

DEMONS 1021

Chapter 1021 Between Match Chat

Sue let out a long breath she didn't know she was holding and said, in a slightly shaky voice. "That... that was someone I met the other day at the party... she seemed so strong and sure of herself but... Tess... she lost... spectacularly so... I just... I don't understand? And this is Bodeir's next opponent?"

"Yeah seems like it, though Lian's match with the crazy bitch in a suit is first. Should I be concerned for Bodeir?" returned Kat.

"Probably not? I mean... The Man with No name-"

"John" interrupted Kat.

"What?" asked Sue.

"Lily and I have taken to calling him John, John Doe," explained Kat.

"Oh, yes... well... I see how that makes sense. I seem to be getting the extra context with that name... we don't really need a term for it because usually D.E.M.O.N.S is at least able to give us a first name, especially when someone is injured. It's an amusing way of referring to him. So... this... John. Swift and powerful he may be... but not overly brutal like Beatrice. I don't see how Bodeir can defeat him... but I also don't see it leading to his death. Plus, he seems to have this whole enlightened monk aesthetic so some sneaky assassination tactic is probably off the table," reassured Sue.

Kat nodded, "Right yeah... I think you're right... I guess I can transfer my worry to Lian then. I don't think I'm looking forward to that match. Seeing some random guy get brutalised was one thing... but Lian is Bing's friend, and she's not here to be angry on Lian's behalf... so we'll have to be,"

Sue smiled and said, "See, that's the sort of thing I like about you. Despite how casual you can be, you really do go out of your way to care for your friends to a major degree. You're already concerned for Lian just for Bing's sake, or perhaps, just because I'm friendly with Bing and Lian is Bing's friend,"

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Kat shrugged, "I guess I became a bit maternal after looking after so many kids. I didn't really have any friends that weren't Lily. When I was MUCH younger you could maybe count some of the other kids at the orphanage, but as I got older I had to... or well, HAD might be a strong word, but I felt like I had to be that big sister, even when I was the younger one.

"Before I was any good at managing my time I didn't really have the option to have any other friends. I think a few people tried when I was younger? But it never really took. We were all kids, so they didn't take it harshly or anything... they just stopped talking to me, and I was busy enough I didn't notice. I had plenty of social interaction... even if it wasn't easy to relax by myself.

"So... I guess what I'm saying is that it's easy to treat friends a bit more like I'm responsible for their safety and happiness than a normal person because that was all of my social life till I met Lily. I try not to be overbearing... I know that well. A lot of kids require a light touch after they've lost their parents. If I try to do too much they start thinking that I'm trying to replace them... and that just causes issues all over the place,"

Lily didn't really have anything to add to that. She was already privy to all of that information. Sue on the other hand, frowned at the explanation. "I... I think you've mentioned it in more general terms before... but you had NO friends before Lily?"

Kat shrugged, "I mean... I had some older kids I looked up to, and Gramps as a father figure... but I was really young when I started stepping up at the orphanage. I don't think I had any friends that were just friends and not orphanage kids I was closer too... since I was like... five?"

Sue winced, "That... can't have been easy..."

Kat shrugged again and said, "Honestly I never saw it as some major concession. It was just how I grew up, and I don't have any resentment over that fact. It isn't even a 'oh I ended up with a bunch of great friends, and a girlfriend that I love so it was all worth it,' type of thing. I'd do it all over again even if it meant I never met any of you guys. Heck, even if I just stayed human it would've been fine. Or if I'd never met Lily. Though I'd be rather annoyed about that last one,"

"You sure?" asked Sue. "I know we can say false things if we believe them to be true..."

Kat rolled her eyes and said, "Indeed we can, as you've shown Sue... but considering the only fact here is my opinion on what happened I can confidently say I'm correct. I am after all an authority on the matter," Lily transformed to give Kat a peck on the cheek and sniggered slightly.

Kat gave her a kiss back of course, but then she turned to Sue, locking eyes, and made sure to convey the seriousness of her words. "I never once saw the kids at the orphanage as a burden. I have lived a good life, surrounded by children whose lives I was able to touch, and improve in a noticeable way. Unlike Gramps, I do not want that to be my entire life. I still want to live quite a bit before I settle down and start my own orphanage, or take over Gramps' one. Well, that is if I ever do such a thing.

"It dominated my early years, and I don't regret it. I enjoyed my time doing it. I mean it when I say that sacrificing some potential friendship is a small price to pay for the work I did. I don't know what I will do in the future... but right now? Right now I'm happy, with my past, and with my future. Well, my long term future. Still not sure how I can make sure Bodeir is safe, and Lian might be in trouble next match... but those are minor worries,"

Sue burst into laughter of her own as the tension drained from the well-endowed Succubus. "I suppose I was trying to project a bit too much. As much as I enjoy our new friendship and find myself with a desire to try things outside of the sexual arts... child rearing is not something on that list right now. I certainly wouldn't want to deal with a whole orphanage full of them. That... that would burn me out way too fast. I'd be restraining myself constantly because I really don't want to teach a kid the sort of habits I happily own...

"I'd have to cut back on inuendo. Somehow stuff my breasts into an outfit and make it not look obscene. Learn how to actually care for children... honestly it might just be major 'only child' bias but I just don't think I could handle that sort of work,"

Deciding to steer things into a lighter direction, Kat decided to ask, "Why do you think you'd need to put in effort to find something that doesn't look 'obscene' on you?"

Sue and Lily raised identical confused eyebrows at Kat. "What? I thought it was a reasonable question?" stated Kat questioningly.

Lily let out a small bit of laughter and asked, "Right, ok, so Kat... what's the most 'decent' thing Sue could possibly wear?"

"Um... I dunno I guess she'd want something baggy so like a jumper or something?" answered Kat.

Lily and Sue grinned, Kat had easily just proved their point, Lily glanced at Sue who gave her a thumbs up. "Right so..." started Lily, "Sue would have a jumper on... and if it was a hoodie... she'd never be able to zip it up properly because her tits are too large. Then if, by some miracle, she managed to defy physics and close it... the outfit would float in front of her chest and showing off just as much. That's not even getting into the fact that if her jumper was riding up because of that, she'd just be showing off her ass,"

"But there has to be something!" retorted Kat.

Lily looked to Sue for the answer, and answer she did. With a shrug and a sigh, "Not really Kat. Once you have breasts as large as mine, it's much easier to look like a slut then it is to look proper. The most realistic way is just to bind them down a whole bunch. If I did it right, it wouldn't hurt... it'd just be uncomfortable." Sue paused and let out another sigh, "That's not really addressing the issue though. I'm not wearing appropriate clothes, I'm hiding how large my tits are to look less like I'll sleep with the first guy that asks. Which I mean... I totally would but that's not the point,"

Sue grinned at the end of her sentence and Kat found herself smiling back. Perhaps she was worrying too much anyway.

Chapter 1022 Lian VS Beatrice

Beatrice and Lian walked out onto the stage, Lian had replaced... or repaired her outfit between rounds. It looked the same... minus the burnt areas of course. Lian seemed fine... though if there was any scarring it was hidden by her long sleeves. Kat hoped it wasn't an issue but it really was impossible to tell.

Beatrice looked impeccable at the end of last round, with none of her clothes being ruffled or hair out of place... but seeing her walk back in a few things became clear. The blood on her knuckles hadn't been washed off, and both of her shoes were caked with dried blood. It really didn't make her like anything other than a complete psychopath. Which... she might well have been. A line of blood had been drawn across her cheek for some reason, but her hands were clean. For now.

When the announcer called out for the start of the round Lian reacted immediately. Instead of her hordes of dots, six thick metal beams appeared from her storage ring and formed the points of a hexagon. Lian sat down quickly after they were placed and started to strum. The pillars all lit up and started to faintly suck in the nearby light to fuel the reaction. The ground then flashed black before sinking into the stone beneath Lian's form.

Beatrice sprinted forward, a wicked grin on her face as she charged in, ready for anything... but Lian sent nothing against her. No swarms of dots. No mines. Beatrice made it to the pillars in not time flat. Instead of stopping, she brought up a glowing golden barrier and charged straight at Lian.

Lian didn't react, even as Beatrice passed through the pillars. For a moment, Kat felt her breath catch in her throat as Beatrice's fist reeled back, ready to strike at Lian... that was, until Beatrice was launched

back at high speed. Beatrice flipped in mid-air, and launched that punch she'd been building up towards the sky, forcing her into the ground and killing most of the momentum she'd been thrown with.

The ground cracked as Beatrice slammed into the stonework floor. Silence rang out over the battlefield as even Lian stopped her strumming. The announcer was leaning over to try and see into the hole Beatrice had dug herself into. It didn't take long to see the results of that. Beatrice hand clawed out of the hole, each finger breaking through the stone like Styrofoam as she pulled herself up.

Broken pieces of masonry fell from her outfit as Beatrice stood up. Her hair had been disrupted and the blood that had been on her face had been ground away by the dust. Her shoes were scuffed, her tie had a rip in it and the white undershirt had clearly seen better days. She didn't look to be in the best state...

Except, as she stood up, her eyes were burning with a manic fire. The creepy grin that spread its way across Beatrice face did not bode good things for anyone. Despite potentially being injured, Beatrice seemed rather pleased with this turn of events. Beatrice patted her outfit down to smooth out some wrinkles before glowing slightly and dashing forward a second time.

