

DEMONS 1161

[Chapter 1161 Mint Musings](#)

"What did you do for fun, or just to stave off boredom? Do you guys have like... books and stuff? Or is that a bit icky to think about?" asked Lily.

Mint shrugged, "We make plenty of things from wood, so books are perfectly normal to have. I suppose the comparison would be like... like making wigs from real people hair? Or perhaps a sculpture out of nail clippings?" Mint ignored the shudders from Kat and Lily at the latter suggestion. "As for fun... well...

"We don't really focus on fun too much as children. I think it comes from the fact that we can't get bored. It's simply impossible. As a species dryads just do not experience it. We can loose focus on a task, we can become slow and lethargic if we've had no sunlight on our main tree for an extended period of time, but boredom is simply impossible.

"The saying 'blink and you'll miss it' is scarily accurate to some dryads. We can rather easily 'zone out' and go into a semi-dormant state if we don't have enough mental stimulation. It's not considered a problem, and if we don't delve too deeply into it the longest we'll remain unaware is until spring comes and gives us a bit of a jolt, but normally something will grab our attention before it gets that bad,"

"So... you can't get bored?" asked Lily, mostly rhetorically. "That's such a strange thing. I mean... it makes sense because you're trees and all but it's still strange to think about. So... you can't get bored at all?"

Mint shook her head and explained, "Not at all. It doesn't necessarily mean we can focus on a dull task forever, for while we might not get bored, if the task lacks stimulation our mind might decide that we're trying to sleep, regardless of what we're doing with our hands or branches, depending on the form. So it's still a risk. We can't just... copy out books for people or make nails endlessly. It becomes dull, and then we become 'sleepy' for lack of a better word.," *Novelnext.cOm*

"Wait... do you sleep?" asked Lily.

pandasnovel.com "Sort of? When night comes we get a dip in energy, and we can easily drift off into something close to sleep until the sun rises, but we don't necessarily NEED it like the other races. Sleep for us is... it's like a magical crystal. As the level of magic in the crystal goes down, you need to recharge it. We're the same. As we use energy, eventually we need to recharge. Though if you're big and strong enough you can take in more energy then you use up doing things and avoid sleeping.

"We don't really dream, not like the other races. Which can be really strange when one of us gets 'dream' affinity. Grape actually has it, and apparently it works really strangely on dryads. It's both more and less effective. Oh, and we can review our memories as we rest, but it's not the same, or so I'm told. It's not really an area I cared much about before, so I don't know it that well," explained Mint.

It can be strange just how different dryads are. A lot of the other races are 'like humans but X' or I suppose 'Like the others but more Y'. Dryads though... they seem really different. I wonder if it's their nature as more plant based then... what meat based? Huh, you know... I wonder if it's because they don't have brains? Do they have brains? Surely they don't have a brain like we do.

[Their original tree probably acts like a brain... and a heart, and lungs. It probably acts like a lot of things really. I do get what you mean though. I wonder if it's something that's been study?]

How though? It's not like they have access to any other species that are plant based like dryads to compare them too.

[Hmm... yeah though I wonder if Alraunes exist in this world. Probably not, I'm sure the dryads would've mentioned it, but I do wonder.]

I only vaguely remember those from the list. What are they?

[They're... well if dryads are tree people then Alarunes are flower people. Just as stationary most of the time, and they're sort of like the Succubi of the plant-based person family. Though they aren't strictly female, they just tend to look that way, because well, flowers.]

I don't get it. I think you should take a look at pandasnovel.com

[I think it's because they are predisposed towards the idea of 'beauty' and with magic as a real thing these days... I wonder if it's that they're actually aligned to the concept in some higher energy way instead of just genetics. It would explain the female dominance in their looks, because most men are considered 'handsome' which might have different magical alignments.]

I sort of get what you're saying. But that's more your wheelhouse than mine so I'll just trust you're idea is correct.

[No Kat, it's an educated guess. Don't just listen to me.]

Lily is always right. I see. Noted.

Lily just rolled her eyes. "Sorry, Kat and I got into a minor... argument feels combative so... discussion? Yeah, a discussion about what makes dryads so different from the other races and we were wondering if you know why?"

