat's feet finally touched the snow, it was softer than she expected. She continued to fall down without stopping as if there was nothing at all between her and the ground she was surely approaching.

After around five seconds of falling, Kat suddenly felt herself getting locked in place. Though, that wasn't quite right, her arms and legs were free to move, but she had stopped. \*Strange. I didn't feel anything stop me... but I'm not falling either.\*

Kat looked down, and found Minor hugged against her chest, though she seemed fine. Kat frowned and pushed herself up into a sitting position to try and get a better understanding of her surroundings.

However, as her head rose, at about the halfway point the snow broke away, showing her a completely clear sunny sky. Kat sucked in a breath of fresh air she didn't know she needed and started to shift.

As she did so the snow fell off her legs, allowing them to break free of their icy confines. At this point, Minor also shook off the remnants of the snow, though she had been mostly protected by Kat's wings when she wrapped them around herself.

"Well, if we weren't sure about the whole Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring I sure am now" said Kat

Minor nodded "Yes, it seems so. I wonder if backtracking will become a theme, or if it was specific just for Autumn" said Minor

"It was the same for Summer actually. That pond I found, I had to turn around and go the direction I'd just come from when I reached a crossroads" said Kat

Minor seemed to frown at this "I wonder what it means. This is the most central scene to Major at the moment, or at least, I think it has to be. The fact that it is modelled after our garden is no surprise,

"And the fact that there is nobody else here is also no surprise. Major loved the garden and chose to retreat there whenever she was overwhelmed, so this all makes so much sense for her. The backtracking though... I feel like that has to be important..."

"I'm just not sure in what way. Will the next to be moving forward instead? A duality of Major's inability to give up on the past, while still having hopes for the future? Will we be forced to backtrack more instead? I don't exactly know what that would mean" said Minor

Kat stroked her chin with her tail as she said "Could it be related to you? I mean, you're well, not quite death, um, self-sacrifice at least, is a major thing for Major. It's the whole heart of this issue, so maybe it's related to that"

Minor seemed to consider this "That... well, it makes some amount of sense. I'm not quite willing to say that you've solved this, but I could believe it to be true"

Kat smirked "And with your power can't you make it so?" said Kat in a joking manner

Minor giggled but shook her head "I could not change such a core belief of Major's even if I wanted to. As much as I claim the mind to be my domain, much of it is still very much Major's. It's like... um... hmm..."

"It's like, you might be the owner of the store, but I'm the store manager. I run the day to day operations, know where everything is, and know a few tricks to keep the generator from short circuiting. But at the end of the day, that one safe at the back labelled 'property of owner do not touch' is not mine to toy with as I wish"

"That... is a strangely believable analogy" said Kat

Minor shrugged "It's a hobby"

Kat narrowed her eyes "I don't remember you spouting too many of those. I seem to recall quite a few poorly thought out analogies" said Kat

Minor gained a slight red tint in her cheeks to match her ears, and turned away slightly. "Look, I'm not all that good at remembering most of them... when I'm embarrassed..." Kat kept looking at Minor "or panicking" Kat's gaze continued "Or nervous... Look I don't get a lot of practice"

Kat hugged Minor to her chest, as she did so Minor let out a small squeak "Yeah, I know"

Despite the words, Minor felt that familiar warmth, and snuggled into Kat's embrace happily. For her part Kat stroked Minor's hair as she looked out at the scenery taking it in properly. [novelnext.com](http://novelnext.com)

As she'd noted before the sky was extremely clear, with not a cloud in the sky. There was snow coating the ground, and if the nearby was anything to go off of, it was around Kat's knee height in depth.

There were trees nearby, but these ones were much more spread out and looked like Christmas trees, as opposed to the sprawling interlocking brambles of the Autumn section. They all had a thin coating of snow on them, but it looked like the slightest breeze would remove the snow in question.

Examining the area further revealed nothing. It was strange, Kat could see as far as her eyes would allow in a few places where no trees blocked her eyeline, but the sheer scope of what she could see was so radically different from the maze and the forest that she was somewhat surprised that nothing sprung out at her.

\*So what does this mean?\* Kat asked herself as she continued to stroke Minor's hair. The kitsune's tails had curled around Kat, and while they didn't make it very far around her waist, the feeling of them brushing against her side was comforting.

\*I don't see a maze to complete, or a terror to outrun. The area is completely silent, with not even the wind stirring... actually maybe that is something to note. The complete lack of sound.\* Kat strained her ears, but they could uncover nothing else, only the faintest of whistling from the wind between the trees if it could even be called that.