Lian started to strum a few more notes on her zither but Kat couldn't see what that was actually doing for her at this time. Beatrice charged all the way up to the hexagon, and this time, instead of charging through, she pulled her leg back and kicked the pillar. The sound of metal on metal rung out, backed by Beatrice's laughter that was leaking from her mouth. The pillar looked completely undamaged. Beatrice's foot much less so. She'd used the top of her shoe, which was somewhat armoured, but not the metal tips. This meant that there was a visible dent in the shoe... and such a dent was deep enough to mean there was a dent in Beatrice's foot as well.

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The foot in question started to glow, and the shoe rose back up again. *Is she... is she healing herself? Does Beatrice, the batshit crazy psychopath... have a healing affinity!* Perhaps she did, perhaps she did not. Regardless of the truth, Beatrice unleashed a flurry of blows on the pillar, hoping for it to do some damage. It did... just not to the metal. Instead, it was Beatrice's own hands that were bloody, the skin having been torn off at some point during the assault. A flash of light, brushed across Beatrice's limbs, then dimmed.

The idea she was a healer seemed more likely... but the blood didn't just go away when her hands were 'healed' so it was hard to say for certain. On the 'bright' side it seemed that Beatrice had decided her method of attack wasn't working and took a few steps back. Lian once again paused in her song and just let whatever it was happen.

Beatrice slammed her foot into the stone, breaking it into pieces before bending over and grabbing one of the fist size chunks. With perfect form, she threw the weight as if she was throwing a shotput ball. The piece of dirt in question sailed through the hexagon, impacting on Lian's shoulder, who hadn't moved to dodge.

Beatrice grinned. It didn't seem to have done much damage... but she could work with that. Beatrice set about destroying the top layer of the arena and giving herself a large amount of ammo to work with. After carving a line from one end of the arena to the other, Beatrice started hurling stones and Lian without stopping, always aiming for Lian's zither or her hands.

Lian realised this quickly, and strummed one last note before putting the weapon behind her. Once that was done, Lian intercepted the stones with her hands. They seemed to flash white, likely neutral qi, every time a stone hit. Lian was fine with this arrangement. Every rock thrown was one more that Beatrice didn't have access too.

As the hailstorm continued, Lian started to build a bit of a rock pile next to herself, but she wasn't doing anything with them for the moment. Her left and right sides were completely filled with stones. Just to be a bit petty about it, Beatrice threw a few of the smaller rocks at the piles, breaking them down into nothing. Lian just shrugged at this and kept blocking the assault.

This kept up until Beatrice had cleared out the entire lines worth of stones. Many were now surrounding Lian, many more had rolled away, and a few missed completely and ended up being thrown from the arena. Beatrice was quite skilled... but she was very much rushing these throws.

Beatrice took a moment to breathe, levelling a grin at Lian for the challenge presented and was about to get started on another row of stones, Lian clicked her fingers. It was much louder than it had any right to be. It sounded almost like a gunshot had gone off in the arena. It was only a few, those with exceptional hearing, that heard Lian whisper "Return to sender"

Then, all of a sudden the rocks glowed with a dark, purple light and shot off towards Beatrice. She smiled and met the first lot head on, slamming her fists into the rocks, thinking she'd just smash them to pieces. The first rock did not yield, in fact, Beatrice found her fist pushed back slightly. Beatrice's eyes went wide, as she tried to comprehend the newfound solidness of the rock.

Before she could think too deeply on it though, a bunch more rocks started slamming into her. It was too late to brace properly, the rocks just kept coming, slamming into seemingly every available part of Beatrice's body until she was brought down low from a few hits to the knees. It wasn't enough to break them, but it was enough to stumble her, and then the continued barrage of rocks bring her down to the ground. The pile continued to grow until all the rocks were spent.

Lian was clearly panting at this point. Her black outfit soaked with sweat. Her makeup running down her face. Lian nearly fell backwards, only her two arms stopped her from collapsing completely onto the stone. It seemed she still wanted to remain sitting in place.

Then the rocks started to shake, and rumble. Lian frowned, a moment before Beatrice burst forth from the pile of rocks. Her outfit had definitely seen better days, and she had a large cut above one of her eyes that was making it hard to see, but Beatrice's smile hadn't faded at all. Charging forward once again, Lian looked rather panicked. She didn't move, but it was clear she wasn't happy about this.

When Beatrice got to the metal pillars, instead of stopping the charge, they shattered. Beatrice's grin got wider. A number of watchers were surprised that was even possible. Beatrice's arm cocked itself back and was ready to slam into Lian... when suddenly, a quick flash and Beatrice found a knife buried in her chest. Beatrice paused mid motion with a frown. A flash of light across her chest seemed to splutter and die. For the first time in the match Beatrice frowned... and then fell forward on top of Lian.

Chapter 1023 Not Toast... but Rice Crispies?

There was a somewhat tense moment after that, as Lian valiantly struggled to lift Beatrice off of her. It didn't matter too much, as Beatrice was clearly unconscious but Lian wasn't doing all that well herself.

She was exhausted and running low on qi. Beatrice wasn't exactly heavy, but some of her clothing had a good deal of heft to it. For such an exhausted Lian, it wasn't entirely easy to get off. Still, this wasn't wrestling. The announcer should've called the match as soon as Beatrice collapsed.

Kat wasn't entirely sure why it took so long, the announcer waited for Lian to completely throw off Beatrice AND return to her full sitting height afterwards. "Lian is the winner!" shouted the announcer. "A short intermission between matches will occur before you see the final match in this arena. Please be back within twenty minutes!"

Kat's group didn't really have a reason so they just sat in place and waited for the next match. "Lian looked like she did so well in that match... but she was exhausted by the end so I suppose it was closer then it seemed," said Kat to get the conversation going.

"Indeed. I guess those metal poles aren't very qi efficient. That or Beatrice was able to force Lian to burn a extra qi with that barrier or by smashing into the metal poles for a while. It's unclear really, but that exists as a possibility as well," answered Sue.

"I don't think Beatrice was expecting that knife at the end either. Heck, I wasn't expecting the knife. Lian has shown her main weapon is an instrument, and sure, it makes a lot of sense she'd have a backup weapon of some kind but I just wasn't expecting it. Everyone else seems to have one thing, and one thing only that they focus on," said Kat.

The conversation looked like it was about to stall out there. Kat and Lily were new to this world of violence and action, while Sue just had no interest in that side of things. With Bing here, they could ask questions, and learn more, which was fun... but with just the two of them? It was actually quite difficult to discuss the previous match.

As if called by these thoughts, the door swung opened and Bing rushed in and took her spot near Sue. She had what looked like a rice crispy made of nuts in her mouth and three more held in her hands. She had a bruise right next to her right eye, and her outfit had seen better days but she was smiling, so presumably she'd won her matches. "Hrgh gryz" said Bing with her mouth full. Apparently the translation only did so much to help make someone with food in their mouths intelligible.

Which of course meant Kat, as someone used to little children, knew exactly what was said, "Hello to you too Bing. It's good to see you back. I take it you won both of your matches?" answered Kat.

Bing nodded, swallowing what she had in her mouth and balancing the rest of her food on her knees, "Yup. First match was actually tougher then the second. The other girl was a bit too focused on punching my face, so I just let get me in the eye and cut of her leg in response," the other's winced but Bing continued, "Oh she'll be fine. It was a clean cut and I don't have anything in my kit to prevent her healing properly.

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"Her leg will just feel a bit funny for a while and she'll probably have a scar from it, a mental one if not physical, but probably both if I had to guess. It shouldn't cause her any issues unless it becomes a heart demon... but she was on the one trying to take out my eyes so I can't find it in me to be all that sorry for whatever issues she develops from that. So... what have I missed?"

Kat quickly caught her up on Beatrice and 'John Doe's' matches then went into much greater detail to recount what happened during Lian and Beatrice's match. "... so I have to ask, what kind of qi does Beatrice have?"

"It has to be either healing or blessing... if she's really lucky maybe both?" answered Bing before taking a few more bites of her food.

"Really? She... doesn't seem to have the personality for that..." mumbled Kat.

Bing shrugged, "Most people fit their elements but some people really don't. It's hard to say. Could be trauma, could be luck of the draw. Could be that she took to her affinity a bit too well and went around the bend. Might be the cultivation technique she uses isn't meant for her affinity and that's the side effect, or that it was designed to turn Blessing and Healing users into monsters. It's happened before, and it will happen again. With basically every affinity.

"Blessing and Healing aren't all that special. Or well... they are because of what they represent but it's quite possible to heal or 'bless' with other affinities. It's just easier for people like Beatrice... or well... people with affinities like Beatrice. She seems like a psychopath, and I'd have mixed feelings about letting someone like that operate on me... but at least I know she wouldn't hesitate to do what needed to be done... as long as she wanted to do it. Which would be the big hang up."

"Right," said Kat. "I guess I can see what you're saying. Do you know anything about Beatrice?"

"Not really?" said Bing with a shrug, "She wasn't out our little get together the other night so I can't say I've met her. Might have heard about her? But I wouldn't have known her name, and I can only really guess what she can do based on what you've told me,"

"How about you tell us about Lian then?" said Sue, "How do you think she did in her last match?"