"Nope, sorry," said Mint. "It's something I'd like to know as well, and Thyme... well... they don't really care? I mean, they did need to know a lot of these differences, and catalogue them to help teach about the subject but the 'why' isn't something Thyme was interested in investigating too deeply. Maybe it's something I'll do in the future when I've grown up a bit. What ideas did you both have?"

"Well we had two," said Lily knowing she could put things a bit more eloquently than Kat. "The first is that most races seem more aligned with the 'animal' side of the world, while dryads are aligned with the 'plant' side of it instead. The other idea is that it's because you guys don't have brains. Or at least, we don't think you do?"

"On my home planet, we know that it's the brain, the thing stuck inside an animals skull," Lily tapped her own for emphasis, "that let's us think. Everything else might help us live, but our brains are the drivers. Dryads though, they seem to be based on their main tree... but we've got no reason to think that tree has a brain somewhere, or that it acts as 'just' a brain,"

Mint considered the ideas for a few moments, "I think they both have some merit. I'm not really sure which would make more of an impact. I don't know of anything with a brain that's more plantlike, and I don't know anything without them that's more 'animallike' without a brain. Then again, it's also not

something I've looked for? They could also be connected. The whole brain thing. Oh, and yes, dryads don't have brains.

"Well, some of these bodies do. Thyme's been testing it out and having a sort of brain-like structure does help with moving everything correctly but it's still in development. Our main trees though are basically indistinguishable from regularly trees. That's one of the reasons it's so hard to pick out all the trees with potential to be dryads.

"As I've said before, we're pretty sure we can pick out those differences... sometimes. Some people think every tree can be a dryad, though we do know that the trees need to be a certain size. Most smaller tree species can never turn into a dryad. So that might be a limitation. Not enough... stuff... in the trees to give us sentience?"

"Actually, what do normal dryads grow up to do?" asked Lily, after thinking about it for a few moments.

"Well... a lot of them do nothing. Thyme isn't very happy with that and they've been trying to fix it, what with making us more involved with the other races and learning more stuff... but a lot of the older dryads just don't do anything. They just... live, tend to their tree and occasionally chat with each other.

"See... we don't really need anything. The sun gives us more than enough food, the rains make sure we have enough water. Our presence invigorates the soul so that's never an issue. The only thing we have to fear is certain magical predators, like magical termites but they're not too hard to get rid of with a few secret techniques... which mostly just boil down to throwing mana at the problem. Something most dryads have plenty of,"

Lily almost wanted to ask how they could live like that. 'Wouldn't they get bored' was the thought... for just a moment. No, that's the thing. They couldn't get bored. A dryad with no drive could live for hundreds of years before any problems might arise, where a human would starve in only a few days. Truly, an different way of looking at the world.

[Chapter 1162 Practice By The Ocean](#)

After taking a break for dinner, Kat felt like getting some training in to burn off some energy. Lily, not one to deny catch much decided to come along. This was of course after the pair checked for Blue and Burnice but the fae and elf were nowhere to be found. Perhaps they were training as well, or perhaps they were getting some early sleep. Mint followed along with Kat and Lily; mostly just because she didn't have anything else to do.

"So... I have another possibly terrible idea I want to try," said Kat as they landed. Kat had selected one of the unoccupied corners (as opposed to one of the two occupied ones). It was off to the north-east when facing the front of the inn. The two over on the West side were occupied, but Kat didn't investigate long enough to know by who, nor what they were doing. It seemed better to give them their privacy.

"Can we just not?" asked Lily. "Last time you had an idea it was excruciatingly painful, and technically still is because you didn't perfect the technique because it wasn't necessary in the end,"

"Wait, why would it hurt?" asked Mint.

Lily glared at Kat who let out and awkward cough before explaining, "Right... so... one of my abilities is to turn myself into water, and I needed to... obfuscate the fact I was a demon, so my plan was to turn just my wings, and maybe my horns, into water and hide it somewhere, probably in a backpack. The problem was... well...

"I couldn't manage it properly. I could only transform part of my hand, and none of my bones. The exposed nerves were not happy with me, and that's not even getting into the few times I only managed to turn the skin into water. Sure the water doesn't hurt, but the exposed muscles do. Not a pleasant time really," said Kat.

"And... and this was for a good reason? Yes?" asked Mint.

