

DEMONS 451

Chapter 451: The Jelly Incident

"Right so..." said Trigrath "the next story I want to tell you I sadly don't have pictures for. It was so adorable, and really does make me wonder how much of the jelly obsession in this family is genetic"

Kamiko squirmed in Trigrath's grip, trying to escape. She'd heard this story a few times now and it was repeated whenever requested. It was a favourite of her sisters and they loved to bring it up to other people, usually multiple times if they could pretend the other person forgot, and she'd heard enough of it. Sadly, Trigrath was determined to do his best to embarrass his daughter. She could not escape.

"Now, it was the first time I'd ever taking my little girl out shopping. I had her set up in this neat little floating seat that connected to the cart. It's... well, I'm sure you've seen them. They attach to shopping trolleys and allow for you to either move them around the cart and keep items in or you can turn them into a 'child mode' for kids... or well, I guess smaller demons in general, but mostly kids, and it can get fairly large.

"I won't say 'all kids' because I'm sure some of the larger demon species wouldn't fit but none of them live around here. We have sizing guidelines for the various areas of the hub." Said Trigrath

"Actually can you explain those? That sounds interesting." Asked Kat

Trigrath seemed to think on this for a moment. He really wanted to continue with his story and embarrass Kamiko as much as possible, giving her this slight reprieve might give her ideas on how to keep him distracted... on the other hand, he did want to be nice to Kat and it was an understandable question. "Sure" was he answer.

"So, it's not so much a law as it is a convenience thing. So... for example the cyclopes all stand at least twenty metres tall. This means that this area isn't really built to accommodate them.? They can still visit of course, but they can't expect the facilities to accommodate them. Like say... the school.

"There is another law that makes it so that school has to be available to everyone who lives here, but the guidelines mean that if you live here despite being too tall to fit in the building, the school isn't liable YOU are. It just helps to keep costs down. It's much too hard to ensure that demons with such major differences in size live together.

"Because of this there are those guidelines in place. Though, these aren't just one sided. In an area where cyclops live, I'M wouldn't always be able to use the facilities. The stairs would be too tall. Well, my physical strength means I could jump I suppose but it certainly wouldn't be convenient. Anyway, does that answer your question?"

Kat nodded. *That makes a lot of sense. I was just thinking of it sort of like disability ramps and all public buildings have them. I guess they went the other way and make sure that everyone has a public building somewhere and encourage them to live nearby. Though... I guess with teleportation it isn't as hard as it could be so it's not really a big deal.*

"Right now... back to the story. So I was alone with Kamiko and she was in the basket happily looking at all the shelves. I think she was admiring all the bright colours on display and the funny looking

characters on a lot of the boxes. She had a nice one piece dress on that my mother bought for her and she hadn't quite yet lost her ahoge but she'd grown out the rest of her hair and she was adorable.

"So, I'm going around picking up what we need, and little Kamiko spots a box of jelly. She starts making... I can't say it was a scene. She was a very polite baby you see. However, I could tell she wanted my attention, and she's pointing rapidly at these boxes.

"It just so happened to be the family's favourite brand of Jelly. Not sure if you'd know it, but it's got a little jelly jewel golem on the front with a cartoonishly drawn smily face on it. Anyway, she started pointing at it and I thought to myself 'should I buy some? No... we already order it in bulk, we don't need more' so I explained that to her. That we didn't need this box because we already had it.

"This was clearly the wrong thing to say. Or well, I didn't realise it straight away but it was. So little Kamiko starts looking through the cart. I thought she was looking at more cool pictures again, but she was actually searching for the jelly box in the cart. She was a very smart babby. Yes you were weren't you" said Trigrath with a bit of baby talk at the end.

"Daaaad! I'm not two still. You don't need to talk to me like that" groaned Kamiko

Trigrath shrugged, lifting Kamiko easily with the movement and clearly unrepentant. "Eh, anyway, my smart little munchkin was searching for it and when she failed to find it, she got upset. Now, Kamiko didn't cry much as a child, so she wasn't crying at this fact, but she was very sad and she had a bright red face from trying to hold in the tears.

"So, this goes on for a little bit and I realise that I forgot something that just so happened to be in the same isle as the jelly. So, we had back and as we walk past Kamiko grabs a box of the stuff and puts it in the cart. I don't notice at the time, and keep going to find what I was after. I think it was some other sweet.

"Now, that should be the end, but I walked back past the jelly on the way out, and here's where things get strange. So Kamiko, she grabs two more boxes of jelly on the way back as we continue shopping. One isle down. Two isles down. Three isles down, and I start to notice something. Kamiko's looking around, but now she's rather worried.

"I can see something is bothering her, but she can't really talk properly at this point, so I pat her on the head, and that seems to cheer her up for a bit. Another isle down, and then she starts panicking again. So... I take her off to the side, and I say 'what's wrong darling'" Kamiko's face is already bright red knowing what's about to come. "and she says to me 'am I a bad girl?'"

"Now, I have no idea why she'd think that, so I just ask, 'do you think you are?' and she struggles with that for a while. I actually considered just going on with the shopping and dealing with it later, but I'd learned from six other daughters that for things like this, you just have to wait and give them time.

"Eventually, she decides she can't figure it out, so she says 'I dunno daddy, I think I did a bad thing' though it sounded a lot worse then that. Once again, six daughters, you learn to speak sad child. So, I give her another pat on the head and a quick hug and I say 'Do you wanna tell me what you did?' which, was probably my best move of the day. Never ask them to tell you, ask them if they want to tell you. Works almost every time.

"She then nods at me and I give her a little kiss on the head. She smiles at me for a moment before getting sad and saying 'I took the jelly', which made no sense at the time. We're still in the shops we haven't paid for anything yet so I ask 'what do you mean'

"And she gives me the biggest puppy dog eyes and says to me 'when we went past I took the jelly' and it was just the cutest thing I'd ever seen. I wanted to laugh. To this day, I almost wish I'd laughed. But, it wasn't a laughing matter. Jelly is serious business of course" Trigrath said in the least serious voice possible "so now I'm stuck. Should I explain the complex inner workings of the supermarket to a two year old and why it isn't stealing because you haven't left the shops...

"Or do I accept that it was sort of stealing, or really just close enough in her mind, and tell her that she did a bad thing but it's ok. It's a tough choice, because while option two is sort of lying, I don't exactly want to encourage her to steal things and it might go over her head. So, I pulled up my britches, and explained as carefully as I could why it wasn't stealing, but that it was still bad.

"Took me a good twenty minutes. Then we put the jelly back and she started crying. Just lightly, like I'd stolen the light from her eyes. So of course, we walk out of the store with five more boxes of jelly" finished Trigrath

Chapter 452: Why Aslena Doesn't Deserve Good things.

Kat didn't want Kamiko to feel to weird or more embarrassed about the shared story, but the whole thing was just so adorable. It was so precious in her mind to see such a young version of her friend not being able to lie to her family. It did seem a little advanced for a two year old, but considering the other weirdness of demons it no longer even registered as a strange event in Kat's mind.

So, Kat, with her knowledge of just how spoiled and ungrateful some younger kids can be found the words of praise bubbling up her mouth before she attempted to squash them to save Kamiko the embarrassment. She failed, instead blurting out. "That's just so adorable. I can picture it, and it's so sweet to hear about. I know plenty of much older kids that don't have half the morals Kamiko did when she was two"

Kat was surprised and relieved to see Kamiko actually getting less embarrassed as Kat spoke, her blush fading as she managed to wriggle in her father's arms to face Kat properly once again. While she was doing this Trigrath grinned and said "Yup, all my daughters are sweet, but Kamiko probably takes the prize as the sweetest. I shouldn't say this but the others aren't as pure as she was back then. Hell, most of them aren't as pure as she is STILL"

Kat smiled, at the answer, and then wider still as she caught the flash of shock that ran through Kamiko's mind. She was practically reeling from the admission. Her dad had never given her any real indication before this that he knew about the less appealing aspects of some of her sisters (read as Aslena). The fact that he thought she was sweeter implied that he either hid that fact from others, or just perhaps just himself, but recognised it on some level, and Kamiko filed that little piece of information away in her mind.

After the joy from Kat recognising his daughter 'was the best' wore off, Trigrath decided to move on, showing Kat a few other pictures and discussing what was happening in them. From pictures of her with little block toys, to pictures of her squished between the triplets, and even one with her sitting in

between Elmony's breasts with another next to it of Kamiko laying on Elmony's head and poking at her 'strange' horns in confusion.