"Pretty well... but I think she overestimated the bloodthirstiness, or meatheaded-ness of Beatrice. Those black metal poles? They help her project a curse that acts a lot like a trampoline. More force in, more force out... but it doesn't stop projectiles only people and it takes a lot of qi to maintain. I'm not entirely sure that Lian can recover in time for her match against Bodeir, well assuming Bodeir wins his next match against John that is.

"See, I'm pretty sure she was overdrawing herself at the end, especially with that improved return-to-sender rock attack. It was really her only option, and I don't doubt that she needed to try it to win... but those black pillars can only be used every so often, it's one of the restrictions placed on the 'curse' she uses to make them operate. So they're out. Plus, as I said I don't think she can recover all her qi in time," explained Bing.

"Does that take a while?" asked Kat, "Regenerating qi that is. I tend to regenerate my demonic energy quite quickly. In fact, just this intermission would be more than enough for me to go from zero to full,"

Bing nodded, "Yeah it does take a while. Qi... it likes to clump together. So it takes a lot more time and effort to go from 0-10% then it does to get from 80-100%. Every cultivator knows they need to keep a bit of a reserve at the bottom of their wells just to allow them to regenerate it in a reasonable timeframe if necessary. I'm thinking Lian is down to 1 or 2% total reserves and she'll be mentally exhausted at this point.

"I can't see her getting above 50% before her next match even though she'll have at least an hour, maybe two hours if she's lucky. That's not even considering the fact that as cultivators we use qi to keep ourselves in top shape, it's just a little bit... but if she's already emptied her well of power... then what little she takes in might just go to shoring up her body instead of into her pool to let her collect more,"

"It wasn't the wrong choice necessarily... as I said earlier she probably had to go about it this way to win. Beatrice would've danced around her mines, smashed through her regular shield, and beat the shit out of Lian, possibly crippling her before the match could be called," said Bing

"The proctor did wait an awfully long time before giving Lian the win..." offered Sue.

"Yeah, fucking pricks. A lot of people still don't like that Lian is so high up in the sect with curse affinity. See it as bad luck, and 'undesirable'. Probably thought it was too small of a matter for me to lean about with my match on. Well jokes on him! I'm going to find that announcer later and break a finger or two for that kind of shit. But yeah..."

"If Lian let Beatrice attack her directly the proctor would've let her get really hurt, so while it does mean her chances at the later rounds aren't great... better then being crippled or dead. So I'm happy with her performance," said Bing.

Chapter 1024 Bodeir vs John Doe!

"Would you say there's anything Lian could've done better?" asked Sue. "You said she did a good job... but good isn't perfect,"

Bing just shrugged and finished off her first crispy. When she saw the matching curious gazes on her three friends, she rolled her eyes and explained with a bit of detail, "I don't know. Remember, I'm just hearing the play-by-play from Kat here. Her memory is pretty good, I'm sure, but she's only going to be able to explain things she noticed and knows. Without watching the fight myself I can't really say if there was something she should've done. I mean, there probably is, nobody's perfect... but I don't know what that thing might be just from an explanation. Heck, I probably won't know even after watching, Lian is much better at Curse stuff than me."

"Right... well anything we should expect from Bodeir's match? Do you how John was able to win his match?" asked Sue.

Bing laughed, "Oh Sue, you seem to think I know a lot more about this sort of thing than I really do. I haven't learnt all that much about unique cultivation techniques. I just don't have the time. Which, I suppose is my big guess as to what he's doing. My guess is that he's a time cultivator and is giving up lifespan to pause the time of someone else. Expensive... but perhaps practical? Depends on the exchange rate of lifespan to time stopped. It might never become an issue if it's second to second ratio... but I doubt it's that good,"

"What's with the whole 'Man with no Name' thing anyway?" asked Lily. "I'm sure you can enter the tournament with whatever strange title you might like... but he has to have a name right?"

"Once again... obscure cultivation techniques are not my area of expertise. I've got a few theories... but they're just guesses. The first, is that he gave up the name for some religious or cultural reason unrelated to his cultivation. Perhaps as a test, or maybe as a great shame. For obvious reasons, when

someone removes their name and becomes a monk, finding out their passed turns into a major undertaking and I don't have that sort of info on me.

"Option two, would be that his cultivation method requires it. True Names are not a well understood concept... especially when there's a lot of evidence suggesting they don't exist... but a lot of things that shouldn't exist also WORK. He might gain a power boost from casting away his name, or perhaps the techniques he uses wouldn't work at all if he had a name that he recognised as his own. Which would make it rather funny to spread the 'Johnn Doe' name around and see if he accidentally claims it.

"Of course, the final option, other than him just being dramatic of course, is that his name was taken from him using some mana technique. Stealing names isn't something a martial artist... at least... a normal martial artist can do. A crazy curse mage though? I could see it happening. Could've ripped the memories of the name away, or it might just prevent him from telling people. Really, I can only speculate. He isn't the type of person to get involved with parties or politics much. I know he showed up, unlike Beatrice, but not for long. Showed up, said hello, offered us a box of incense and then left," explained Bing.

Sue nodded, and she did want to ask more question, but Bodeir and John were taking to the field, so she held her tongue for now. Bing, completely irreverent in the face of the match, crunched down loudly on her nut crispies, and Kat couldn't help but ask, "Are those any good?" as the fighters walked to their positions.

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Bing swallowed before answering with a, "Not really? They're great food for filling your stomach and getting the right kind of calories... but I think they taste a bit like sawdust and the maple syrup they use to hold it all together can only do so much heavy lifting to mitigate that fact,"

Kat screwed her nose up and decided she'd really rather not think of it as Bing made her way through her second one. Kat wasn't sure why anyone would want to eat something that tasted like sawdust, but it probably wouldn't do anyone any good to point out that fact. So she turned to watch the start of the match.

Bodeir and John faced off, and when the announcer called it, they both just sat back and stared at each other. It took some time for one of them to make the first move, and when they did, Kat felt like making a joke about it. Both of them started to walk, slowly, towards the centre of the arena. Both apparently recognising that they were patient enough to wait each other out if it really came down to it.

They kept approaching each other until they stood ten paces from each other. They stopped in place, and John shouted out, "Not man enough to approach me?"

"I do not see why those words should only apply in one direction," returned Bodeir. "I see your feet are solidly on the ground... and Earth is my domain,"

Despite the rather aggressive ending to Bodeir's statement he didn't follow it up with some form of attack... he just kept staring at John, not feeling the need to make the first move. John had apparently decided to play this game. Bodeir shrugged and brought out a teapot. John looked at the teapot in confusion when Bodeir took out a stand and a number of twigs. Then used his earth manipulation to make a seat.

John's jaw dropped when Bodeir lit the twigs on fire and it became clear the crazy bastard was MAKING TEA in the middle of a fight. "What... what are you doing?" John had to ask. It was obvious... but John could not simply say nothing.

"Making tea," said Bodeir as if it was obvious. Which... it sort of was... but now really didn't seem like the time to be doing such a thing. John took a slow step forward. Nothing happened. He sniffed the air, and looked puzzle for a bit before chipping off a bit of the stone and throwing it lightly at Bodeir's teapot.

Bodeir casually lifted the pot out of the way before putting it back over the fire, and turning to John with a questioning look. John was feeling mildly insulted. Bodeir seemed to be saying 'how do you disrespect my tea' but at the same time... WHY IS HE BREWING IT IN A FIGHT!

With the immense confusion John was feeling... he decided to just let Bodeir go about his task. Which meant that 'soon' Bodeir had a freshly brewed pot of tea. The elf took out a pair of cups and poured himself a cup of tea, "Do you want some?" asked Bodeir.

John looked down at the teapot from where he stood. "Ok?" said John ready for anything.

Bodeir poured out a second cup and then kicked the floor, causing the earth to shift like a conveyor belt and deliver the tea to John, who brought it to his lips, and then paused. "This is poisoned..." accused John.

"I know," answered Bodeir.

"IF YOU KNOW IT'S POISONED WHY ARE YOU DRINKING IT!" shouted John.

"Well it's not poisonous to me obviously. It's MY tea after all," responded Bodeir as if this too was a perfectly reasonable thing to say to a man after offering him tea... in the middle of a fight.

John slammed the cup into the ground, spilling the poisoned tea everywhere. "Well that was just rude, I paid five dollars for that cup," said Bodeir with a sigh.

"I'm not apologising," said John through gritted teeth.

Bodeir just shrugged and stomped the ground again, letting the stone bring the scattered pieces back to him where he collected them with his ring. John, seeing his opponent was still being ridiculous walked forward spinning his staff with enough speed to create a rather forceful amount of wind.

Bodeir swallowed the rest of his tea and vanished the equipment back to his ring before standing, ready to attack John. John slammed the staff into Bodeir's side. Bodeir simply pulled a layer of rock up to block the blow. John grinned and a small chime sounded. Bodeir was frozen. As John wound up for a second attack though, Bodeir stepped forward and slammed a fist into his face.

John went pinwheeling backwards through the ground, but he managed to halt his momentum by stabbing his staff into the stone. "How did you escape my technique!" shouted John.

"I don't understand the question," said Bodeir.

"My technique! My technique to freeze you in place!" shouted John as he charged forward.

"Still no idea what you're talking about my guy," said Bodeir casually.