"Well it was to better hide at my little sisters science fair showing so... I'm going to go with yes," said Kat.

Lily jumped in to add, "She's leaving out the fact that said little sister already had a workaround planned and it was totally unnecessary for Kat to go through with it,"

"Hey, it was fine. It can be a useful skill. I just need to work on it some more," retorted Kat.

"I think I'm with Lily on this one," said Mint. "Unlike me, you seem to experience great pain when your body is damaged,"

"Wait, can dryads not feel pain?" asked Lily.

Mint made a 'so-so' gesture, "There are some ways we can. Quite a few actually. Our main tree is the big one. If it takes more than just minor wear and tear things get quite painful quite quickly. Then there's the fact Thyme can wire up bodies to have nerves. This one doesn't, but Thyme can make them, and even gave us a chance to pilot one. It's... quite painful to use. Then finally, there is magic.

"As beings are fairly magical in their inherent makeup, magical spells that deal more damage than a certain acceptable threshold start to cause us pain, even if other bodies. It's a bit strange because there's no reason it should, and we can take more than enough magical damage to destroy the body and be fine. It just hurts," explained Mint.

Kat nodded, slowly walking over to the ocean now that everyone had been sufficiently distracted. "Kat what are you doing?" asked Lily without turning away from mint. Apparently she was NOT sufficiently distracted. *Quick think of an excuse.*

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[Tick tock, running out of time for that 'excuse' Kat.]

Um... woops?

[No, no, I'm not exactly surprised and I'm happier that you accidentally broadcast to me than I'd be if you tried to make a poor excuse... so why not just admit to the plan allowed so Mint can listen?] I think you should take a look at pandasnovel.com

pandasnovel.com "Right... um... so I was going to see what happens if I use my water transformation then touch the ocean?" offered Kat.

Lily slapped a hand against her face, while Mint asked the obvious question, "If you're expecting issues why not start with a bathtub or something? Why go straight for the ocean? The largest body of water around."

"Good question," said Kat.

Lily just groaned into her hands. "God Kat. Your grades aren't this bad. Why are you so stupid sometimes,"

"Ah, you love me," said Kat easily.

"I do, and I'd love you more if you were less of an idiot when it comes to potentially hurting yourself. Regeneration does not equal immortality," said Lily.

"True... but honestly? It feels pretty close a lot of the time. I'm not sure I have a proper fear of death anymore... still, I can work with the bathtub idea," said Kat. With that in mind, Kat walked over the ocean and summoned up her demonic fire. Sure salt water was a little harder to freeze... but Kat's demonic fire was so far beyond that task it was basically irrelevant in terms of energy use. Kat just carved out a roughly circular looking bowl that was about half again as wide as her wings before pulling it out of the ocean.

The water in the centre was slowly starting to freeze over, mostly around the edges but it wasn't like the cold was going to bother Kat so she just ignored that. Lily sighed and let Kat do her thing without interruption, while Mint pulled out a notepad from... somewhere. Lily was guessing an expanded pocket on the uniform, courtesy of Thyme.

Kat wiggled her fingers above the water for a bit before letting her ability activate. A moment later she plunged her 'hand' into the water and was pleasantly surprised by the lack of pain. Kat lifted her 'hand' back out, then put it back in. Out. In. Out. It was an odd feeling. The water didn't instantly become part of her. Instead, it was sort of like... the water that she was controlling was reaching out to the rest of the water.

Kat placed her hand back in the makeshift bathtub and then let the water do what it wanted. The demonic energy drain was noticeable but not too great. About twice her regeneration rate, but that was enough for the pool to quickly come under her control. Once it was 'marked' for lack of a better term, all the water seemed to be the same. Kat controlled the water that looked most like her till it was over the centre of the water and then let it drop into the tub.

For special effect, Kat then sprung back out as a giant version of herself. She could see... honestly not that much further. Despite more than doubling the amount of water making her up the extra vision she received was maybe twenty percent more space? Mostly upwards to adjust for her drastically increased height. The radius she was using to see was barely affected.