The next interesting one, was where Trigrath stopped. It was Kamiko in a rather... unique... looking outfit. There was simply no other way to put it. At its base, it was a simple long sleeved dress that was obviously too big for the poor girl in an unflattering dark green that just did not go well with her hair.

It got worse though. It had a number of what had to be glued on additions to it. There was a number of stickers all along the sleeves with various different household items on them, ranging from cups to plates to building blocks and even a couple of pieces of actual Lego stuck on.

To make things worse, the centrepiece wasn't spared either. Where one would expect breasts on a fully grown woman, someone had stuck two small bowls, which weren't small at all on the young demon's frame, to the dress, perhaps to imitate the real thing. Then, underneath that, was countless streams of fabric dangling off the waist, and going to the floor, and beyond in some cases. None of them were uniform, and it looked like somebody has just grabbed all the leftover fabric they could. It wasn't in any kind of order, and the colours ranged from red to green, to purple and more.

So of course, Kat, knowing what she did, was already seeing how this next story was going to turn out, she almost wanted to ask Trigrath to move on when she saw him gearing up for the next major story, but Kamiko shook her head sadly, knowing it was better to let Trigrath get it out of his system.

"Oh, yes, this was the very first fashion show Kamiko was in. She used to love them, going all the time when she was younger..." said Trigrath with pride, very adeptly ignoring the look on Kamiko's face that screamed 'I never wanted any part in this'. Now, Kat, knowing how much other kids at the orphanage could regret what they'd done the previous week let alone in years past, might have been tempted to pass over that look. However, knowing what she did about Aslena, it was clear who was really responsible for Kamiko's participation.

Which was of course confirmed in the next breath. "This one, actually, was mostly Aslena's doing. It was also her first fashion show if I recall, but she wanted not to be the model but the designer. I do wonder where she got the idea from. I don't think I showed her any of the fashion industry. Perhaps I can blame Aunt Marge for that. Anyway...

Kamiko was not having a good day. She'd been woken up and told by her father how happy he was she had decided to sign up for the Tiny Tots Fashion Show. Now, Kamiko would be the first to admit, she was a little forgetful. She never pretended to have a great memory, especially when she was younger but... that just didn't seem fun.

Her Dad had picked her up along with Aslena and put them her in the stroller, even though she was probably too big for it, it was what Dad wanted. Aslena was set down to walk nearby before teleporting them off someone knew. Kamiko had gotten used to that quickly, the teleporting. She'd never known anything else, and her mum and dad did it, so that meant it was safe.

Still, the first thing that her on arrival was the noise. It was LOUD. There were people everywhere and little Kamiko didn't like that one bit. She dug herself deeper into the stroller, wishing that the blankets

from when she was younger were still around. They weren't because they didn't really leave enough room for her, but right now she wanted nothing more than to hide somehow.

In stark contrast to Kamiko's panic, which Trigrath was taking as her being 'a little shy' Aslena was practically basking in the noise like a beachgoer looking for a tan. If she'd could have been considered happy before when they were leaving home, now she was ecstatic, the emotions hardly compared. Aslena was practically vibrating in place.

Kamiko, at this point, still had on a nice plain outfit. She was wearing pants because her parents noticed she'd developed the habit of playing with the bottom of her skirt... and was not exactly mindful of how far she lifted in in the process. To curb that habit somewhat they'd tried switching over to pants. It... well it was a work in progress. Kamiko's shirt was a soft pink not quite matching her hair, and her pants were short little black things that went to about her knees.

Aslena however, wanted to be 'professional' which, unlike a normal child's ideas of suits and ties, meant medical gowns and form fitting clothes to match her mother's. Somehow, she'd gotten the idea that the longer the coat, the more professional, so she wore one that was obviously two or three sizes too big and it dragged. Her parents had tried though, and managed to get away with pinning the extra fabric up so it only barely touched the ground rather than leaving a train like it should have.

It was very hard to see what was under the coat, as it practically draped over her and took up more than its fair share of space. Aslena had even allowed it to be done up, unlike her mother who wore it open whenever she was seen, though that was because Aslena had never really seen her mother in full 'work mode'.

Still, underneath the outfit, Aslena had what she considered to be fashionable attire at the time. Which was a bright pink skin tight dress that was even brighter than Kamiko's hair. Her shoes at least, were practical sand shoes though they were black and white with light green highlights.

Still, Aslena didn't look that out of place. This was a contest for young designers and models after all, and any designer so young had a few strange ideas. There was one in a similar coat but with massive glasses on that had to be held onto her head with tape so they didn't fall off her nose or ears. Another young girl was wearing a traditional suit, fitted for her, but with a tie that went all the way down to the floor. Finally, there was more than one girl in a princess themed outfit. It seemed that transcended species.

Chapter 453: Why Aslena Doesn't Deserve Good Things Part 2

Trigrath was pushing his way through the crowd. It wasn't too bad, but a little more crowded than would be comfortable in this situation, as he made his way to the receptionist desk to sign up the girls, Aslena for the designer side and Kamiko for the modelling.

Kamiko, of course, didn't want any part of this, but she was still trying to get over the shock of how many people there was to properly complain. Her body was solidly in flight mode, and the only thing keeping her from screaming out or throwing a tantrum was her understanding that doing such in a public place was 'a bad thing' though she wasn't quite older enough to realise why that was at this point.

So, very quickly, and perhaps with this knowledge in mind, Kamiko was signed up and the desk was left behind for a quieter area towards one unoccupied corner. It was somewhat dirtier than the others and

required Trigrath to step over some fallen plaster from the ceiling to get there, likely why it wasn't used, but it did allow for him to get Kamiko away from the crowds. He'd recognised that the noise was bothering her at the very least.

Once situated, Aslena started kicking at the loose plasterboard on the ground, sending up little puffs of dust here and there as she did so. Kamiko, on the other hand, had turned around, and was sitting on her knees, back pressed into the corner of the stroller as she peered out. She could still see a lot of people but at least they were further away now.

"So, excited for the big day?" said Trigrath cheerfully.

"Yup Daddy, this is gonna be the best!" said Aslena.

Kamiko looked from her sister to her father, wide eyes laced with confusion. Her lip trembled slightly not liking how happy these two seemed to be when she couldn't understand why. "Da? Wha's goin on?" was about what she managed to get out around her recently grown baby teeth.

"Oh, you get to show off on the runway. Aslena's even going to make a dress for you! I'm sure you're very excited." Said Trigrath with a big smile.

Wa? Tha doesn't sound fun at all... I dun wanna. Too many peoples around. Asy might be able to make pweety dresses but I don't want them. At this age, Kamiko's thoughts weren't exactly refined either. Still, it made great sense to her. Things were not as they should be, and she didn't understand what could be fun about any of this.

Still, her inner conflict was missed by her father, who was enjoying the smile on Aslena's face. Aslena though, even young as she was, around six at the time to Kamiko's four, did notice, and her eyes flashed with a glint of pride and hidden malice for engineering the situation.

Long before this Aslena had learnt how to manipulate their father. It was easy when your parents knew you couldn't lie and assumed you didn't know well enough to lie through more discreet measures. It was around this time Nira, her mother, was certainly catching on to this fact and had already started taking steps to confirm things Nira said. Thus, Aslena was trying to go all out before her father caught her as well... some say she's still waiting for him to figure it out to this day.

None the less, this meant that when Aslena had mentioned the contest and her desire to enter alongside Kamiko, Trigrath had been ecstatic at the news but said "make sure you have your sister's permission"

To which Aslena had left, pretended to ask Kamiko, and then said "Kamiko said she was fine dressing up to help me" which was of course true. She had said as much. A few days ago. When presented with an outfit Aslena had stolen from Kamiko's closet before it was noticed as 'something she was working on. So, Kamiko had agreed to play dress up but certainly not for any contest.

Trigrath of course, never followed up on this, and so here they were. Kamiko freaking out quite a bit, Aslena grinning, both at getting a chance to enter a fashion show, and at managing to get one over on Kamiko and her dad. Luckily for Kamiko, her mother would find out later, but that's another story.

So, the three waited for a while to be called into the next room. Aslena picking at her surroundings. Kamiko trying, and failing, to calm herself down, and Trigrath watching his daughters. It took around

thirty minutes for someone to finally address the room. They were a large demon, with shockingly unnatural muscles.