John growled and slammed his staff into Bodeir, 'freezing' him in place. John went for a follow-up attack but Bodeir just slapped him across the face. John went flying out of the arena as Bodeir stared after him.

"Still no idea what technique you're trying to use..." mumbled Bodeir quietly to himself.

Chapter 1025 Keeping Abreast of the situation

A chorus of confused "WHAT!" rang out across the stadium from those who had seen John Doe's previous matches. Seeing everyone he'd fought so far struggle with the technique only for Bodeir to completely no-sell it... nobody really knew how to react. In addition to that, Bodeir claimed to not even realise the technique was being used at all. Something many suspected was a lie... but Kat and Lily were familiar enough with him to know that complex lies were a little above Bodeir in terms of planning and intellect. It was very likely Bodeir had no idea what he was doing.

Which of course was why Sue, Kat, and Lily all joined in the chorus of confused noises as Bodeir walked offstage. "I... I... I don't understand?" mumbled Kat.

"I don't either," mumbled a confused Sue. "I thought Tess looked pretty strong... but to John beat her so easily... I expected him to be a challenge for Bodeir but... but he was toyed with the whole match... what the heck even was that?!"

"Don't ask me," said Bing equally astounded. "I didn't see it in use... but I can tell that Bodeir tensed a little bit when the chime sounded... but that might've just been with the expectation of something, anything, would happen in response to the chime. I wish I'd seen the match against Tess. John's first match was a complete stomp. His opponent was just... horrible. I couldn't believe Nature's Embrace wasted a spot on their champion... then again they might have just been snubbing us. They aren't big fans of our sect... so that's possible but like... what the hell?"

"No offence to Bodeir..." said Lily, intending at least some offence, "but he's an idiot. How could he have broken the technique so easily? I'm not sure he has the brain power to figure some secret about that technique just from watching it..."

"Sure you're not just annoyed you couldn't figure it out?" taunted Bing.

Lily shivered, remembering the first time she met Bodeir Jr, "Yeah... no... I mean, yes I would be annoyed IF he figured something out... but not only do I think he's too dumb to do so, he looked so genuinely confused when John claimed to be using a technique on him that I have to believe there's something we're missing," explained Lily.

"Crazy theory," interrupted Kat, "but what if it's a technique that freezes people in place for longer based on how smart they are?"

Bing frowned and seriously considered the idea while Sue fought to keep down her laughter, but was visibly nodding at the suggestion. Lily could see Kat wasn't all that serious about the idea, and was willing to just let the statement hang. Not Bing though. After a few moments of consideration nodded, "It IS possible. I'm not sure what affinity you'd need. I want to say curse, but I know Lian wouldn't be able to do something like this, I'm just more familiar with the affinity because of her..."

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“But... it’s an interesting idea and I could see the technique being developed by some ancient master. It scales really well, because qi naturally enhances an individual’s mind and body as their cultivation increases... so if that’s actually what’s going on... it could be a very powerful move once mastered,”

Before the idea could be developed further, the group heard the door opening. Lily quickly transformed, while Kat scooped her up, Sue continued trying to halt her laughter, Bing’s explanation, while making a good deal of sense, still sounded very silly to Sue’s mind. Bing turned to the door, hand clenched and ready for anything...

When a very tired Lian stumbled into the room. Lian was clearly still feeling the effects of her last match. She was swaying on her feet, and even though she’d clearly cleaned up between matches, including washing off her makeup, she was still sweating heavily. Lian managed to make it to Bing’s seat, before collapsing into her friend. “Mrghgmh” mumbled Lian.

“LIAN! It’s so good to see you!” said Bing with as much cheer as she could muster. She was also desperately trying not to think about the fact that Lian had not collapsed into her arms gracefully... but had instead collapsed face first into her nether region. A very uncomfortable place for your sister-in-all-but-name to be. So Bing pulled her friend up as best she could, though Lian really wasn’t willing to cooperate. In the end, Bing decided to dump Lian into the chair next to her... where Sue was sitting.

“Why?” asked Sue, not really complaining that Lian was getting a face full of tits... but confused because Bing had an empty chair on her right.

Bing glanced over at the empty chair. Then back to Sue. Then the chair. Then back to Sue. “Um...” Bing started but flailed... “Yeah no honestly I got nothing. I have no idea why I did that,”

Lian shifted slightly while leaning into Sue. “These pillows are great,” mumbled Lian, “I don’t remember these from last time I was in the VIP box. Did your parents do some upgrades?”

“Um... no?” said Bing awkwardly.

Lian who still hadn’t opened her eyes, pulled up a tired hand and gave Sue’s breast a squeeze. Hard. “Really? But it’s sooo soft?” Lian continued up this ‘test’ until Sue let out an erotic moan.

Lian froze. Then, a blink later she was back on her feet, zither at the ready and staring mortified into Sue’s somewhat flushed face. “If you want to continue that, I expect dinner first,”

“Oh god...” whispered a horrified Lian.

“So THIS is what it looks like from the other side...” said an enlightened Bing with a few nods of her heads. “I have to say, it’s much more amusing on this end of things...”

“Bing?!” shouted Lian in a mixture of surprise and confusion. She really wanted to ask what exactly Bing meant... but she also wanted to call out her friend for making fun of her in front of people she was only just now meeting for the first time. The fact THIS was their first impression of her meant she was thoroughly mortified.

Of course, Sue, revelling in the chaos, was unwilling to let that ‘question’ hang for too long. “Bing is just enjoying the fact that she’s not the only one who felt me up on the first real meeting. Bing also realised she was a lesbian yesterday,”

"I DID NOT!" retorted Bing.

"I'm a demon, I cannot lie, thus, it is the truth," responded Sue with a grin.

"That's not how that works Sue," added in Lily after she transformed, trying to stem the flow of embarrassment Sue was sure to unleash.

"You're also a useless lesbian Lily. Just because your obsessed with thighs instead of tits doesn't mean I won't make fun of you for it," joked Sue.

"No bullying my girlfriend Sue. That's my job," said Kat with a grin.

"Wait..." said Lian looking over the group in confusion, "Why is Lily the useless lesbian when Kat's her girlfriend? Kat is her girlfriend right?"

"Asexual," said Sue, Kat and Lily all together.

"But she's a Succubus?" responded Lian.

"It's just how it is," said Sue forcefully retaking control of the conversation. "But that's all old ground. I want to know how it was Lian? Feeling a poor innocent maiden such as myself up?"

"Wait how can you call yourself an 'innocent maiden'" asked Lily.

"Mental gymnastics I'll go over later if you really want," said Sue dismissively before turning to stare at Lian with greedy eyes.

"I... I mean... um... they were very soft... but it's not like it did anything for my sexually. I was mortified sure and you're quite beautiful. If nothing else, your breasts are large and in good shape," Lian said that last part like she was forcing herself to swallow a lemon, "but while all that is true... still does nothing for me sexually,"

Sue shrugged, "It doesn't do much for me either, I'm straight as they come... but experimentation is fun for everybody! Plus, doesn't really matter who owns the hands that are kneading my breasts, if they've got good technique, they've got good technique. Something you practice a lot on yourself hmm?"

"I don't know what your implying," said Lian with a deadpan look.

"Oh... are you sure about that?" said Sue with a hum in her voice, "Bing... is that rumour that when you massage your breasts they get larger prevalent in this dimension?"

"You must be good at it then," snapped Lian...

But Bing wasn't going to let that interruption stop her from answering, "Yes it is... along with the one that says having a higher cultivation rank makes your chest bigger,"

"Oh? Does it?" asked Sue.

Bing winced and made a 'so-so' gesture while Lian was looking mortified. "Sometimes? It seems to be partly genetic still and based on the ideal look for your form. If you had large tits before, they might get larger... or firmer, or perhaps you'll get taller so they look better on your frame... but for people like me and Lian they'll probably remain the same size..."

Kat and Lily rolled their eyes off to the side. All these girls obsessing over breast size. Of course, they both thought it was silly for their own reasons. Lily because larger wasn't always better... and she was a thigh girl anyway. And Kat for obvious reasons. It was 'just fat after all'.

Chapter 1026 Getting to know Lian a bit

Sue sighed and asked, "So, now that we've got all that out of our systems... why don't you tell us about yourself Lian? Your match will be soon after all... and... wait why are you here? You're up next right?"

"Because I'm probably just going to forfeit?" said Lian slightly confused.

"I mean... don't you need to be in the waiting area for your match? You as well Bing?" asked Sue.

Bing shrugged, "Eh... I probably should be heading off soon? Maybe? Nobody has come to get me so I'm going to assume there was some holdup with the previous match or something so I'm not worrying about it, and Lian, you're not forfeiting,"

"Why not?" grumbled Lian as she made her way to a spare chair and flopped down, "I've done well enough and I'm exhausted. I have no chance at defeating Bodeir considering he spent most of his match making fucking tea. He'll be more than ready to take me on and I doubt I can really do anything to stop him,"

"What about playing for the team? Weakening him so that he's more likely to lose in the future?" asked Bing.

Lian shrugged, "Well he's not fighting against you or your brother until the finals if you guys even make it that far... and if I went hard on him, his next match might be a stomp, and then you'd be annoyed that someone was easily able to reach the finals. Plus, you don't suddenly think you can beat your brother, right?" Bing nodded, "See, in that case what's the problem? You don't care if Feng has a harder time of it,"

Bing nodded again and said, "You know what? You're right! Fuck Feng. He can deal with his shit by himself. So... forfeiting? I'd never push you into it... but it's your idea... so...?"