Kat waved to a tiny Lily and Mint before activating the mental switch to turn herself back. She had a moment, a moment of perfect clarity where time seemed frozen and Kat knew she could pick anywhere in the giant form to reconstitute herself. Mostly just because she wanted to, Kat reformed where the makeshift head was for the giant and let the water drip off of her. "That was... surprisingly natural. It wasn't as big an improvement as I might have hoped, but it's certainly not painful," said Kat.

"Well that's good. You're not going to like... vanish into the ocean or anything if you touched it right?" asked Lily.

Kat waved a dismissive hand. "Nah, it's not like that at all. I sort of keep all the 'marked' water together naturally. It's pretty easy to keep it together, takes no effort at all. It just takes a touch of effort, and a bit of demonic energy to spread my control. I'm... not sure how large I could make myself. Didn't really test if it cost more to maintain a larger form after 'claiming' the water. Might have to do that,"

"Hmm..." Mint murmured. "You might get banned from more activities for a skill like that. I'm not going to tell Thyme... assuming they don't just know already, because I'm nearly certain they do... but yeah. You might not be able to participate in some events. I suppose I shouldn't say any more though,"

Kat shrugged, "I'm not too bothered if that happens. Either Lily can take my place or someone else can. I mean, if it happens it happens but I'm not going to stress over it. I trust Thyme to keep things if not completely fair, then at least feeling fair. Though that could just be because I've been winning most of the time too. That might help make it less annoying,"

Mint giggled, "Perhaps that is the case. Maybe, maybe,"

[Chapter 1163 Practice By The Ocean 2 Electric Eel Boogaloo](#)

Lily chapter (Could've just been a Kat one but I thought, why not?)

pandasnovel.com Lily pretended to crack her neck as she stepped forward and said, "Well, with that working I feel like it's my turn to show off. I'll just quickly run through the basics that I've got down for paper magic, then I have a few questions for Mint about shadow magic,"

"Oh... well... I don't exactly know much about shadow magic. Thyme did cover it a little in their lessons but I don't know anyone with that affinity," said Mint with a pout on her face.

Lily just waved it off and said, "Hey, don't worry about it. I'm just wanting to check a few things that are probably super obvious for someone who lives in a world where magic is more common,"

"Alright," said Mint, not entirely convinced. *Naw, Mint's so earnest and adorable. Makes me want to give her a cookie. She's like... a little cousin perhaps? Sure we're trying to befriend her, but I feel more like I need to protect her. *

[I do understand the feeling Lily. Though, counterpoint. Thyme is protecting her, and her tree is likely somewhere very safe. I suspect she doesn't really NEED the protection. Though, I do agree that she's adorably earnest. A bit like Kamiko was before she met Sue.]

Kamiko is still a bit like that... but she's a bit too embarrassed you know? She's earnest sure, but it's not her defining trait. Though, yeah they're both adorable. Now, stop distracting me I want to show off properly to the adorable Mint and my lovely girlfriend.

[Of course girlfriend.]

Lily let out a full body shiver that went all the way through her tail, and set it fluffing up slightly. Mint raised her eyebrow very slightly at Lily, but it went unnoticed. "Right, so first off," Lily summoned up a single circle and let out a swarm of paper, "Is something the book calls 'papercut blast' but I sort of think of it as 'paper blizzard'. Regardless of the name, it's a really neat first circle spell.

"It will keep going as long as I give it mana. The paper is decently sharp and it's just a good spell to blast off in a panic. After seeing the basic shadow stuff, and how... rigid and unintuitive it is, I realise now that this is a masterwork of spell craft. It also has a second tier version," Lily flexed her mana a bit and a second spell circle appeared around the paper, "which is nice, but it doesn't add too much. It's just a better version of the original spell, which just shows how good the original is,"

"Next is my 'Paper wall' spell," said Lily as she dismissed the first circle and summoned another. In front of her was a wall of paper. "Now, the nifty thing about this one, is that it doesn't require constant mana, it summons a sheet of paper, roughly where you want it, and then end. But there was a trick in the book..." Lily then quickly summoned three more sheets of paper, in a row, "If you sort of 'pulse' your mana through the sigil as it's fading you can cast the spell again, summoning more paper.

"The great part though, is that your mana stays connected to them all, and while you can't pump energy into the spell, you can push it into the sheets of paper to give them extra durability. It's not a perfect defence, but it is nice. Furthermore, it also has a rank version but it's kinda lame," Lily explained as she cast the spell at a Rank above. She was right, it just summoned a wall of five sheets of paper.