Their pectoral, deltoid and bicep muscles were massively oversized. Each pec was larger than the four year old Kamiko, with similarly sized, if slightly smaller, muscles in the other three areas. Their midsection was also about twice as long as a normal person, but they had much shorter legs that were only about as muscled as a normal human. This look was not assisted by the normal head full of blue hair they had which looked so small when compared to his muscles.

The business suit he was wearing had clearly been tailored to his body as it didn't look like it was about to explode off him with a slight flex. Still, it was a form fitting article which did show the definition in his various muscles, both normal, and oversized. His legs were covered by something like a kilt. The patterning was right, but the length was wrong, going to just above the ankles instead.

"WELCOME ONE AND ALL" said the announcer. "YOU'LL BE COMPETING TODAY FOR THE HONOUR AND GLORY OF THIS YOUNGLING COMPETITION. THE WINNER, ON THE DESIGNER'S SIDE WILL RECEIVE A COMPLETE SET OF REGYO KIRYEN'S DESIGNER BOOKS INCLUDING ONE FROM HER EXCLUSIVE LINE TITLED 'LIVING THREAD AND IT'S MANY USES'

"FOR THOSE OF YOU MODELLING, YOU'RE IN THE RUNNING FOR YOUR CHOICE OF, A YEARS WORTH OF DANCE LESSONS OR, A NEW OUTFIT DESIGNED BY UP AND COMER SETSUKI KIRYEN WHO IS FOLLOWING IN HER MOTHER'S FOOTSTEPS

"DESIGNERS, MODELS, HEAD TO YOUR ROOMS AND LET'S. GET. STARTED.

Kamiko paled. She did not like this. She didn't know who any of those people were but she did know what modelling was. She'd had to find out when living with Aslena for so many years. It was not what she considered anything close to a good time. To hear she was in a modelling competition somehow, for her what other reason could she be here. Was not a fun thought.

Quickly though, she was shuffled off into a room filled with dresses. To Kat's eyes, they were pristine condition, easily something she'd think to find in the higher end stores in the nearby city. To the demons though, they were clearly very old.

Thread was hanging from them in a few places, normally around the arms of the neckline. The enchantments on them which kept them in good condition having faded recently, or perhaps some time ago and just now noticed.

In addition to the, well styled but very plain, dresses, was a box filled with supplies to help 'improve' them. This contest was for those under eight, so they'd allowed for the more 'childish' ideas of what could look good a chance to flourish. Kamiko and Trigrath would never learn the contest was actually leaning towards that sort of thing on the judges side.

Aslena though, was already in her element. She jumped straight for the dress that she thought looked the best... on her of course. Not taking into account Kamiko's measurements properly nor her hair colouring when making the choice. From there she quickly dragged Kamiko from the stroller and put her on the pedestal in the room before stripping her of clothing.

Kamiko started to tear up at this point but bit her lip in an effort not to cry. Her Dad wasn't here. Adults weren't allowed to help, and she knew Aslena would not help her deal with the emotions at all.

Chapter 454: And Her Mother Knows It

Leaving Kamiko's torture for just a moment, Trigrath was making his way into the auditorium. It was actually a rather impressive piece of enchanting work that had stayed in use for quite some time. There was a number of seats laid on in the standard formation for large viewing areas like the cinema or concert halls. The special enchantments on this one, was that it made the stage appear as if the watcher was in the front row regardless of their actual position in the room.

It did this with a combination of space warping runes that would actually work somewhat against Kat, because what was happening is that the runes would collect the light from the stage and make it look closer, rather than utilising an illusion technique. Kat would be able to tell something was wrong, knowing what she saw was almost an illusion but not through it... until Rank 3 or 4 when the ability got more sophisticated.

What this really meant though, was that it was an excellent viewing experience for the whole hall, allowing the judges to sit at the front in a private booth hidden from others without it causing viewing issues for the people behind them. Currently, the stage was being used by a small time band that had been contracted to play to keep the parents busy. It was more for them to get some exposure and practice than a true job, especially as the members were family members with the organiser.

Still, this kept Trigrath occupied while Kamiko and Aslena were in the other room. Back, to them actually, would find Kamiko with a large hat covering her eyes. Even for Aslena, watching her little sister try to hard to fight back tears was a somewhat painful thing once the rush of tricking her was over. Oh sure, she had no regrets, but that didn't mean she wanted to be reminded of how much she was traumatising her sister while she worked, so the hat was the second thing to go on after the dress.

What Aslena was doing, was starting to sew strips on. Those were actually the first accessory she'd started with. Trying to 'make it more professional' and fight against her instinct to just throw colours at the problem and make it go away. Aslena while a gifted designer, was still very much a child at this point. All the reading of fashion and knowledge of colour theory was great, but really bad at suppressing the childlike wonder of 'lots of pretty colours make everything better'

Still, she had tried to keep it professional with the fabric scraps. Sure some where a little too long, but that was fine. She didn't have time to sew them all on properly she only had an hour back here to work and she was going to use it.

Once she'd created what was basically a second skirt, Kamiko had recovered somewhat. She had a nice hat that hid the world from her, so she could pretend she was just at home and not about to be put in front of hundreds of strangers. It was a comforting thought that she decided to hold onto, just to stop the tears for a bit.

Eventually, as the deadlines started approaching, Aslena decided she hadn't done enough to stand out. In reality she really had, but she was something of a perfectionist, even if her idea of perfection was very wrong. The idea of creating the cutting edge of fashion had wormed its way into her brain and become a goal some time ago, and she couldn't just leave things as they were.

Because of this she started on the stickers. She had plenty of extra real estate to work with, having mostly just used the bottom of the dress at this point. So she just started going to town with them, plastering Kamiko's back and arms with them as best she could.

Finally, there was just the front left, and Aslena was really scratching her head on that. Five minutes to go and not a unique thing in the room. She reached over to the snack bowl hoping a little sugar would help her think of something when she paused. Her eyes drifted from the two snack bowls, to Kamiko, and back.

Aslena smiled, thinking she'd just cracked the code. They were told they could use anything in the room as long as they didn't break anything like the mirrors or the clothes horse holding the dresses. She decided the bowls were fair game.

So that was how Kamiko ended up walking out on stage with the bowls strapped to her, with considerable amount of glue to keep everything in place, even some on her skin, something Kamiko as a four year old, did not understand the problem with and thus had managed a fairly brave facade when she was finally called outside.

Standing in line behind the other girls who looked just as crazy as she did, was somewhat calming... until their numbers slowly dwindled. Kamiko tried to open her mouth to speak to the ones nearby, to try and gain some form of understanding, but the words died in her throat. She couldn't speak.

The stage was getting closer. The number of people before her dwindling swiftly, and the emotions building within her. There was no calming presence to reassure she was fine. Just a strange man with a clipboard standing off to the side looking disinterested. She started to hop lightly from foot to foot, the nervousness requiring some movement from her to contain properly.

As her movements increased though, the clipboard man placed a hand on her shoulder, stopping her in place. Her movements had started to create a good deal of noise, and they couldn't have that. Kamiko paled, even more than she had already and sadness welled in her eyes but the tears wouldn't come. She was scared. She couldn't deny it. She was terrified. She wanted Mum, she wanted Dad. Heck, at this point she'd even take Aslena just to have someone familiar nearby.

So when all of a sudden she was pushed out onto the stage, not having the awareness to realise she was the only person who hadn't walked, she froze like a deer in the headlights. She tried to take a step forward, but found herself unable. Tears finally started to build in her eyes and started to trickle down her face.

The stage was so long, it never seemed to end. It stretched towards a darkness containing so many eyes that all held expectations for her. All wanted to see her in something she'd had no desire to wear, all wanting to see her FAIL. They were everywhere. More eyes than she'd ever seen, and she'd seen a beholder before. Kamiko's knees wobbled as she started to fall, her body giving out from the sheer weight of the terror starting to press itself in on her, when an angel, not literally of course, saved her.

What Kamiko didn't know, and even her Father would never learn, was that a colleague of Nira's was in the judges panel and had recognised Kamiko instantly, as well as the look on her face. She was a master illusion based Succubus and therapist who worked with Nira on specific cases, and had become somewhat of a friend with her. Her name was Karanth.