Lian shrugged, "I don't have the qi to do anything fancy and I never prepared any specific defences against someone so skilled at manipulating earth qi. I set up my barriers? He just brakes the ground underneath me. My 'can't move' defences might stay up if someone else moves me, they might not... but if he just dumps me on my face and places rocks over me, the announcer would probably call the match, bastard that he is,"

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"Yeah... I'm going to do terrible things to that man later..." grumbled Bing menacingly. "Definitely forfeiting though?"

Lian nodded, "Yeah... I could maybe last a minute? No longer then that and then I'd be really out of qi. I've put in a good enough showing, and while there might be some honour in fighting Bodeir for a bit just to prove I'd lose even if I tried... but I just can't muster up the energy to care about that sort of honour at the moment. Plus, I'm a Curse cultivator, people already think I have no honour, so who really cares?"

"Ah, that's more in-line with what I'd expected from you," said Sue. "That sort of attitude tends to come with your style. I was wondering why you weren't a bit more doom and gloom about things, or at least more apathetic,"

"It is pretty common... but it takes a surprising amount of effort to act like that," said Lian.

Why is 'goth' a valid style AND mood? I can at least understand the style, tastes are very subjective, and it's no surprise that goth in some form survives across worldlines... but why did the attitude follow!

Lily shrugged at the question while Sue continued the conversation, "Oh? I wouldn't have thought it'd take much effort at all?"

"Eh..." Lian shrugged, "It's easy to not care about quite a few things... but at the end of the day? It just isn't me. The pioneers of Curse cultivation might seem strangely apathetic about things until they rage or go crazy in a massively noticeable way... but I personally suspect that they either use curses to suppress their emotions... or accidentally trade away certain feelings in exchange for more power at one point or another.

"I mean... it might seem easy 'just don't care' or 'pretend to be a pessimist all the time' but the second option is rather hard with Bing as my best friend..."

"Sister" insisted Bing

"...right sister, whatever," Lian continued with a slight grin on her exhausted features, "and... not caring about things is kind of hard. Hearing a bunch of nasty shit about you since you're a child? That stuff hurts, and Bing had to teach me to find joy in things that aren't people. I don't think I could handle all the negative attention without some joy in my life... and I don't think I could be apathetic enough to brush aside the negative attention. So I can't just 'not care' about things. So... I'm left with liking the look, but not the attitude,"

"Well I suppose that's fair enough," said Sue, "I like the sex, but not the other sluts that tend to agree with me when it comes to life choices. I mean... maybe it's because they're young like I am and they'll mellow with time... but I find the sort of casual backstabbing they engage in to be immensely frustrating to deal with. It leads to a thoroughly unfulfilling 'friendship' if it can even be labelled as such. I'm also trying to branch out with my hobbies... but I don't really know how or what I want to branch out into,"

"Well... I can't say I have much experience with that..." said Lian, "Bing is really my only friend because she stood up for me in a major way and she's a bit too important to be casual friends with many other people. Too many kiss asses. I'm lucky we became friends when I was too young to think of her as anything other than 'the cool older sis who saved my life' which... it really wasn't that deadly, I wouldn't have died or anything... but toddler me wasn't in a great spot at the time, and didn't know what death was except a 'very bad thing' so..." Lian trailed off with a shrug, as if that explained everything.

Which, to be fair, it mostly did. Everyone knew that they'd had some strange ideas as a child, yet also a certain level of wisdom. Friendship was important, don't be a suck-up. Stick close to those that help you in bad times. That sort of thing. Bing, being especially touched... or just looking for a chance to embarrass Lian a bit, got up and pulled her into a big spinning hug. "Naw, aren't you just the best today. I'll take that praise more often than thank you, it makes me feel all warm and fuzzy inside,"

“*cough* Lesbian awakening *cough*” muttered Sue. Of course, everyone had enhanced hearing, so everyone could hear the words perfectly well. Bing did not give up the hug because of some petty ribbing... but she did pout at Sue over Lian’s shoulder.

“Can you let me down now? I’m still pretty out of it, and all this spinning really isn’t good for me,” grumbled Lian.

“Don’t you want my hugs anymore? Too grown up?” whined Bing.

“If I throw up on your combat robes because of this, then you’ll be the one complaining,” Lian shot back.

Bing of course, decided that was a risk she really didn’t want to take and sat down in the chair pulling Lian with her. Lian just shrugged and shifted around till she was more comfortable, ignoring the odd looks from Bing who was continually jabbed in the sides by Lian’s shifting. “What about you Kat? Lily? Any bonding words to share like Sue?” asked Lian once she was settled in.

“Um... I feel like I am rather laid back but I grew up in an orphanage and quickly found myself in charge for some odd reason so I can hover a bit?” said Kat slightly unsure of what she was supposed to say.

Lily shrugged and continued on from that, “I’m Lily, Kat’s girlfriend. That might sound like an odd way to start my own introduction but honestly I’m pretty boring otherwise. I’ve only recently been able to use my magic with any power behind it, and I haven’t really refined it yet. I spent my childhood reading books and learning about topics that won’t mean much to you... and I have a thing for thighs, so your long, heavy dress that keeps them covered offends me on a visceral level,” Lily finished off jokingly.

“Ah? Hmm... I don’t think I’ve ever really thought about my thighs as attractive... but I’m not a lesbian like you and Bing so that might not be something I’d be primed to notice like you both,” said Lian.

“I’M NOT A LESBIAN” hissed Bing. “I thought we agreed not to dwell on this?”

“I agreed to nothing,” pointed out Lian.

“And I just agreed not to dig into it too deeply. I’m going to keep bringing it up every time it’s funny,” said Sue.

“So that’s it? My sexuality is just a joke to you both?” grumbled Bing.

Sue shrugged, “Your sexuality is never a joke... your reaction to mentioning your potential sexuality, IS hilarious and a great joke,”

“What can I do to escape this fate?” whined Bing.

“Provide us with something more embarrassing to tease you about?” answered Lian for Sue, who was nodding along.

Chapter 1027 Labyrinth Reference

“Hmph” huffed Bing as she raised her nose to the sky. “I see how it is. I guess I’ll just go get ready for my match then. You can all make your way over to the main stage. I’ll meet you there later, when you’ve all got something better to chat about,”

Lily transformed just as the door open to reveal a butler coming for Bing, apparently her outburst was more about having a dramatic exit than any true annoyance with the rest of the group. This was further proved by Bing's comical bow as she left the room by pushing herself backwards with the wind so she could keep bowing all the way out of the door.

"Might as well move..." said Kat, "... no sense in getting settled again when we'll need to move for the next few rounds. Do you think we'll see the finals today?"

Kat got up and the other two followed alongside her as she made for the door. "I'm not sure..." said Sue, "Lian, any idea?"

Lian nodded and said, "Yeah I think we'll have the finals today. The day isn't over yet and I think the sect would rather wrap everything up today. The only thing they might delay is the award ceremony. I suppose it depends how much of that they want to advertise. A simple, 'these are the winners' before they pull the winners away to discuss the real prize... or they'll hand everything over in a big event tomorrow,"

"Hmm... makes sense I suppose..." said Kat as they rounded the corner, "... do you need to go somewhere to announcer your forfeiture?"

"Technically no... if I don't show up they'll do that automatically... but then I'll have a grand time for a few weeks..." Lian coughed "months" Lian coughed louder "years maybe" before continuing normally, "where they'll act like arrogant passive-aggressive assholes... so I guess I should forfeit properly,"

With that decided the crew diverted their steps, with Lian leading the way this time. They headed down, down, down quite a few flights of stairs till they got to a door with a set of guards. "Competitors only past this point," said the one on the left.

"No competitors past this point," said the one on the right.

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"Ok no, we are not doing this Jim," said the one on the left, "We are not doing this truth, lie, guard bullshit. This is why you're still single,"

"Shut the fuck up David, not all of us have dicks the size of our arms, finding a good woman is hard ok?" retorted Jim.

"Who said anything about women?" asked David.

Lian, tired of the comedy routine, desperately wanted to curse their mouths shut, even just for like five minutes. If only she wasn't so exhausted. So with punishment of the table, she just side and walked through, "Just wait here for a bit guys, I'll be right back,"

The guards continued to argue about nonsense after Lian left, clearly not paying attention to their jobs. Lily, just as a test, walked through the doorway without being stopped. She then walked back to Kat with no troubles on the way out either.

In the end, it didn't take long for Lian to walk back out, but she looked even more exhausted then before... and the guards were still arguing. "Carry me?" asked Lian jokingly while making grabby motions with her arms.

Sue was about to tell her off for being lazy, or silly, or some other form of gentle ribbing... when Kat pulled Lian into a princess carry and started walking. Lily rode proudly on Lian's stomach, as if she was watching out for attackers... while Sue and Lian were both surprised and confused.

"Um... I know I'm not heavy, not for a demon like you... but I was just joking..." mumbled Lian.

Kat shrugged, the motion lifting Lian as well with no effort. "It really isn't an issue for me. You're clearly tired, and looked even more so after putting in your notice of forfeiture. I really don't mind carrying you till we get to the new VIP room. What's got you so tired anyway?"