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"Honestly? Unless you need to spam out constant sheets of five, it's better to just quickly cast the tier one version of the spell. Technically the tier two sheets are sturdier, but after a bit of testing? The durability increase is miniscule. Not really worth it. The only upside I can really see, is that the way the mana cost works out, it's five sheets for like... three and a half sheets worth of mana...

"But it's not like they cost much mana anyway. I can summon dozens of them without too much issue. It just comes back to the whole 'unless you NEED the five' might as well just stick to quickly casting the Rank 1 spell," said Lily.

"Now, for the dedicated Rank 2 spells. There were a few more Rank 1 spells, but they're all utility spells, not combat ones, and I can see why. The two the Paper Mage focused on are all you really need in combat. The first one Rank 2 exclusive is called 'paper shell'." Lily let the spell wash over her, and suddenly she was encased in a dome of paper.

From inside the dome Lily continued, "This is made up of a bunch of interlocking paper sheets and it can do a proper sphere if you're in the air. Additionally, if you keep supplying it mana, the dome keeps fixing itself. It's a very good defensive spell for paper magic... but it's horrible mana efficiency wise. If you can keep this up, nobody your rank is getting through..." I think you should take a look at pandasnovel.com

"But they don't need to, they can just wait you out," finished Mint.

Lily dropped the dome, and let out a long breath. Her face was covered in sweat, and even though she hadn't sounded too put out from inside the dome, it looked like she'd just finished a hundred metre dash. "Yup, even just those few seconds took half my damn mana pool. The book Thyme gave me

labelled it a 'Panic Button' spell. One you practice and practice over and over so that if you're under attack and panicking, you throw that it up to block the attack,"

"It's very impressive looking from my perspective," said Mint. "I can see how it would protect you from near anything, eating momentum from stone or ice, simply letting fire burn unimportant stuff, and water would just soak in without too many issues. I think only the more exotic things like space... but I'm not sure if you can even attack with that at Rank 2, so it does seem really good,"

Lily nodded, "Yup, now for the next spell, it's called 'paper minefield' and well," Lily cast the spell and suddenly the area in front of her was filled with floating paper balls. "It's somewhat cool... but it doesn't know friend from foe, or even foe from ME which is listed as a major downside of the spell. The other problem is it's always in the same configuration. Not a major issue, but something better combatants will notice,"

Kat nodded, already seeing a few paths through the floating mines. If she watched her wings it wouldn't even be an unreasonable ask. Perhaps for people with lacking flexibility, or wide frames it would cause issues... but then Kat realised something. "It's an anti-monster spell,"

"What?" asked Lily confused.

"IT IS!" said Mint in shock. "Oh that makes so much sense,"

"I'm confused," said Lily.

Kat jumped in to explain, "I was wondering what idiot would be stupid enough to just charge into a clearly trapped minefield... but most monsters don't know what paper is, and even if they do, there's nothing to give away the fact they explode. Heck, if a monster is charging they'll go straight into the mines without being able to stop if you time it well. The lower mines can cut up a soft underbelly if they have them, and if not I'm sure it would still hurt exploding in their faces,"

"Huh," said Lily as she looked over the spell again. "It's odd the book didn't mention that use specifically... but now that you say it, I can see the use. The paper blizzard seems better against people, but for monsters? Those bombs pack a punch and might be enough to penetrate thick hide..."

"I think I might know," said Mint.

"Oh?" intoned Lily as she gestured for Mint to go on.

"If this book is written by a paper mage as wise as they seem, I suspect that they were attempting to either discourage fighting against monsters, or they were giving you everything about the spell they could... except how best to use it, just in case they stifled your creativity. If the mage in question missed an obvious use of their own magic, and then taught it poorly that would be really bad,"

Lily nodded, "I... I guess? I'm not totally satisfied with that answer but I can admit that even just with the two main spells and the 'panic button' spell you can get by so... maybe it's a good explanation? Depends on the rest of the book I suppose..."