She blurred into action. The only Rank 5 on the panel, her illusion was thrown up over the poor shaking girl as she was brought into her arms and back into the judges' booth. Karanth went a step further, blanketing herself in an illusion the whole time so that when she made it back to her spot, nobody knew she'd been gone, and nobody could see the child she'd picked up. Karanth pushed her energy into a silencing skill bubbling out from her skin, as she held Kamiko close.

"It's ok little one. It's alright, breath" said Karanth

Kamiko lost it. Deep, heart wrenching wails broke out of Kamiko as the tears doubled in size, soaking deeply into Karanth's outfit. "Kamiko dear, it's you right?" asked Karanth

All Kamiko could manage was a small nod of her head as her tiny hands gripped what they could of Karanth's shirt burying her face into the impressive chest the Succubus sported. "There there girl. Cry it out, please" said Karanth kindly.

The contest went on. The Kamiko illusion acting as if nothing was wrong, even continuing offstage and acting in place of the original for a bit. Karanth waited till Kamiko cried herself out before asking. "Why are you here dear?"

This started the water works again, as Kamiko managed to choke out between sobs "I. I. Don. No"

Which lit a blazing fire in Karanth's eyes. Glowing a deep hostile red as her aura started leaking out of her and wrapping around Kamiko protectively. Karanth knew what she would do. Nira would hear of this. Aslena would be punished.

Of course, these details were not know to Trigrath, but Kamiko filled Kat in on them much later. And well... Aslena's punishment was legendary... but not part of this tail.

Chapter 455: Well Bother...

"... and that's really the whole story. Kamiko looked lovely in her dress and Aslena got third. Apparently there was one judge that had it out for her for some reason. Rather sad, and I never did find out who. I'd give that judge a piece of my mind if I did" said Trigrath

Kamiko gave a shake of her head before jerking it towards the stairs. Her eyes seemed to tell Kat that this wasn't quite the full story, and she'd share it later. Kat was rather happy she could get so much information from just that look.

Kamiko was right of course. Karanth didn't let Aslena off, and certainly wasn't going to give her any points for torturing her sister. She even left with the group, keeping her illusion up to sneak into the family's home. It wasn't hard, as a friend of Nira she didn't set off the intruder alarms just by entering.

Kat pursed her lips, not really sure what to say, as she hadn't yet heard the full story. From the way Trigrath told it, Kamiko had a great time, got third place with Aslena, and got to show off spectacularly. *At least though, he isn't like Lily's father. You could call them both wilfully ignorant but it's to very different degrees. Trigrath lies to himself just as much as everyone else, if he even notices at all. He also applies it evenly. Sure that means the results aren't ideal when Aslena specifically takes advantage of it, but if Kamiko tried she'd probably get just as far.

Well, until Nira picked up on it. I wonder how much she teases Aslena. I imagine either a lot, or not at all. Depends how well it works really. Still, I can imagine what Aslena was doing through that whole time. The little queues Kamiko gave me to signal how wrong Trigrath was when explaining Aslena's facial expressions a few times worry me a bit.

Though... I do also wonder if Kamiko is a bit harsh on her sister. How much could she really remember from when she was four? I certainly struggle with it and my memory is better than hers... but she was a demon the whole time so maybe something like that sticks around? I have more important memories fairly available of course.*

Hmmm... you know. Kat glanced at Kamiko's eyes. Unlike the more normal embarrassment from the first story, where sure, it didn't paint her in the best light, but it wasn't a truly terrible experience for her. *Perhaps it was the younger age... or the experience this time was much worse and Trigrath doesn't know.*

Kat could see Kamiko was... not quite angry, and certainly not at her father for telling the story, not really, but there was... a remnant of pain there. She was not happy to be reminded and there seemed to be so much more.

I guess that means I should focus on finishing up with Trigrath then. I don't like the look in Kamiko's eyes. Makes me want to give her a hug and tell her it's all going to be fine, Clearly the hug she's still getting from her dad isn't helping matters here.

"Thank you for the story" said Kat, a bit less enthusiastic than she was the first time, as she was trying to carefully get Trigrath to move on, not spend more time questioning either her or Kamiko as to why she didn't like the story when it seemed so happy.

"It was no trouble" said Trigrath grinning. "I'm glad you liked it. I still have plenty more where that came from"

Kat suppressed her wince, but only because she saw the words coming a mile away. There wasn't really anything else Trigrath could have said. It was rather obvious that he enjoyed the situation and didn't realise it was a problem at all. *Dammit how can I get Kamiko away for a bit.*

Even though Kamiko was now settling into her father's arms, it was not in a peaceful manner like it had started. It was now more like a cat waiting to pounce to escape from a bigger predator. *Quickly though, Kat came up with an idea.*

"Well you've shown off your story telling skills, what about your cooking?" asked Kat. She wasn't really hungry, tired perhaps, but hungry she was not. Her lunch, while smile, was a sufficient amount for Kat to skip a few more meals without trouble at all. The same wasn't quite true for Kamiko, but still certainly possible. However, as soon as the words left Kat's mouth Kamiko's eyes brightened considerably.

Trigrath glanced out of the window. "Hmm, well..." and noted that it was starting to get dark. It wasn't night just yet, but they'd been talking for a while and it was too late for the afternoon tea he'd been planning with all the sweets. Perhaps it was time for him to cook something for dinner instead? "Well, if you both want to keep each other busy I can prepare dinner. The sweets can come later"

"Great Dad thanks!" said Kamiko before Kat got a chance to reply. She leapt from Trigrath's arms as soon as they'd loosened and grabbed Kat by the arm before dragging her downstairs to her bedroom.

As Kat was being dragged, she found herself surprised that her arm wasn't getting sore from this. Kamiko was moving her pretty fast after all, and all that pressure was going straight to her wrist. During the transit Kat was thinking. *Honestly, my bones have really improved. I can't believe this doesn't even hurt. A little help from my skin being smooth enough not to get friction burns...* Kat's memories flashed back to when she crashed into the dirt with Minor and she got gravel EVERYWHERE including her throat. *Ok not easily anyway.*

Kamiko entered her room and deposited Kat gently on the bed. "Sorry about that but... I just had to get away"

"It's alright" said Kat shifting over slightly so that she was closer to Kamiko before pulling the girl into her lap. Kamiko stiffened for just a second, and Kat felt her heart hurt at that before the smaller demon relaxed and curled up into a ball.

"I... I just... it hurts you know" said Kamiko.

"It'll be alright" said Kat, "just tell me what's wrong." Knowing that empty words wouldn't help, but talking about it probably would.

"It... dammit I... look I... I love my dad but he has some problems. And... and one of them is that he lets us get away with things. And... well... he... um... Asleana... no ok hang on" Kamiko fumbled around the worlds as she fought back the tears she knew were coming. She wasn't a little girl any more, she didn't NEED to cry anymore.

As Kamiko shuddered in her arms trying to hold in the tears Kat gently ran her fingers through the girl's hair. "It's alright let it out" said Kat

Kamiko didn't even think twice before the tears started flowing. Tears of choked acceptance flowed from Kamiko's eyes and ran down her face before sliding off Kat's attire. "He... I... I knew he had problems and... and I don't really hold it against him... but... but it hurts to know he really... he really doesn't know. He... he's so... so BLIND"

"Hey, it's ok" said Kat "it's all over now. If you want I can even confront him about it"

Kamiko shook her head into Kat's clothing. "No. No... I want to... I... after I talk to someone. Actually... maybe... maybe it should be Karenth..."

"Oh?" said Kat very curious about this demon, not having heard her name "Why her?"

"Well, I... I was already looking for a therapist. I good one... and I... well I forgot her as an option. I... I'm not sure I'll definitely ask for her but... maybe. Um... so this is what... what was missing from Dad's story..."

Kamiko went on to explain the extra details, what happened in the backroom, the hat, what she was feeling in the waiting room, how she froze on stage and was then saved by Karenth.

It painted a very different picture of the whole thing in Kat's mind. *Huh... you know... I've known some real brats at the orphanage but... man that might take the cake. Forcing your baby sister into a contest

she didn't want to enter by tricking your father and enjoying it all the while. Plus it clearly still is a major point of trauma for Kamiko.