Kat needed to supply said ears with a rather large amount of energy to even get that much. "So Minor" said Kat "I can see pretty far around us, and the area is very open. No mazes, no endless jungles. Is that a good sign?"

Minor hugged Kat harder and spoke into the demon's chest instead of looking up. Kat continued to stroke Minor's hair to show this didn't bother her. Her still enhanced hearing made up for the muffling of Minor's voice. "It sounds good... but I don't know if it is or not. I don't know how much I can read into things yet. This might just be how Major sees the garden. I don't really believe that to be true, but I don't have a better answer sorry"

### **Chapter 239: Princess Carry!**

Kat was about to clap her hands together, but considered that, with the position that Minor's ears were currently occupying, such a decision would probably be frowned upon by the aforementioned party.

\*Now the temptation to do it anyway is strong.\* Ignoring her more childish side, Kat instead spoke her thoughts out loud "Well, now that we've thoroughly established we don't know what we are doing. What are we doing?" asked Kat

Minor let out a chuckle and shuffled herself so that she was now leaning with her left side against Kat so that she could actually speak without silk kimono getting in her way. "Well, we can go wandering then try to backtrack. That's probably our best bet, especially if we can see our footprints in the snow.

"That way, we can at least confirm a few things in the worst case scenario, and in the best case, this scene works like the rest of them and backtracking will take us to the next one. It might be as simple as, 'to move forward you must first take a step back' and other such nonsense

"Major was... well, saying she was fond of them would be a lie, Major thought most of it was nonsense, but she did love repeating it to other people. I think some of those people thought she was trying to be clever, but, as the one living in her head, I know it was because she wanted to act cool like mum, who actually has real words of wisdom"

Kat shrugged "I knew some people that were like that at the orphanage"

Kat paled as soon as the words left her mouth. \*I don't think I was supposed to say that. Does this count as talking about my home world? Pretty sure I wasn't supposed to do that...\*

Before Kat could work out what to do Minor gasped and asked "Wait, you grew up in an orphanage? Demons have orphanages?"

\*Ah shit... Do I deflect? I mean... I don't mind telling her aside from the whole 'don't talk or else' really... but does it apply here? I don't think I want to risk it but... maybe I can deflect a bit\* "Well, I don't see why they wouldn't. Surely you can believe a number of demon parents are irresponsible" said Kat

Minor nodded at this as if she had grasped some universal truth. Kat felt her stomach churning at the thought. \*I really dislike misleading her like this. Clearly it's true else I couldn't speak the words but I don't like this any more than just lying to Minor... I'll have to find a way to get permission from the system later. Maybe even use a token for it if I have to. I need the other one for maybe making Lily into a wizard but I can spare one for Minor surely.\*

Kat shook her head "Anyway, I'm getting distracted. Do you need me to carry you as we walk?" asked Kat

Minor stiffened at this question, and while Kat couldn't see it Minor had a frown on her face. She was warring with two competing parts of her mind. One wanted to say she was fully capable of walking by herself, but the other was very pleased with the idea of getting more hugs from Kat and decided being carried around counted.

"Ah... um, I can walk" said Minor with a heavy heart

Kat seemed to notice the discordant tone and asked "Well, sure you can but do you want to?"

Minor bit her lip, and managed to shake her head. "Sure I can carry you then" said Kat standing up and letting Minor sit back into a princess carry.

"Y-you don't have to if it's a bother" said Minor

Kat laughed "Ha, I have super strength and outstanding endurance. If I can't use that to carry a friend in need then what use am I?" asked Kat

Minor twinged at that last part, wanting to insist she didn't need this, but that same part of her mind that argued for the hugs insisted that, while she didn't physically need this, perhaps she actually did need it more than she let on.

Kat noticed something a little off in Minor's expression as she started to trudge off through the snow, but chose to leave it for now. Kat's chosen direction was straight ahead... because when every direction is endless snow and a few trees, every direction is the same.

Once Kat had made her way past a few trees so that if she so decided she could block her vision of the place they'd been dropped, Kat voiced a question to Minor "So, how long do we walk forward for do you think?"

"Um, maybe just till you can't see where we dropped in?" asked Minor unsure, still enjoying being carried by Kat.

"Well, about that. I can move so that some trees line up and block said sight, but without going off course, I can see for a rather extreme distance, and that's before I add any demonic energy to the mix. I'd say we could walk for something like... twenty minutes? Maybe more? Before it gets hard to make out where we started" said Kat

"Hmmm" said Minor "I don't know what would constitute proper testing in this scenario"

\*Well, that really is the question. I could maybe do them all and just fly back? Unless walking is somehow important. I was sorta forced into it all the other times so I'm not sure... \*

"Should I fly back? It'd be faster but the walking might be important" said Kat

"Huh, I hadn't even thought of that. It might be, just as easily as it might not be. It's hard to say because Major can't fly, and YOU are the only thing we've seen across all the dreams that is capable of flight..."