Mint shrugged, "Well I've never read it so I was just guessing. It just seems like the type of thing Thyme would do if they wrote the book, and well... Thyme is the most eccentric mage I know, so having an eccentric paper mage act similarly would make sense,"

Lily nodded, "Indeed, it does make sense,"

[Chapter 1164 Practice 3 Return Of The Dead Meme](#)

Lily.

"So are there any other Rank 2 spells?" asked Mint.

Lily shrugged, "None that I know of. I wouldn't be surprised if the book has extras in it, but I realised that while you can skim it... new pages open up once you cast a spell perfectly with the book nearby. So I might just be missing things. There was a lot of information about how to build your own spells at a given Rank... but honestly? I'm not as good at it as the original writer so I haven't spent too much time trying to make my own,"

"I suppose that makes sense. Is that something you're going to try doing in the future though?" asked Mint.

"Probably?" said Lily with an uncertain look. "I... I want to certainly, and the fact I'm already basically immortal because of Kat means I have the time... it's just hard to explain how outclassed I currently feel. Wait, no it's not. It's like looking at Thyme and then trying to comprehend being that successful in space magic, my final affinity,"

"Oh? You have three affinities? That's amazing!" said Mint.

Lily gave a weak smile, "Amazing yes... but mostly cheating. I'm not sure how many I had originally, but when I was given this new body I was assigned three affinities along the way. I'm pretty sure it was ruinously expensive but we got it in exchange for a favour Kat did so... yeah,"

Mint looked towards Kat who nodded at the unspoken question. "That's nothing to be ashamed of, clearly that favour was important," said Mint.

Lily shrugged, "Maybe it was, maybe it wasn't... but now I have questions about shadow magic, if you don't mind. Then I'll show off my shadow spells!"

"Sure, I'll do my best," responded Mint.

"Right well... the big question is should my shadow be sucking in a bunch of extra mana from me and the world?" asked Lily.

"Um... I think so?" said Mint somewhat unsure. "I don't know if it should be taking in mana from the world... but I know one of the main techniques that shadow mages use is to empower their shadow to act on its own. It's not even a spell, it's just a unique property of the magic. Though, a warning. Your affinity for shadow magic will crash massively if you separate your shadow from your body. It's also worth mentioning that it is still your shadow even when separated,"

"What does that mean exactly?" asked Lily confused. "Of course it's still my shadow," *nOvelnExt.cOm*

Mint shook her head, "Um... not quite like that... so... hmm... ok once your shadow becomes... 'real enough' I suppose... both yourself and it will take damage as reflections of each other. Some things work better against your body, and others against your shadow, but if the damage sticks to the target, it will effect both 'bodies' for lack of a better word. Like... if you... it's a bit gruesome to imagine but if you had your real arm chopped off your shadow would also lose its arm...

"Or if your shadow was blasted with concentrated light magic and had a whole punched in its shoulder, then suddenly you'd gain a massive hole in your own shoulder, though it might be cauterised? Though in that same token, if someone tries to cut your shadow with a completely ordinary metal sword, it'll go straight through and not cause any damage, while blasting light magic at you would probably still burn," explained Mint.

pandasnovel.com "Huh... so... is using my shadow for stuff like that actually a good idea?" asked Lily with a frown.

"Yes!" said Mint with a heavy nod. "It's best if you just make your shadow... semi-real. Keep it attached to your body and only have certain parts of it able to interact with the world. It's much, much sturdier that way. Oh, and as a shadow mage it's possible for you to separate people from their shadows and attack the shadow if the person escapes... but it's hard to 'keep' other shadows around. You have to constantly waste mana for it.

"If you're a lot stronger or have like... a special enchanted cell for shadows it might be worth it, but generally it's more trouble than it's worth... though it does work on objects as well to a lesser extent. Still expensive mana wise, but if it's not enchanted properly it can get you around some things,"

"That feels like somewhat niche knowledge... how do you know?" asked Lily. I think you should take a look at pandasnovel.com

"Oh that part was actually covered in our beginner enchanting lessons, not on shadow magic. The lesson was 'niche bypasses and how many you should plan around' and it was a bit annoying to have a class on because the answer is 'as many as you can really' but it's a waste of both space on the object, and potentially your better materials to defend against all the little tricks. It's part of why most people don't protect against them all," explained Mint.