I'd thought it best to just... meet Aslena and not beat her face in. Now... now I'm thinking some face rearranging is just the thing she needs. Heck, Nira can even heal the bint afterwards if I go to far. She wouldn't let her daughter die now would she? I can feel perfectly fine about the whole thing! Hmm... Kamiko might not want it though... I wonder how the rest of the sisters would feel...*

Chapter 456: Father Figures are Complicated

Kat had finished up with Kamiko for the time being and the pair were making there way up for tea. Kat found out that they had basically a television screen in each of the sisters' rooms that could transmit video from other places in the house and Kamiko's dad had called them up to eat tea with him. Kat wasn't sure how much she would eat, but that was fine.

What wasn't quite so fine were her current thoughts. Aslena, as difficult as it was to decide if she required punching, didn't actually require that much thought overall. It was very easy to just class her as somebody not to like and deal with it as things went. It just wasn't a super immediate problem for Kat, and even after they inevitably met, still wouldn't be a major point of concern. Her father was a different matter now that Kat was thinking on it again.

*I just don't know how to deal with him. I can objectively say Aslena is kind of a bitch. She has few redeeming qualities from my perspective because I don't care at all about clothing, and am honestly glad I have such a lovely outfit I can wear all the time with the excuse that nothing else will fit around my wings. I also haven't met her, so she's had no time to endear me to her at all. Finally, even if I wasn't Kamiko's friend, I have a long track record of disliking bullies. She is a bully, and one who directly terrorised a friend of mine. Sure she's also said friends sister, but really that's just an extra detail at this point.

Trigrath though... he's more of a problem. I don't exactly have a lot of gold male role models, and I certainly have no proper father figure in my life. Well, that might be a bit harsh, I do think of Gramps sort of like a father, and he does fill that role but... but it's very different.

Gramps is more a father to me then any other orphanage child because I lived with him for a decade and a half unlike most of the others. Inevitably we got closer, and he'd favour me when he could, and probably a few times where he shouldn't. Without knowing too much, he might have also tried to have other kids be more proactively put up for adoption instead of me. No proof of that one, and if it was the case I'd give him a hug because the orphanage really was my home, and still is a little bit.

Anyway off topic. Despite what Gramps has done for me, there was always the understanding that he was the head of the orphanage first and a father figure second. He did what he could, but it isn't the same I don't think. I'll never resent that, but it does make it really hard to figure out how I feel about Trigrath.

The sort of behaviour coming from Gramps would be utterly unacceptable. He'd have failed as both a father figure and as the orphanage director if he let something like the fashion show happen under his watch. On the other hand, he has much more distance from a lot of the kids. He'd have checked with both of them, both because he knows kids can be little shits, and that they can LIE.

Now, one could argue that Trigrath should know his daughter better than that, but I also know that people are wilfully blind when it comes to their family. Heck, take Lily's dad. He was more than willing to throw me under the bus to keep his wife happy. I don't even know if I can say that's the wrong choice and I'M the one they targeted.

So what the heck am I supposed to feel here. Both of them are his daughters, and I think, my gut tells me he is majorly at fault because as a father he should take care of his daughters, and know Kamiko well enough to realise she'd never want to go up on stage, and know Aslena well enough to realise she'd do anything to further herself. Probably should also know about the bullying.

The hard part is of course that Kamiko still likes him. Loves him in fact. Also, she hasn't really shared much of the good he's done. I'm sure there must be, because otherwise she'd talk about him in a much worse light. From what I can gather it's more... disappointment? That might be right. Loves him, knows he means well, but ultimately doesn't follow through?*

Kat disguised her sigh with the rushing of air as she was launched back to ground level for their meal. Kamiko was now happily skipping ahead of her, quite literally. After the girl had finished crying, she perked up quickly and Kat could see that it wasn't fake. Many years of practise from watching kids let get a sense of when a smile was put on, and Kamiko bounced back well. Sure, it took her about ten minutes after the crying to get there, but Kat was going to count that as a good time.

On the other hand, I could probably just punch him, and when he ask why say 'for Kamiko' and he'd accept it. Seems like the sort of backwards thinking he'd go along with. He wouldn't bother with the why I was punching him, just accepting it was for a good reason once he established, I was doing it for Kamiko's sake. Of course, unlike Aslena it wouldn't hurt him.

Now Kat was back to considering the implications of punching Aslena and what power level would be best along with where. Kat was tempted for a moment to pull her thoughts back to Trigrath but seeing him standing behind the ready made meal smiling allowed her to move on from that particular spiral.

So, I don't know how strong Aslena is, but I doubt it's any higher than four, and even three is unlikely. If she's level two, punching her in the face might be a bit much. However, I doubt she'd die, and Nira can be called up to solve that issue. Hmm, maybe I should think about this more.

Kat took her seat at the table as she let that thought percolate through her mind but it wasn't really giving her any new answers she hadn't thought of before. The meal was a simple affair really, Trigrath had made up three pizzas for them to eat alongside a large bowl of what looked somewhat like fries, however they were bright green. Clearly not natural, but it looked very close to being a vegetable of some kind if you only looked out of the corner of your eye. The pizzas were sprinkled with normal looking cheese, a golden coloured base, and various toppings.

Kat grabbed a slice of the nearest one after Kamiko grabbed the same piece. It seemed to have the least number of toppings. The main topping was something like salami but greyer and had a slightly wrinkly appearance. It did not look appetising at all but Kat found herself not caring. Biting into it, Kat found it was actually quite good. Whatever the grey stuff was, she found it very salty, but mixed well with the rich sauce and the strange meaty taste it had. It tasted a little like salty jerky but it was very supple and easy to tear into.

"So what do you think?" asked Trigrath

"Iss rely goosh dad" said Kamiko with food still in her mouth. Trigrath smiled thinly at this as if he was fighting a war between telling her off because it was rude, or enjoying how cute it looked because Kamiko had stuffed her cheeks full of pizza with one overly large bite.

Kat actually waited till she swallowed to say "It is indeed quite tasty. Whatever topping this is, isn't something I've tried before but I like it. The sauce is good as well." Left unsaid was that the cheese was honestly rather standard, nothing outstanding, but Kat supposed it might be a little strange it really was just normal cheese anyway.

"I'm glad" said Trigrath taking a slice of one of the other pizzas that had the same grey things as well as a few blue pineapple looking slices and a fine dusting of... something on it.

Think Kat think. What can you ask to keep the conversation off Kamiko. I can already tell Trigrath is wanting to go back to that. "So... what do you think we'll end up doing at Sloth?" managed Kat.

Trigrath stopped, pizza halfway to his mouth as he considered the question. "Well... if I'm honest I think it's most likely that they'll get you to do something interesting"

"Interesting?" asked Kat

"Yes. They do love their normalcy. Settling into a routine is one of the great joys of a sloth demon. So... whatever disrupts that is a problem. They'll send you after them."

Kat didn't really know what that meant exactly, but she was already forming several good guesses.

Chapter 457: The Mines

"... so I'm happy to inform you that you'll be sent to the mines for your punishment" said the Sloth demon.

"I'm sorry... what?" said Kat with a distinctly hostile edge. Though really... this was skipping ahead a bit.

Once Kat had finished off her second slice of pizza she found herself full. Kamiko managed to finish off four easily, while her dad had a whole pizza spread across the three taking pieces from each of them before the meal was done. They didn't really share any more stories over dinner. Kat did speak about the orphanage somewhat, but she found that all very standard.

Once they'd finished eating a wave of fatigue seemed to hit both Kat and Kamiko so they retired for the night, with Kamiko also draining her energy beside Kat. Once that was done they snuggled up together and went to sleep. In the morning they skipped over breakfast completely and headed straight for the Sloth compound.

Or, as they would find, just a lone building somewhere in the Hub. It was surrounded by other buildings of course, but... they didn't seem to be specifically for Sloth. It was all high rises, and Kat was shocked at just how normal it looked. They'd been deposited in front of a five story tall building with the word "Sloth" stamped on the front in black letters. The building itself was mostly white with black tinted windows and a few balconies on the sides, one on each level.

Sharing a glance, they walked inside to find a normal receptionist desk with a living shadow sitting at it. They were pitch black, of course, with bright white eyes and a thin line for a mouth. They lacked any other distinguishing features, and Kat had no idea how she'd ever tell them apart if she found herself in a room with multiple.