"Well, Grandmother might be able to do something about it, but Major and I haven't seen her fly, so perhaps it would be more accurate to say you are the only thing we know that can fly, and even then Major didn't know at the time she fell asleep" said Minor

"Huh" said Kat "That might be important"

Minor shrugged. "Ok, well, I'm going to block my view of the starting point and then run back" said Kat

Minor nodded, and Kat got to work. It wasn't hard, it only required moving to the side and letting a tree fill her vision. Once that was done, Kat looked at her footprints and assured herself that they were in fact still there.

\*Welp, let's do this, without flying? Without flying.\* Kat moved herself back onto her long line of footprints. "Minor you might want to move to my back for this one"

Minor frowned but nodded. Kat moved Minor around so that she sat in between her wings. It was a little tight of a fit and said wings were being pressed down, but it worked well enough. Kat then looped her tail around Minor just to be safe, and got into a runner's pose.

Kat took in a breath, and kicked off the ground. Snow exploded from the space Kat just occupied as she set off. Her legs cleaved through the snow as if it wasn't even there shoving it aside and piling up the snow on the edges of her chosen path.

With Kat moving at full speed instead of a walking pace it barely even took a minute to get back to the original clearing. Kat let herself start slowing down once she saw the end of the trail so that she didn't completely destroy such a clear area of where exactly she had sat up.



As it was, when Kat slowed down and looked at the area, it was the same as before. It still had the spot marking clearly where she had sat up, and a few remaining footprints that hadn't been removed in her mad dash.

Carefully, taking it a step at a time and using the previous footprints Kat made her way back to the exact spot she had entered the winter section and... nothing happened. "Well, that's disappointing" said Kat

Minor let out a heavy breath of air. Kat may have been used to the speeds, but even with the support of Kat's tail it was hard on her arms. Sure she could just remove the pain, and she did. But it was much worse than sitting in Kat's arms

"It seems that way. Do we want to try going even further away? How long did you spend wandering in the other two areas" asked Minor

"Oh, quite a while I'm sure. At least half an hour in each case" said Kat

"Hmm, do you think it???'s a timing thing maybe?" asked Minor

Kat bit her lip "A timing and then return thing? I guess it could be, but I don't think so. Or at least, I suspect the Summer one wasn't though, we have no way to check"

"Back to the drawing board?" asked Minor

"Well, we can still do some more running" said Kat

"Great" said Minor, who instantly brightened when Kat moved her back to her arms.

#### **Chapter 240: a Minor tail**

"Now, the question is, do we travel the same path or pick a new one" said Kat

"At the moment we are just flailing. I say we continue down our old path" said Minor

"Sure thing" said Kat kicking up off the ground. She let her wings spread out and begin to start flapping as Kat aligned herself with the previous path. As she did so she started to feed more energy into her wings.

Kat wasn't quite at full, but it wasn't much of a cost to empower things for a bit, she'd get most of it returned to her. Shooting off, Kat couldn't help but grin at the mess she'd left in her mad dash.

There was a large gash cut through the snow exposing the dirty ground beneath. There didn't seem to be any grass to speak off other than a few small tufts of green that Kat could only just pick out.

While Kat was flying, despite not being so high up, it still gave her a good look at the nearby terrain. Despite Kat's desire for something to stand out it was nothing she hadn't seen from the ground.

\*Just a few extra trees, better sightlines and a hell of a lot of snow. It's a shame there really isn't anything else to speak of. \*

Shortly after Kat finished examining the unremarkable terrain, Kat managed to make it back to her previous spot. Settling down softly, and making sure Minor's landing was comfortable Kat strode off.

It was not a minute of walking later that Kat decided to speak up. "So, while I have you as a captive audience, and things are as calm as I think they are likely to get. I have to ask, Minor, what is it that you want?" asked Kat

Minor shifted uncomfortably in Kat's arms. She could sense the weight behind the question and the seriousness it entailed. Despite this she replied with "I don't know what you mean"

Kat let a light smile grace her face. \*If that's how you want to be\* "I want to know your plans for the future Minor. Your hopes and dreams. If you had all the power in the world what would you do with it?"