"Ah... that seems annoying, but it makes sense," said Lily. "For now, all I can make my shadow do is this," Lily made her shadow wave at Mint, and blow a kiss towards Kat. Kat was extra surprised when a little shadow love heart floated up from the ground and hit her on the cheek.

"Wait what?" said Mint surprised.

"Yeah I was practicing that last part for a while, but it's worth it," said Lily with a grin.

"No, no, no, you don't understand. You've only had this ability for a couple of weeks right?" asked Mint.

"Eh... sure," agreed Lily. Mostly. *If you just mean shadow magic 'a couple of weeks' is probably being overly generous.*

Mint frowned down at Lily's shadow, "That's really advanced stuff for such a short amount of time... people spend years pumping mana into their shadow before they can move it at all... I... I don't really know what this means?"

"Wait really? It wasn't too hard to do, especially not once we entered a more mana-rich dimension than my home," said Lily.

"I'm all but certain. Now, granted, part of the delay could just be that most wizards start when they're younger and with less mana... so perhaps that is offsetting things... but that still seems wrong to me. It's just... very fast," said Mint as she gave Lily's shadow a sideways glare. "Your shadow isn't possessed right?"

"Um... I'm going to hope no?" said Lily as she looked back at her shadow and made it shrug. Mint glared at the action. *Could it be because this body was put together by a Living Shadow? Would that explain things?*

[I'm not sure. It might be what's causing your shadow to develop quickly, it has a template to work from... it could also be because you're already Rank 2. Maybe that makes a difference?]

We'll have to tell Nira about this and see what she says. This counts as an odd medical issue right?

[I think so?]

"Right well... that's something I'll have to ask someone else about," said Lily out loud for Mint's benefit. "Then I guess... I'll just show off these spells. The first is shadow dart," Lily set off the spell, three shadow darts in a triangle. "Now, the problem with this... is it's just three darts. Always three darts. It costs too much for the basic amount of damage it does, and the bolts are so slow.

"It really helped drive home just how good my paper spells are. Now the next, is shadow cloak," Lily moved over towards a rock and cast the spell. The shadows under her feet seemed to rise up and wrap around Lily as she crouched down. It was still rather obvious that something was wrong, and Kat's night vision was good enough to still see Lily. "Problem with this spell is that it's not even that great for hiding. I'm not sinking into the shadows, I'm just forcing them to wrap around me a bit. Obfuscating me slightly.

"What's even worse though... is it's just this patch of shadows. If I get too far away the shadows will snap back sort of like a rubber band which is very noticeable. Horrible for stealth. Then there's shadow ball," Lily cast the spell and a ball of shadow about the size of her head was summoned. Then it sat there for a bit, before firing off.

"This one is bad because it's so slow. Not only does it take a few seconds to leave my hand, it doesn't travel quickly. Both problems are part of the spell's inherent makeup. Honestly, the only spell in that box that's useful is the 'shadow pocket' spell, but I can't use it yet because I need more mana in my shadow,"

"Ah... so not the best gift?" said Kat with a wince.

Lily shrugged, "I don't know Kat. It was probably necessary so that I could start building my own spells, but I'm nowhere near that level. Probably best to ask Thyme for some shadow spells, if we can,"

[Chapter 1165 Spar With A Fiery Lady](#)

Back with Kat

After Lily showed off her spells the two girls really got into their training. Well, no. First Mint removed the limiter band from Kat because both Kat and Thyme had completely forgotten about it. So with Kat no longer limited, she started training. Kat focused on controlling larger and larger amounts of water in precise ways. Specifically, to set up a target rich obstacle course for Lily to run through, unleashing spells along the way.

Mint happily watched it all from the side, quite amused by her friends training. It looked quite cool off from the side. Inside, was a different matter. Lily, wanting to increase her fighting ability as a Memphis was desperately fighting her instincts to freak out and maul something. Every time she succeeded in hitting one of Kat's targets, it disrupted her girlfriend's control over them long enough for the water to splash onto Lily, who was not pleased with the result, but knew it was good training.

Kat, on the other hand, was dealing with the headache of moving everything around independently. She could almost feel the mental block that she'd created for herself, limiting her to more 'human' standards. If she just 'tilted' her thoughts the right way it she was perfectly capable of maintaining the entire obstacle course with somewhat repetitive but still unique movements of all the targets, as well as the wall structures... but if she lost her focus, or focused too much on just one part Kat found things collapsing.