The strange thing about it, was how it was sitting at the desk. It was practically plastered onto the chair, and looked like a real shadow, pressed into the chair back. Its legs ran down the front, then leaned backwards and ran down the central supporting part of the swivel chair it had claimed. The arms were stuck to the arm rest with just a short gap in the middle before switching over to the desk as its preferred surface, with a number of fingers resting on the keys.

"Greetings and welcome to Sloth building number 12314451, how may I help you today?" spoke the shadow. Its voice sounding strange, and reminding Kat, surprisingly, more of the Angel than anything else. When it spoke, it was almost like she could hear velvet. The voice was smooth, but at the same time, heavier than it should be. Their just seemed to be weight behind the demon's words, despite them being soft spoken. It was like her demonic energy was telling her one thing and her ears another.

Kat was so freaked out by the sensation that it was actually Kamiko who recovered first and answered "We're the two demons scheduled for Punishment at Sloth today"

The living shadow tapped away at its keyboard before clicking a few times on the mouse, likely bringing up some document Kat was unable to see. After a few more minutes of searching the demon evidently found what it was looking for. "Ok, I can see you both here in the system. Please head up to floor four, then turn right and knock on the fifth door you see please" said the receptionist. After a moment they added, "Oh, and the elevators are that way"

The shadow seemed to warp as suddenly their arm appeared to shudder in place before appearing on the back wall with the fingers pointing to a large doorway on the left side of the receptionist desk. Kamiko and Kat nodded, before heading towards the doorway. The elevators were easy to find, and operate so it wasn't long before they got out on the fourth floor.

Kat and Kamiko didn't really have time to share any words as the elevators were much more efficient than human ones, arriving on the ground floor instantly and taking only a few seconds to drop them off at the fourth floor. The hallway was nondescript with basic grey carpet and slightly off white walls. The doors were all a boring grey colour that made them look like many other office buildings.

They quickly found their door and knocked. A silent thirty seconds past where nobody moved, then it opened up for them. What Kat found there was a relatively normal office for a very abnormal demon.

There was a book shelf on the right just as they entered with three chairs laid out before the desk lined up and slightly angled towards the left wall so that there was plenty of space for people to walk to the main desk. That's where things got a little stranger.

The desk itself took up the entire back wall. It didn't leave any way for someone to get on the other side of it. There was space at the back of the desk, and there was a demon there, but really, only that demon could ever manage to get there.

This was because they must have been some strange cousin of a beholder. They mostly consisted of two eyes and a faint mist. The eyes were expressive, and somehow had the ability to blink despite being

glowing orbs in space with nothing attached to them. The left eye was a deep green with a red iris, while the other was the opposite, bright red with a dark green iris.

The rest of the demon's 'body' if it could even be called that was a indistinct cloud of energy that seemed to switch colours continually as you looked at it, with a more solid looking energy mist heading towards the computer nearby.

"Hello, are you both here for the Punishment duty?" asked the cloud

"Yes" said Kat and Kamiko, mostly in sync.

"That's great my name is Ealvis and I'm so I'm happy to inform you that you'll be sent to the mines for your punishment" said the Sloth demon.

"I'm sorry... what?" said Kat with a distinctly hostile edge.

Kat felt her mind starting to speed up. This was everything she'd been worried about. *The other things were all so reasonable dammit. I'd forgotten this was demonic punishment. I can't believe I thought this wasn't going to be so bad. Heck, what about Kamiko. She's a sweet girl, she doesn't really deserve hard work in the mines!*

"Ah, I see your distress" said Ealvis, and Kat returned that with a look that basically said 'yes, yes you do' but somehow gave the impression of smiling. "Please don't think we're using you for hard labour, we have machines and operators for that."

"Ok..." said Kat letting the skepticism leak into her voice. A quick glance at Kamiko showed that she was also rather confused as to what was going on.

Ealvis let out what must be a sigh, but sounded more like a small dust tornado as the air was let out of them. "Right, allow me to explain. The diggers have managed to find a Swarm Rat nest. We'd like you to clear them out."

Kat chewed on her lip, and took the chance "Why?"

Ealvis tilted slightly to one side before righting itself. "I suppose that's a valid question. See, we don't get on with Wrath so don't really want to go with them. Plus, if we did go for that, we'd also have to worry about damage to the mines. They just go at the job without worrying about the stability of the walls or other 'inconvenient things'

"Following that, none of the miners want to do it. They aren't combatants really, they got away from that life early and came to work for us as soon as they could in most cases, so they want nothing to do with it.

"Finally, this also helps us prevent theft. Because you are here on punishment, you won't be able to take any ore that you might find in the mines because you'd be breaking that Punishment contract. Not that we don't trust you necessarily, it's just another layer of defence."

I don't really like this. I mean sure, this all seems like a completely reasonable request. Go into the mines and kill some rats but it feels iffy for some reason. Plus the whole 'not taking stuff' thing makes me wonder if it extends to the rats as well. They might have valuables or something, I guess. Still... sounds somewhat dangerous.

"Is there anything else we need to know?" asked Kat

"A few things actually" responded Ealvis "But those will all be covered by the foreman at the site. I'm just here to make sure you can do the job. I have a list of things to send you on if you couldn't go to the mines for whatever reason."

I wonder if those other jobs are better or worse...

Chapter 458: The Machines

The floating cloud thing shuddered before the solid part of its 'body' moved under the desk and a loud buzz resounded. "If you both open the door behind you, it will take you to the mine in question."

Kat and Kamiko gave a quick nod before turning around to find the door had transformed into one made of fire. The fire was a strange mix of blue and orange that seemed to mix and intermingle, bleeding into and out of each other with no rhyme or reason. Kat stepped forward first, pressing her hand against it and finding it somewhat squishy. Pushing harder... nothing seemed to happen until she heard Kamiko cough behind her.

Turning, Kat saw Kamiko with a big grin on her face, they stared at each other for a second before Kamiko said "You need to turn the handle silly"

Kat turned back to the door, and noticed that the area where the handle used to be was every so slightly wider than the rest of the door. *Ok that's just annoying. There's only a slight difference between the handle and the rest of the door. How did Kamiko notice? No, she has that skill I just wasn't paying attention.*

Of course, that wasn't true either. They both had the skills but neither was using them fully right now, Kamiko had just been in Kat's position a few times. This was the demon equivalent of pushing on a door that had a big sign saying 'pull' on it that you didn't really pay attention to.

Now making sure that she turned the knob first Kat tried to push on the door only to find her hand going through. A mild bout of annoyance shot through her as she realised that the door didn't open, it let you through made Kat frown slightly but she stepped into it anyway. Colourful flame surrounded her before she found herself deposited in a dusty room. Kat didn't just stand still, she made sure to move out of the way for Kamiko who followed behind.

The room was both large and small. In most ways, it was tiny. A bunch of tightly packed coats stood to one side and a dirty window on the other. There was a bench in the middle and a couple of old shoes falling apart underneath it. The main thing preventing the room from simply being declared small was the fact that it was three times the height of a normal room, and the exit was actually two doors. One for people around Kat's height and another for people who'd treat this whole room as a changing area, a cramped one at that.

A particularly large peg also rested near the roof of the room, presumably for an equally large coat. Still, Kat and Kamiko didn't linger, they could already feel the dust getting to them. It was actually worse for Kat as she felt her regeneration work to push the stuff out of her lungs in tiny amounts instead of allowing it to build up. This led to it pushing out through her skin and made it feel like somewhat like she had small bugs crawling through her skin.

Note to self. Never, ever, go into an extremely dusty place like this without reason. This... this feeling is horrible. I never thought the weakness of my regeneration would be DUST. Dammit, just... just cut into me or something. At least normal pain is sharp and over with quickly. This is... an eery lingering feeling that I do NOT like.

Kamiko, sensing Kat's rising irritation along with her own throats complaints made her way outside just as fast. They were greeted by a barren hillside with a number of wholes dotting the surrounding landscape. Various demons in mining gear with pickaxes over their shoulders walked in front of a cart that looked to be for storing ore that was floating behind.

Other teams were coming up from the Earth in the distance, but before Kat could spend any time looking around a voice sounded beside them. "My two adventurers!"

Turning, Kat found someone that had to be the same type of demon as Rock was albeit much older and taller. Where Rock looked a bit like a human that still needed some details filled in, this figure looked like he'd be more at home with the ground behind them than a person. Where Rock was a mix of sharp and flat lines, this demon had cracks running across his form, as well as what looked like chips missing in places.