"Ugh... the ass at register wouldn't let me forfeit unless I provided him with the correct forms all written out and then stamped with my qi signature, that of a medical professionals, or one of my guardians. Something he DIDN'T NEED TO DO. That procedure is only for when someone else is trying to withdraw me on my behalf. The fact that I was there, in person, should be enough!

"Not only that, but those forms are for visiting cultivators so that we have evidence of who made the withdrawal and how. We don't bother with that when we're all Holy Icy Wind Sect disciples! I was obviously exhausted but I needed to make a fancy ass qi imprint, despite the fact nobody else in the sect uses Curse qi which SHOULD be plenty to prove my identity even if they were just being paranoid... but no... seems like it's bully the curse cultivator day again,"

"Why would they do that?" asked Sue. "I mean, you explained, a bit more generally that you weren't liked for your affinity, but why cause you a problem like this now?"

"Eh, probably a combination of Bing being busy right now, and this 'minor issue' is 'beneath Bing-sama's notice'. If I bring it up, and they get taken to task for it they can just say they were following procedure, which they were, just not the unwritten rules for Holy Icy Wind Sect members. So technically they can't be punished for this sort of thing... but if I didn't tell Bing, she'd find out eventually... and for something 'beneath Bing-sama's notice' I'm pretty sure it'll result in Bing breaking his hand," said Lian with a huff.

"That's... a bit brutal," said 'Lily' "Is going straight to breaking someone's hand for something like a good idea? It seems like it would just encourage resentment?"

"Well... it's not a particularly permanent injury, a quick trick to the healings to get it fixed is nothing, plus, if Bing offers to pay for the treatment, then they're not out of pocket for it... and are embarrassed about the fact Bing had to pay for their healing, and explaining WHY their hand was broken to the healer.

"Ms Shun, the head of the healing pavilion actually really likes me for some reason. I have NO idea why, but it's true, and I'm not going to let that sort of goodwill rot you know? So I go around to chat with her when I know she's not busy, I make sure that she's not skipping meals, and sometimes she helps me with designing outfits," said Lian.

"Sounds like she's your Mum," said Sue.

Lian winced, "That's... that's probably closer to the truth of things then I'd like to admit. I mean, she's not my biological mother... but... well... if she was ok with it... I'd be happy to call her 'mother' I think,"

"Your parents aren't great?" asked Kat.

"No, no they aren't" said Lian with a sigh. "They're both mortals, and they don't understand much about cultivation... but when you also add in my Curse affinity and the fact that people started causing trouble for them because of it? They were just about willing to throw me out on the streets... or dispose of me in a more permanent manner. A tragic accident I'm sure,"

"Oh... oh dear..." whispered Kat, horrified at the statement.

"Yeah... they can't really do anything to me NOW, because well... mortals as I said but... that doesn't mean I wasn't hurt by the whole thing when I was younger... and I do still visit because I've got siblings but... none of them seem to have potential to be cultivators so my parents were actually good to them. Allegedly," said Lian with a shrug.

"When I ask, they always insist that our parents have treated them well, and that I've got no cause for concern. I've even done... maybe a bit of... surveillance work in the area and pretty much confirmed it's all fine... but I just don't think I can trust them after what they did to me. Most of my siblings are grown and moved out, but... well... what if the grandkids end up having cultivation or mage potential? I don't know what would happen then... or if my siblings can stand up to my parents..." continued Lian.

"Ah... I can understand. I already mentioned I grew up in an orphanage so I have a fair bit of experience with various... non-ideal parental situations. Most kids lost their parents but... well... let's just say that some parents 'lost' their kids," said Kat through gritted teeth.

It was not particularly pleasant to recall the state of some children that showed up on Gramps' doorstep. The bruises. That one little boy with a broken arm. It was very, very rare thankfully, and they'd all found good homes... but it was never pleasant to remember.

Chapter 1028 Pure White Princess

The new room was pretty much the same as the old one... with a few additional drinks that Sue had yet to consume, if you wanted to be pedantic about it. That might seem strange, considering the main stage was so much larger, thus providing a lot more space... but it also had a lot more VIP boxes, so it all evened out in the end.

"So, you've got to tell us the embarrassing deeds from when you and Bing were kids," said Sue as she grabbed some alcohol from the fridge. Not that alcohol did much to demons, but Sue tended to find that people went that extra mile when it came to something alcoholic.

"I dunno..." said Lian from Kat's arms. "... I'm not sure I should be giving you more ammunition to use against Bing. You've already got that 'lesbian awakening' joke and that's going to drive her up the wall for quite a while,"

"Ok... but before I get to my counterpoint, do you think she's a lesbian? Or that I'm just distracting," said Sue as she intentionally moved her legs to flash Lian her panties. Not that it did much good, Lian wasn't looking, and was too tired for the effort. Lily was snuggled against Kat... and so the only person that actually saw this 'show' was Kat, the asexual one, who just rolled her eyes.

"I don't really know," said Lian with a sigh, "She's not given me any reason to think she's a lesbian before now... but it's not like she's had a sex demon thrust their tits into her face before either. I wouldn't be surprised if she just didn't have the time to find people attractive. She's pretty friendly, and

gets along with people... but she's also somewhat socially isolated because of her position in the sect. While she has friends... she keeps a distance from all of them except me and her brother... and even then... to call them friends is perhaps...

"Well, Bing treats them like friends, and is willing to go out of her way for them like casual friends... but they treat her like she's their sect heir, not like her friend a lot of the time. So... yeah, unless she has a thing for goth girls like me, it probably wouldn't come up, and even then... we grew up together so maybe not..."

Lily wanted to transform to make a point... but she was very comfortable right now and decided to just get Kat to say it for her, "Lily says that her first crush was on her childhood friend. It ended horribly for her, but that does mean it's quite possible for romance to bloom if you grow up together,"

"Yeah well, clearly Bing is a breast girl, and I'm not sure if you've noticed but well..." Lian waved her hand across her front, miming a flat surface. Which was a little self-deprecating but well... even if you added up the total boob mass of the room, except Sue, Sue would come out on top by a not insignificant margin. Considering it was three against one, that could be a potent blow to many a girl's ego. "...I'm not sure I've ever seen a bigger set of tits up close. Or... just at all really,"

"Yes I am quite proud of my assets..." said Sue as she placed an arm under her boobs to support the weight a bit and push them out further. "... so I wouldn't be too surprised if they forced... a new perspective on Bing. Shame you've got no further insight for us though. No shy moments in the changing room? Awkward hugs when your boobs were growing in? Long moments of staring vacantly at women while training?"

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Lian shook her head, "Nope, nope and nope. Bing has never had any issues with that. Well... she was a little self-conscious this one time when we were changing and she had to reveal this massive gravel rash all up her side... but I'm pretty sure that was because she was trying to hide her injury, not because of any... gayness?"

"Fine fine, I guess Bing wasn't giving away anything obvious... Lily got any secret tips for spotting a lesbian?" asked Sue.

"Not really," said 'Lily' "It can be a bit of a pain. Especially when other girls talk about practicing kissing with each other. They could just want the practice, and a doing that with someone they trust... or they could be using 'practice' as an excuse to get some action with hot girls,"

"Oh? Is there something you'd like to share with the class Lily?" asked Sue as she wiggled her eyebrows at Lily.

Lily rolled her eyes, and knew that unless she personally answered the question this was going to turn into a thing. So with a mental sigh, Lily hopped off Kat and transformed, looked Sue dead in the eyes and said, "The first person I've ever kissed, if you don't count my parents, is Kat. I was too scared to steal a kiss from my first crush, then I was terribly afraid to reveal my sexual orientation at my second school. I certainly wasn't going to risk a 'practice' kiss with a group of girls. I'd be so much more flushed, and for those who could recognise it, turned on. People like YOU Sue, would know immediately, so it was just too risky,"

"Yeah... that's fair..." grumbled Sue, "What about you Kat?"

Kat just raised an eyebrow and beckoned Lily over with her eyes. She planted a soft kiss on Lily's cheek and said, "Nope. Never really though about it. I'm not sure I even kissed Gramps when I was a kid... it's just not something we ever really did at the orphanage. Hugs? Of course, kisses? Not so much."

"What about you Lian? Practiced kissing at all?" asked Sue.

Lian shook her head heavily, "Everyone is too scared I use it to curse, them, or wear poisonous lipstick or something dumb like that,"

"Is... is that something people do?" asked Sue.

"Yes" said Lian firmly.

"Well... fuck. You guys are boring. I practiced kissing a whole bunch before I started going out with boys... didn't have go for 'practice' lesbian sex though. That was a step too far for a younger Sue. So... in light of how boring you guys are NOW... what about those embarrassing stories Lian?" asked Sue.

"I don't want to throw Bing completely under the cart..." started Lian.

"She told us about the hair trade story," added Sue 'helpfully,'

"... but apparently Bing already decided our childhoods are FREE GAME," finished Lian.

"Right so... I guess the most embarrassing thing I can think of... is that time Bing wanted to 'look cool'. She got this cloak, and started using her qi to make it 'billow awesomely' as she said at the time. It worked pretty well, at first. Not too hard... but when Bing started to show off her control started slipping... but not the power she was using. So... Bing started running around her house, showing off to all the maids and guards... eventually though it started to lift up her robes as well...