"If you never had to worry about anything else what would you occupy your time with? Who are the people you want to see? And, I suppose most importantly for your situation. What do you want to do once we free Major" said Kat

Minor sighed "I believe I told you before Kat"

Kat grinned, showing her teeth in the process "That you did, when you were a scared little fox desperately trying to escape and struggling to understand the world you thought you'd never see again. Now I'm asking you while you are safe, without anyone to judge you except yourself. I'll even promise never to say anything if you want?"

Minor shook her head "No, no it's fine... I guess... I guess I really don't know"

Kat smiled but didn't say anything for a while. \*Take your time Minor, take your time.\*

Ten minutes then passed without Minor saying anything. \*Ok, maybe I'm giving you too much time. I'm happy to wait, but it seems like it's doing you no good. You've had years trapped in your thoughts, or I guess trapped in Major's. Perhaps I should poke a bit more\*

"How about we start with a question that needs answering. Do you still want to stay in Major's head?" asked Kat

Minor winced "Not asking the easy questions are you..."

Kat shrugged "Easy no, but certainly important"

Minor nodded, and took a few seconds to gather her thoughts. Kat watched, as she went through a number of various expression and didn't say anything. She could see that this time it was actually working and Minor was properly considering things.

"That... that question is harder than it once was. I... I don't want this to sound rude but I didn't really think of you as a friend before... I mean I did... sort of..."

Kat just nodded along trying to let Minor take her time. "I... ok, how do I put this. So, up to that point, I was used to living through Major, and even then you were just summoned to help her by Mother..."

"Don't get me wrong, I loved chatting with you, and I already really cared about what you thought, I don't... when I say I didn't think of you as a friend, I don't mean that I wouldn't treat you as one it's... I guess I just didn't think you'd care about me?"

"Is that bad? I mean, it really started to change when Grandma was going off at you... you'd already done so much for me, and then for her to attack you so unfairly just because of what you are..."

"That... that's the first time I've ever truly been... well, angry yes, but in a lot of ways... anything" Minor let the silence sit for a little while before she continued. Kat made sure to keep a steady pace and not interrupt the flow of the conversation at all.

"See, it's... it just isn't the same experience emotions first hand. Like... well, you remember how I was... I just... I wasn't ready for the intensity of everything. I like it here, and even now I feel more at home when I'm safe in Major's head, even with the Nightmares attacking but..."

"It does lack something, and... I really wasn't prepared for that. So... when you were around I ran the whole gamut from complete despair to endless happiness in just a few days. It felt like the world was trying to compensate for the time I missed or something..."

"Anyway, I'm getting off track. What I'm trying to say was, at the time, I sorta thought that was it. Even though you'd said you come back... I didn't really feel like you were talking to me as much as you were talking about Shizuka, if that makes sense..."

"Then well... this happened. I ended up back here I guess. Now, don't get me wrong, that brief stint in the real world somehow reinvigorated me. My feelings are clearer and my memories feel stronger, I feel more like a person than I ever had..."

"I was... I was trying my best to be my own hero at the time I guess, or Major's hero. To facilitate this, I started making a copy of you to talk to which... well I guess you know that part, but anyway, the reason I did it... well I explained that too but..."

"Well, it just helped a lot you know. You knew me more than you knew Major, and as I sat around I started to really understand what that meant... and then... and then you showed up to help"

Minor let out a laugh tinged with tears. Minor hadn't started crying just yet, but it was close Kat could tell. She almost asked Minor to stop but... it felt like she needed to get this off her chest.

"Oh boy when you showed up. I'm stunned quite frankly, that I managed it as well as I did. Oh I handled it poorly don't get me wrong, but that's when it really hit me. That you cared... N-now don't get me wrong, I... I'm not trying to say you didn't I mean"

Kat let her tail stroke Minor's hair and tightened her hands around the kitsune more to let her understand that Kat wasn't upset. Minor recovered enough to keep talking but there were the beginning of tears in her eyes.

"See... I just... I mentioned that I feel like Shizuka, I feel like part of that being... but I never felt like I was a 'Major' part heh, but... now I understand. As much as you are helping Enuke, and the fact that you are saving Major as well... that isn't a favour to them or just a job..."

"You are here because I wanted to see you again... and when you heard that something was wrong... you didn't demand payment, or leave or complain or... well, anything else you could have done..."

"You said yes. You jumped into our head and... and we set to work. You let me lead, you didn't treat me like a child I surely am and... you know... I just..."

"It's hard. When you asked me what I want to do once we get Major back... I... I still don't think I want to be in the real world... or at least not for very long, no more than a few hours at most every week or so but...

"But I'm not sure what I'd do if I never got to hang out with you again... is that... is that bad? That despite all my years with my sister, the thing that worries me the most about slipping back into her head is not being able to see you" said Minor trailing off with sadness.