He was also a dull grey like crushed stone but still retained some shine to him because the sun was currently reflecting off his shoulder. He was in a big coat that fit his form somewhat well. It was mostly the large rocks in place of biceps that strained against the fabric that gave cause to assume it wasn't the best fit. He also had a large yellow hat that was two sizes too big with the word 'Foreman' written on it.

"That'd be us sir!" said Kamiko cheerily, mostly from just being away from the damned dust.

"Great. I'll just need to get you both a set of masks and then I show you the area we need you to clear out. I'll also be going over basic safety in the mines as well as some advice that's not quite as iron clad." Said the stone man. It was also now that Kat realised he sounded completely normal. Well, he had the slightest tinge of a British accent somehow, but for a lot of people that was normal.

He then turned around and started marching towards a nearby box that was leaning up against the shed they'd just left. He opened it and started digging around as he continued the explanation. "Right, so, my names Stone, and I'm the foreman here. It's my job to keep all the other idiots on task, though I'll grant you it isn't too hard. Most of who we get down here and the less intelligent demons who still want to make good Candle.

"Because of this, I expect you to be polite, but if they start doing something stupid because you're both Succubi give them a good slap upside the head if you need. They aren't smart enough to hold it against you and neither am I. We just don't see a little of pretty lasses around here and as I said, not that smart.

"Right, next up, don't let your Demonic Flame loose. Confined to your hand is fine, burning your enemies is mostly fine, but DO NOT let it sink into the walls. A lot of the stuff we're mining reacts to the stuff in ways we don't want. If you hit one of the ores that become harder when energy is applied we will not be happy campers when it's time to excavate. Ah, found them!"

Stone, and Kat was sensing a them with these golem types because what a name, turned to them both and through over what seemed like a combination between a face mask and a scarf. Putting it on, the fabric seemed to 'click' somehow around her mouth and nose, moulding itself to her before freezing in

place and acting more like plastic than cloth. Breathing in, Kat found it a slightly strange experience, like the air wasn't quite right. That was probably just the filtration getting rid of normal air stuff though.

Kamiko put on her own mask before asking. "Hey, hey, um, where are the machines? I believe the guy who sent us here said you used them to excavate but it just seems like demons..."

Stone gave a full belly laugh as he slammed the box shut and stood up tall, before gesturing them to follow for a bit. "Ah, that old coot. He loves telling that joke. At some point the mining division here was named 'the machines' or 'machines' for short, and now a lot of the employees joke about that. Nope, this is almost all muscle powered!"

"Why?" asked Kat "Surely you have better tech for things like this"

Stone stopped just outside one of the nearby tunnels and said, "The simple answer is it's more cost efficient. The longer answer is really complicated. The more complicated gist of it is that the rock here is much tougher than it looks and doesn't exactly guarantee a profit. It's just easier to enchant some basically unbreakable picks and hand them over to some miners and tell them to go nuts.

"It essentially boils down to the number of interesting materials in the soil and how they all react differently to demonic energy. The demons here can use it to enhance their muscles for the swing, but not coat the pickaxe. On top of that, if we were to say use... explosives, we could set off a chain reaction if we found some of the more volatile stuff. So... not only would it be expensive finding powerful enough explosives, it would be dangerous too.

"We also don't get more powerful demons here because this isn't a high priority sight. They have more profitable areas they get sent to."

Chapter 459: Da Mine Rules Part 1

Stone stood tall outside the cave entrance for a few more seconds waiting to see if there was any more questions he needed to answer before he got started on the important things. He found it best to answer all the questions someone had beforehand so that they were willing to properly listen to the full explanation when he went over the rules of the mine.

"Right then. I have a few official rules, and a few unofficial ones. I won't be telling you which is which because both are just as important as each other. The only reason some are unofficial is because I won't be taken to task for not telling them to you, or be punished if I see someone breaking them even if it's stupid. I want you to treat everything I tell you seriously. Please ASK questions if you need. While the job itself isn't dangerous for you, not really, the MINES are a much more deadly foe if you don't follow instructions. Do you both understand?"

Kat and Kamiko gave a deep nod, indicating they did understand but Stone frowned and said. "I need verbal confirmation. I ain't a drill sergeant so none of this 'Yes Sir' 'No Sir' or 'Stone Sir' shit. I'm Foreman, or Stone. Now. Do you understand?"

A "Yes!" from Kat and a "Understood Stone" from Kamiko rang out. Stone gave Kamiko a slight glare for her answer, but she smiled innocently back and he didn't want to call her out on it.

"So, first thing that you all need to know, I already mentioned. Keep your damned fire to yourself. I don't care if you use it, but it DOES NOT touch the walls. Under any circumstances. If it DOES I want you to

mark the spot heavily in some way and report it. Now, that being said... it DOES NOT give you permission to actually DO it just because you know to mark it afterward. You may just set off an explosion, and we DO NOT want that, but, if mistakes happen we NEED to know. Understood?" *novelNext.COm*

"Yes!" "Understood!"? rang out from Kat and Kamiko.

"Good. Next, you protect that mask with your life, not because it's valuable, but because if it breaks, you might not have one much longer. It brings in fresh air from somewhere up in the clouds so it's always fresh.? It also has a backup air filter in it if it's only damaged in a SMALL way. That being said DO NOT rely on it. The backup filter is for getting the hell out of the mines as fast as you can.

"The area you are both covering is not KNOWN to have any deadly gasses, but because of the infestation, we don't know for sure. The miners broke into a cave, and they just poured out to fill up space. The mine section should be completely safe, but the cave that we opened up might not be. If I find out you fell to some poisonous gas I will not be happy. So KEEP YOUR DAMNED MASK ON. Don't take it off for anything. If you need to take it off, leave the mine. If it breaks, leave the mine. If you start to notice something funny with the mask or the air you're getting. LEAVE THE MINE!"

Stone was a bit more authoritative with the rules about the masks, it was clear to even a blind man that while he might have heard horror stories about demonic energy causing explosions in the mines, or had it happen sometime in the distant past, he was much more directly effected by the Mask Rule and likely lost friends or family in it, but neither Succubus made move to mention this, merely replying with an ""Understood""

"Now, this next rule is a little different for you to. It is that ALL ore mined must be added to the communal minecart. A team's minecart is shared completely. Doesn't matter if you do better one day and worse another, it all goes in the cart. We want teams to trust each other, and we find it fosters better teamwork that way. This also applies to any monster corpses they find, because you DO NOT leave them in the mine.

"Now, for you both, I won't be sending you down there with a minecart. This is because you don't know how to operate one, and I don't really have any space. Even if I did, I'd have to send at least one person down with you to operate it, and that's a waste of everyone's time. They wouldn't be happy because they won't get a proper cut from their efforts either. Sadly Swarm Rats ain't exactly worth much.

"What that means however, is that I expect you to pile up the corpses every time you get into a fight. I will send people to collect them all, likely once you leave this afternoon, but I don't want them running around looking for lone rats. Put them in piles of no less than TEN for me. I don't care if there is more. Piles of ten, piles of twenty, piles of two hundred. It's all the same as long as it's MORE THAN TEN" Stone slammed his foot into the ground to emphasise the point.

""Understood STONE"" shouted the Succubi together. Kat was grinning, she felt very professional for some reason.

"NEXT RULE" shouted Stone, "This is the one that trips up the newbies the most. It's not the first thing you think of, but it's IMPORTANT. IF you hear or feel or whatever other crazy sensing ability you have tips you off to the ground shaking, you need to try and do these things IN ORDER.

"First, you grab your nearest partner. NOBODY is to be alone. Two's, Three's I DO NOT CARE but for you it should be just each other. You will HOLD THEIR HAND. I don't give a shit if that sounds like it's for when you were back in school, this is important. HOLD your partner, or partners and DO NOT LET GO. I don't care if the whole ceiling smashes into your arm, you HOLD ON to your partner.

"SECOND. You make your way towards the minecart if you can see it, or know that it is nearby. DO NOT let go when you run to the cart. If you do so, I will PERSONALLY smack you into the ground when we find you. When you get to the cart, press the LARGE RED BUTTON under the glass. SLAM through the glass, it can be replaced. This will turn the minecart's cart section over and raise it higher off the ground.

"THIRD crawl under the cart, and WAIT. If you see other people coming for the cart, make room for them but DO NOT leave to grab them unless they are alone. Then you MAY, use your own judgement but do not leave your own partner just to help them. They SHOULD HAVE A PARTNER so if you don't see one they might be and idiot.