"So she was sprinting around the house, underwear on full display... and then she headed for the training grounds to show off to the acolytes. The servants hadn't stopped her at the time because they all thought it was funny, and somewhat adorable. I hadn't stopped her because Bing is MUCH faster than me and had taken off before I could mention it. I finally catch up to her in the courtyard.

"The instructor is looking around, desperately wishing for someone with authority to pass the job off to. The acolytes are all trying to hold in their laughter, and I burst into the yard and scream, not really thinking anymore, 'BING YOUR PANTIES ARE SHOWING'. Bing looked down, saw her outfit, and panicked. She started desperately trying to push the billowing robes down instead of just shutting off her qi and letting them fall.

"So there she was, turning on the spot, showing everyone her underwear, as she desperately tried to prevent her dress from riding up. Eventually the instructor managed to interrupt the technique and remove the wind... but Bing was mortified. Now, Bing didn't have anything embarrassing on her underwear, they were just plain white pairs... but most people don't buy white underwear because it's too hard to keep clean so it was memorable for it's uniqueness just on that alone..."

"Things didn't die down for over a year afterwards. Whenever Bing came up in more casual conversation, they addressed her as the 'Pure White Princess', and because nobody was game enough to explain to her parents what happened... they didn't know to squash the nickname. It came out at a

public dinner... and her parents looked so confused, and were like 'But Bing isn't an ice cultivator, why are you calling her the pure white princess?' The poor guy who used the nickname clammed up faster than an avalanche will ruin your day. Ruined his day too,"

Sue snickered, "Yeah, I'm going to congratulate the 'Pure White Princess' on her win when she gets back.

Chapter 1029 That One Time with the Goose, or the Duck? Turkey?

Sue's perspective.

—

Sue would have to wait on that little prank though. Even after handing out a round of food and drinks to everyone, Bing still hadn't returned. Nobody was all that worried about her just yet, but it did mean they were a bit stuck on topics. Lian was much less personable than Bing, and seemed content just to relax and recover from her matches. Kat was happy to pet Lily, and Lily was asleep.

So really it was just Sue that wanted to do something other than sit around. She'd already made her way through three drinks, a bag of salted nuts, and one of those cracker things Bing said tasted like sawdust. She was right, they DO taste like sawdust and only the fact that Sue needed something to do allowed her to put up with the taste to finish it all, just to have something to do for a bit longer.

Sue wasn't really one for 'enjoying the silence'. Her mind liked to stew on things if given the chance. Even just watching random shit on tv was better because that let her zone out more. Here, it mostly just gave rise to the temptation to start another lewd conversation, but Lily was asleep, Lian might as well be, and Kat was asexual. That last part was now relevant because Kat had become a lot more comfortable with her sexuality... and a lot more comfortable just ignoring Sue if it came down to it.

It also meant, that unlike most people who couldn't simply ignore Sue when she was oozing sex appeal, Kat very much could ignore her if she felt like it, and with Lily asleep? Well, Kat just might feel like being quiet. Sue sighed and rubbed her hands over her toned stomach. *I'm lucky I don't really have to deal with 'digestion'. Food is just fuel for the fire. Huh... you know, I don't think I've ever wondered how or why gluttony demons get fat? Like... isn't it all burnt up in our stomachs? Actually hang on... didn't I have a class on this? Shit was that the biology assignment I failed? Might've been.

Hmm... I wonder if I ate a whole bunch of food if it'd all go to my tits? I mean, that's the joke I like to make, and my breasts and ass do make up a larger than average portion of my weight... but I've looked like this since I turned eighteen without gaining or losing anything. Not during that stint where I tried all the food kinks during sex, or that time I thought I'd gained a bunch of weight and went on a diet for a month...

Only to find out the dress had shrunk in the wash, and that I hadn't actually gained or lost any weight. God that one was awkward. But who the fuck sells clothing that shrinks when improperly washed these days?*

A small voice in the back of her head pointed out it was from a store meant for exceptionally beautiful but functional outfits to be turned into Demonic Attire and a 'shrinking in the wash' was not an issue the store needed to be mindful of. *Still... probably should've paid more attention during that unit. Aw well,

I guess I could ask Mum... but it's not like boob jobs are expensive. Not that I need one. Why am I fixating on this right now? Oh yeah, nothing better to do if I'm too scared to get the conversation going again just because two people are dozing. I mean we're at a tournament for crying out loud. I can hear thousands of people moving around outside. It's dimmed sure, but still very audible, and I'm only Rank 1.*

.....

Sue's ears twitched as she heard the door opening, turning just a bit so she could watch, Sue internally cheered as Bing opened the door. *YES! SAVED FROM AWKWARD SILENCE! God I could kiss you for this boon Bing! Hmm... should I actually kiss her? See how she tastes? Hmm... no... probably not. I feel like she'd take that as a punishment, even if her blushing face would be hilarious. Still... that won't save her from...*

Sue's train of thought paused as she properly looked at Bing. Her arm was in a sling and she had an ice cube wrapped in a towel being held against her eye with her free hand. Her outfit looked ice and clean... but it was clearly a spare pair. Bing still had a lazy grin on her face... but... *Should I? She looks a bit worse for wear... why isn't she at the healers? Did she lose? Do I make the joke? Fuck it I'm making the joke. Hopefully that lightens the mode a bit if she did lose.*

"Ah, I see the Pure White Princess has made her glorious return. Where you victorious princess?" teased Sue.

Bing's head snapped to glare at Sue, before snapping over to Lian, the 'true culprit' of that particularly joke. "Indeed I did win... but what is this? My friend Lian? Giving away my secrets? Why I do believe you promised not to speak about that event,"

"Counterpoint," said Lian as she sat up with a groan, "I could've just told Sue it would annoy you if she called you that and not explained anything. By admitting there was an incident, you're basically setting it all up yourself,"

"If you honestly didn't spill that story I'll eat the ice I'm holding, towel included," growled Bing.

"Ok, fine... but second, and third counterpoints, I didn't agree to anything back then, I believe my words were 'most of the sect already knows, who am I going to tell?' and you said 'My parents?' and I agreed not to mention it... TO THEM. Also, you told them about the time I cursed your dad and lost my hair for my troubles, so I feel like we're even," said Lian calmly with a smug look on her face.

Kat, annoyed that she couldn't actually see Bing right now because Lian had sat up and blocked her view, used Lian's smug posing as a chance to move her to another chair while ribbing Lian a bit. Lian barely reacted, simply slouching down in the new chair across the armrests.

"I was just ensuring they knew the dangers of curse qi," said Bing 'honestly'. "They did ask after all, and it was such a nice practical example. I'm not exactly familiar with curse energy, and that seemed like the best story to tell. At least I didn't talk about the duck incident,"

"The duck incident?" said... Lian in surprise and confusion. Kat and Sue looked at the two of them, confusion written on their faces as well.

"Do you not remember the duck incident? You know, the one with the duck, twelve jars of maple syrup and that stray dog?" asked Bing, not particularly wanting to go into the incident either. *nOvelnext.com*

"Nooo?" said Lian confused, "I remember that one with the goose... but that doesn't really make me look bad?"

"The goose?" Now it was Bing's turn to be confused. She didn't know what Lian was talking about... at all.

"Yeah? Don't you remember? It started biting me so I cursed it to lose all its feathers in an hour. You could hear the screams of the younger disciples for like an hour afterwards because they all thought it was some feral spirit beast?" said Lian.

"No..." said Bing still confused, "Wasn't that a turkey?"

Lian shook her head, "No, it had to have been a goose. Turkeys aren't that vicious..."

"They can be pretty vicious when they want to. Are you sure it wasn't a turkey?" returned Bing.

"I'm positive... but that story doesn't involve any maple syrup or a dog. I think it got taken down by a stray cat in the end? Is that what we're talking about?" asked Lian.

Bing shook her head again, "No... you're refreshing my memory, and I can now remember it being a goose... but that's not the time I'm talking about. I'm talking about the time we almost got caught with the you-know-what because a duck scared us?"

"I'm sorry but I've got no memory of this incident," said Lian with a shrug. It really did seem that way too, she looked genuinely confused and neither Kat nor Sue could detect a hint of falsehood.

"Hmm... well... weird," mumbled Bing. "I'm sure I can figure out something embarrassing to tell them... if you give me a bit of time,"

"I could always tell them about the time you tried to go goth," countered Lian.

Bing just shrugged, "Bah, you were my best friend growing up and you practically breathed black eyeliner when you were but a wee babe. The fact that I had a bit of a goth phase trying to mimic you, when you were so much more certain of your chosen style, should really not be a surprise at all. I'm not embarrassed about it, go ahead and explain,"

Lian rolled her eyes, but noticeably didn't bother expanding on the story for the other two girls.

Chapter 1030 Caps Lock For the Win

The shift in atmosphere was both expected, and obvious. Unlike the previous referees, this announcer was clearly making a show of things. They stamped in place, two loud booms ringing out through the sound transmission array. Once it was clear they had everyone's attention, they started to walk out onto the arena. It was a man who had an obvious hourglass shape, with their shoulders and arms being easily twist the size of their waist. Their outfit showed their bare chest, which was waxed clean without a single scar in sight and obviously defined muscles.

"WELCOME LADIES AND GENTLEMAN! ARE YOU READY FOR A SHOW!" shouted the announcer.

A spattering of applause came from some of the crowd, but everyone was paying more attention now. "I SAID, ARE YOU READY FOR A SHOW!" shouted the announcer again.

A roar of applause and whistles washed over the stadium. "THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT! RIGHT NOW WE HAVE THE TWO SEMI-FINAL MATCHES FOR THE HOLY ICE WIND SECT'S UNDER 100 DIVISION. SO LET'S MAKE SOME NOISE!"

Another wave of noise crashed across the stadium and Kat couldn't help but frown in response. Even with the sound dampening up it was rather loud for someone with sensitive ears. This was made worse by the fact that the announcer's voice was wired directly to the room, and the transmission circle wasn't tuned to only capture HIS voice... but all voices. So it was nearly as bad as if they didn't have the sound dampening at all.

"THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT. OUR FIRST MATCH WILL BE BETWEEN TWO HOT CONTENDERS, TWO BEINGS OF DESTRUCTION, A DWARF UP FROM THE UNDERGROUND, AND A MOUNTAIN ELF READY TO THROW DOWN.

"OUR FIRST CONTESTANT IS FRESH OFF OF A FORFEITED ROUND, SO THEY'RE ENERGISED AND READY TO BATTLE, BUT DON'T LET THAT FOOL YOU INTO THINKING THEY DON'T BELONG HERE. HE WAS ABLE TO SKIP THE QUALIFYING MELEE, AND THEN TANK A STORM OF STONES IN HIS FIRST MATCH, SHOWING HIMSELF AS THE TRUE MASTER OF EARTH.

"FOLLOWING ON FROM THAT, HE MANAGED TO TAKE ON THE NAMELESS MAN AND COMPLETELY IGNORE SAID MAN'S STRONGEST TECHNIQUE. HE WAS ABLE TO DEFEAT IT SO EASILY, HE DIDN'T EVEN REALISE HE'D DONE IT. THIS MAN MANAGED TO TAKE A TEA BREAK IN THE MIDDLE OF A MATCH, HIS OPPONENT JUST COULDN'T STOP HIM. THAT'S RIGHT FOLKS.

"IT'S THE EARTH SHAKER AND BREAKER, THE ELF WITH ATTITUDE, BELOVED OF THE EARTH AND ENVY OF MANY. FROM EAST TO WEST, NOBODY CAN SAY HE ISN'T ONE OF THE BEST. IT'S THE HEIR OF THE MOUNTAIN SHAKER SECT! GIVE IT UP FOR BODEIR!"

.....

The crowd roared as Bodeir came onto this stage. Apparently he was told to show off a bit because he simply stood still, gazing proudly up at the crowd as a boulder beneath his feet carried him up and onto the arena, depositing him in a clearly marked white square that would serve as his starting position. Once their Bodeir did a few more tricks, stomping on the ground to get more stone, he shattered it with a punch then let it orbit around him for a few seconds. Once those seconds were over, Bodeir flicked the rocks up into the air with a finger before swallowing them to a round of applause.

What the fuck? Why are people cheering that? I mean... I thought it was cool up until the swallowing actual rocks part! I mean really, how is that impressive? All that's going to do is cause digestive issues, surely. And I thought Bodeir liked food! Why would a guy who's so snobby about food eat dirt willingly?

Kat's confusion was answered when a few seconds later Bodeir spat globs of mud from his mouth and onto the stage in a surprisingly intricate display of artistry. The first glob became a detailed statue of Bodeir's fist, with the same notable vein placement and everything. The second to fall was on the

opposite side and was a foot, and some of an ankle. Then the next two dropped at the same time, and looked like Bodeir, bowing to the crowd on either side. Bodeir himself, bowed towards the announcer.

[That's why!]

I mean... it's impressive, but Bodeir is still a food snob and I'm surprised he was willing to stomach something like that.

[Eh, maybe it's different for a cultivator? I know some media show people eating the elements their magic comes from, so maybe cultivators can taste something we can't in their elements?]

Lily... did... did you try to eat paper?

[Everyone must have tried it when they were a kid!]

I'm not talking about that, even I'd dispute the logic. I most certainly did NOT eat paper as a child. What I'm asking is if you tried it recently?

[Fine... yes I did try it... but it clearly didn't do anything for me and I spat it out. Also, what about that time you tried eating a leaf as a kid?]

We eat a bunch of leaves, they just happen to be things like cabbage.

[We both know that's not what I'm talking about. Who's being smart about the question now?]

Touché

"WHAT A SHOW, BODEIR IS CLEARLY ON ANOTHER LEVEL HERE WITH THAT FINE CONTROL. A GRAND SHOWING, BUT IF HE ISN'T TO YOUR TASTE DON'T BE DISCOURAGED. WE'VE STILL GOT ANOTHER FIGHTER TO INTRODUCE!" shouted the announcer. He clearly hadn't lost any steam.

"ON THE OTHER SIDE, WE'VE GOT THE LITERAL RISING STAR. HE'S COME UP FROM THE UNDERGROUND, AND UP THROUGH THE MELEE TO REACH HERE FOLKS. IN THE FREE-FOR-ALL HE TURNED DOWN TWO TEAM UP OPPORTUNITIES, AND MANAGED TO STAND STRONG AGAINST THE CULTIVATORS MAKING THOSE OFFERS WHEN THEY RETURNED FOR REVENGE.

"AFTER THAT, HE'S BEEN MAKING HIS WAY THROUGH ALL THE ELEMENTS. HE STARTED WITH A WATER CULTIVATOR FROM THE ETERNAL, EROSION SECT. OUR DWARF HERE STOOD STRONG, PROVING THAT HIS WILL WAS STRONGER THEN THE POWER OF THE TIDES!

"AFTER THAT, HE TOOK ON AN AIR CULTIVATOR FROM OUR VERY OWN SECT! THEY SLICED, THEY TRIED TO DICE, BUT ULTIMATELY, OUR DWARVEN FRIEND WAS UNPHASED BY THE 'GENTLE BREEZE' OUR DISCIPLE WAS PUTTING OUT. CLEARLY THEY NEED MORE PRACTICE IF THEY WANT TO USURP BING.

"BUT DON'T LET SOME WASHED UP WIND CULTIVATOR'S LOSS MAKE YOU THINK OUR WILDCARD HERE GOT THERE BASED SOLELY ON LUCK. IN A FIREY THIRD MATCH, HE MANAGED TO PROVE THAT YOU DON'T NEED WATER TO EXTINGUISH A FIRE. IN A PHENOMEL SHOW OF GRAVITY CULTIVATION HE BROUGHT THE FIREBRAND TO THEIR KNEES.

"SO THAT JUST LEAVES HIM WITH ONE FINAL ELEMENT TO CONQUER FROM THE PRIMARY FOUR... BUT UNLIKE HIS PREVIOUS OPPONENTS, BODEIR IS A TOP-TEIR EARTH CULTIVATOR. WILL HIS GRAVITY

TECHNIQUES BE ENOUGH? WILL BODEIR BE CRUSHED BY THE PRESSURE? OR WILL OUR DWARVEN FRIEND PROVE TO BE THE REAL MASTER OF THE ELEMENTS?

“WELL, WE’RE ABOUT TO FIND OUT! HE PUTS THE D- IN BOTH DWARF AND DESTRUCTION. HE ONCE LAUGHED AND CAUSED A MOUNTAIN TO COLLAPSE! HE CONQUERED THREE ELEMENTS, AND IS SHOOTING FOR FOUR. HIS SECT IS UNKNOWN, BUT HIS NAME IS NOT. WELCOMING VOLDAR!”

Voldar strode out of the entrance on the opposite end of the stadium. Like Bodeir he had clearly been told to make an entrance. He walked steadily up the stairs and onto the arena floor... but his feet never actually touched the ground. He hovered a constant five feet above the ground, letting him ‘stand’ taller than Bodeir and the announcer.

When he made it to his own marked square, it became clear he had seen Bodeir’s entrance, because he kicked the floor and summoned a swarm of pebbles. He made sure to pick double the number, and moved them through various forms. A flower, a smiley face, and a dwarven hammer before crushing them back down into the ground. With a glare, Voldar pointed at Bodeir’s statues each in turn, crushing them into the ground, perhaps to provoke a reaction from Bodeir, or perhaps to show that as nice as they might have looked, they weren’t very sturdy. Perhaps both.

Bodeir remained unmoved, simply staring back even as Voldar started to break out a few showy martial arts moves, all performed off the ground of course, allowing him to finish up with a spinning move that lowered him head first to the ground where he kept spinning for a few moments longer before rolling onto his feet.

Voldar was actually pretty tall for a dwarf, standing an easy five and a half feet tall and nearly as wide. His beard was thick, but not all that long and his outfit was less an outfit and more a collection of thick metal plates strung together with chainmail over a padded outfit to keep the chafing down. His weapon was a rather obvious hammer, that he floated into his hands from offstage and it stood at a solid six foot, just half a foot taller than Voldar himself.

The announcer clapped and sent to bolts of golden light towards both contestants, a quick query to Bing revealed that the announcer was restoring lost qi from the two competitors so that they were once again in full fighting form after using their qi to show off at the start.

Hmm... guess this will be an interesting match...