"Finally. YOU WAIT. I don't care if the world stops shaking and everything seems fine. YOU SIT YOUR PRETTY LITTLE AS-" Stone cut off his rant, realising that unlike his normal rant where the phrase 'pretty little asses' was not applicable in the slightest, was potentially applicable here and that both of them were the same age as his a couple of his nieces.

Coughing to hide that fact. "Right er... you SIT YOUR ASS down and don't move" Stone managed to recover well, "Someone from outside will come and get you if that is at all possible. We do NOT need you trying to travel backwards only to find or cause an extra cave in. The minecarts have some food and water in a hidden compartment that has a stasis enchantment on it, so if you can keep to them we WILL find you before it runs out. Do you UNDERSTAND!"

""UNDERSTOOD STONE"" shouted the pair.

"Right, the next thing, and this is just for you really, is that if you see somebody with a hat like mine that says Team Leader on it, or find myself with my Foreman hat on it, you LISTEN. These people have years of experience in the mine like myself, and if they've come to tell you something important. Normally, you only listen to your own team leader or rarely me, but I do want it made clear that nobody will be disturbing your section of the mine unless it is IMPORTANT. Is that CLEAR?"

Kamiko and Kat shared a quick glance before they said "CRYSTAL CLEAR STONE"

Stone clicked his tongue, which sounded a lot like rocks scraping against each other, and was really hard to identify for a few seconds. Kat couldn't understand how he sounded so much like a normal human but clicking his tongue, which should just like talking mostly, sounded like two stone scarping against each other.

Chapter 460: Da Mine Rules Part 2

"There are a few more things" said Stone, recovering from their response now, "that are mostly just common sense. Sadly, I know a few miners that are lacking in it so more rules are coming.

"Do NOT start bashing away at the walls. I don't mind if you punt a rat or twenty into the walls. Their bodies should take most of the shock, but do NOT start throwing your full weight into the walls. The caves are tough, and so are the supports, but the supports aren't perfect. If they have to deal with all

the weight of the mountain AND you punching it, then it might just give out. That causes problems for you, and the rest of the mine, so be careful there.

"Understood Stone" said Kamiko and Kat somewhat sedately, giving Stone a chance to recover from their antics a little.

"Next RULE. Light! If you need it, you will pick up one of the specially designed lanterns at the entrance. You push demonic energy in, light comes out. YES they are specially designed for mines, NO you can't take them home. The best place to put them is to hook them onto a belt if you have one. If not, you'll have to hold it.

"They are sturdy little things, but not ideal. Now. There is lighting down the tunnels but you will go beyond that. Still, it should be enough for you to find your way back to if something does happen to your light. So, now I got two questions, HOW good is your night vision, and Do you UNDERSTAND?"

"UNDERSTOOD STONE!" shouted the pair. Kat then gestured for Kamiko to go first. To comment on her eyes.

"Um, well Mr Stone, I have much better than average night vision but I still require some light. I can however get that light by shooting low powered lasers out of my eyes if necessary. It doesn't last too long but it would let me see if desperately needed." Explained Kamiko.

Stone nodded, and then gestured to Kat. "Well, as far as I can tell, I might actually have perfect night vision. I've yet to find a place so dark that I cannot see despite a number of times that I think there's been no light around. Possibly a consequence of truesight."

Stone nodded. "Well, I don't know about truesight, but I'll have you with a lantern each still because pinky here needs them at least a little. If you could both see in the dark completely guaranteed I might still have had you take one anyway so this is more of a precaution. Still, you both will do well in that department.

"NEXT. Getting LOST. If you find yourself lost. You need to STOP in place. Now, because you don't have pickaxes you might have to use something else if possible, but if you can, dig out and obvious CIRCLE around you to mark where you have realised your lost. Then place the largest fallen rock in the centre of it.

"Once that is done, start carving a line back the way you think you have been. Do NOT go further than you are sure of. If you end up not realising where you need to go at any point STOP again in place, and draw another circle and SIT in it. If you have your lanterns, place ONE on top of the original rock, and keep a second with you. This will make it the easiest to find you both.

"If you have not shown up at the end of the day, that is what the team sent to find you will be looking for. In your case they will be following the rat corpses to get an idea of where you've been. So, if you could, do try and keep your rat piles in sight of each other if it's not too hard. Understood?"

"YES STONE!" said the pair.

"Good. Now, NEXT RULE. If a cave in happens, and you get stuck, DO NOT summon up D.E.M.O.N.S to get you out. The reason for this is several fold. Firstly, shifting the collapsed rocks could cause more damage to the tunnels, potentially leading to another collapse just from your removal. This might be the

case even if you aren't being crushed as the teleportation can get a little funny in areas like the mines. YOU will be fine, but OTHERS might not be so don't jump to it.

"Second, if things don't collapse, the influx of demonic energy needed to actually START the teleportation process might seep into some of those explosive ores. If they happen to be ON you, the instant before the teleportation gets you away... well... you might just die anyway. It is NOT safe to use teleportation if you can't be sure you're away from that part of the mine.

"Third. Don't bother shouting out. Save that precious air. The equipment we use to find you DOES NOT use sound. We'll be tracking various other things, mostly demonic energy concentrations. Fourth. Don't try to dig yourself out unless you can very clearly see un-collapsed tunnel nearby, COMPLETELY. I don't care if it's one single chip out of the ceiling, that's already TOO MUCH.

"In general, staying put really is best. Shifting the rocks is just asking for trouble, and while it might get boring, it's really best you don't work on shifting things. Now, try to remain calm. If that means you have to chat with each other, go for it. Nothing uses air up faster than panicking, but really, if you protected your mask, like you should, then air WILL NOT be a problem. UNDERSTOOD?"

"YES STONE!"

"NEXT RULE. This one is a bit of a strange one that not many get the first time, but I've got high hopes for you both. NO SCREAMING. Whisper if you want, normal voice levels are also fine, but if you got good ears USE THEM. We've done our best not to make the mines an echo chamber but there is only so much we can do. You'll get a pass if a cave in is happening, but only because there's already so much noise. Simple, but is it UNDERSTOOD?"

"OF COURSE STONE!" said the pair, really getting into the vibe. Stone was also pretending not to grin at the two enthusiastic demons. He wouldn't admit it, but he found their innocent joy at listening to him harp on about the rules was very warming to his heart.

"Now. That's all the rules I have for YOU but do either of you have any questions for me?" asked Stone, voice drastically quieter than before.

Hmm... I don't think so? It's all pretty cut and dry. Most things are... well maybe not quite common sense, but having heard it all, they each make a lot of sense. Even the no screaming rule is important... though I bet we'll have a lot of screeching rats... hmm... that might be worth asking. "What about the rats Stone? They will problem be screeching a bunch" said Kat.

Stone ground his lips together slightly hearing this question. "That is actually a good point I hadn't considered. I may need to provide you with some ear muffs with communicators in them... hmm. Just one rat wouldn't be a problem but we already know they're SWARM rats so... hmm, give me a bit to think on that one. Any other questions?"

"What makes them swarm rats anyway?" asked Kamiko, and Kat was a little glad she wasn't the only one that didn't know.

"Ah, so... Swarm Rats are monsters that can duplicate themselves. They don't breed like normal rats. Well... they CAN but normally they don't. A colony of somewhere between five and twenty five will find

a nice place to whole up and then start eating basically whatever they can and converting it to demonic energy, before cloning themselves" explained Stone

"Wait... I thought only Demons could use demonic energy?" asked Kat before she could stop herself.

Stone nodded. "Yes, that's true sort of. Many things can use demonic energy, but what makes us DEMONS is that we can use it with no side effects. The most common side effect is when the energy itself destroys the brains ability to reason and sort of just... takes over. Some people think the Demonic Energy itself takes over, and others think it just destroys the ability for higher thought turning the creature into nothing more than a monster.

"In the Swarm Rats case. They look basically like normal rats but they have a big crystal sticking out of their head made of harden blood and demonic energy. Very fragile and basically useless, but it's where they store the energy before they clone themselves. That's the real problem. We don't know how long they've been in the area. You could be looking at a few hundred to a few hundred thousand rats. They aren't much of a risk, especially if you're paying attention but killing them all and making sure they ARE dead is a hassle."