They trained until sometime passed midnight and Lily collapsed asleep. Kat quickly retracted all of the water and then stumbled over to Lily. Her body not tired at all but her mind feeling a lot like a wrung-out towel. Mint helped the pair, or really, Kat carried Lily while Mint supported Kat, as the group moved its way back inside. Everyone (except possibly Thyme) seemed to be asleep, so they were quiet as they snuck inside and Kat collapsed onto the bed.

The next morning, Kat woke long before Lily, just before breakfast was starting. Kat decided to go for a bit of a walk, leaving Lily behind with a slight kiss on the nose as she was still in Memphis form. As Kat descended the stairs, she noticed Burnice leaving through the front door. Kat sped up and followed behind the elf.

Just as Kat got to the door, Burnice looked back with a somewhat hostile glare. Kat just waved back awkwardly, performing an odd not-quite jogging motion to catch up with Burnice. She didn't want to run and scare the elf off. "Um... hello?" offered Kat.

"Why are you following me?" asked Burnice, not beating around the bush.

"Well... I wanted it hang out a bit? Hopefully smooth out any rough feelings still... and I didn't really have anything else to do in the morning?" said Kat with a wry grin.

"What? No training for the great and powerful demon?" asked Burnice.

Kat gave Burnice a confused look. "What do you mean? Lily and I were up till early this morning training, why wouldn't I train?"

"Oh," said Burnice, a lot of the wind getting knocked from her sails, before a thought stuck in her mind, rebuilding some of that lost momentum. "Wait, if you were up that late how come you're up so early now and don't seem tired at all? Are you hiding the bags under your eyes?"

Kat shook her head, "I just don't need much sleep. Not sure if it's a demon thing, or one of my abilities. I know at least some other demons that need more sleep than me... but demons are rather diverse species," *and I can't say that I needed more sleep as a human without giving the part away. I'm sure D.E.M.O.N.S would be mad if I let that spread.*

"Well, whatever. If you want to chat you can come spar with me after we warmup," said Burnice with a shrug. Burnice took off after seeing Kat's nod, and the pair dashed across the island until they found a decently sized clearing. Burnice moved to the side and started stretching while Kat did a few rounds of katas.

"Straight into that? No warmup at all?" asked Burnice.

"Oh, not really? My regeneration takes care of any issues I might have from not warming up properly so I thought I'd just do these exercises for my fighting style," explained Kat.

"Don't feel like you need the extra flexibility?" asked Burnice. I think you should take a look at pandasnovel.com

Kat shrugged and stood tall, then leant down until her chest was flat against her legs. Then she showed off by leaning her body to the left and right, once again putting her chest nearly flat against her legs, showing that the only inflexible part of her body was her bones. Just to finish up, Kat pulled her leg up against her face, repeating with the other side, and the shrugging, "Flexibility is no issue,"

"Ok that's such bullshit," grumbled Burnice as she went back to her own stretches. "I can't believe you get flexibility like that basically for free. There's gotta be a cost somewhere right?"

Kat shrugged, "Honestly I'm not sure. If I had to guess I'm not as strong as other demons of my level... but that's other demons, and at my level. So... not really something that comes up often,"

"Some people get all the luck don't they?" asked Burnice, not really upset.

Kat nodded though, "Indeed. Though I technically have some things in my past you might consider tragic, I think I've been rather blessed overall. I'm strong beyond my years, I have a great girlfriend, and I have a great family. I'm honoured to have what I have,"

"Huh, I'd heard demons were usually more arrogant," said Burnice. "I was expecting you to deny it was luck or proclaim how hard you worked comparatively,"

pandasnovel.com Kat just shrugged and answered, "I'm not going to say I don't train at all, but I certainly haven't seen massive improvements from it. Most of my gains have been from Ranking up, and everyone says that's supposed to take decades most of the time. The fact I'm Rank 3 already is apparently super weird. Normally you're looking at half a century or more for that sort of power, or so I've been told,"

"Can't say I really know much about demon power jumps other than that they're significant and scary. Though... how do you find the motivation to train at all?" asked Burnice.

"Hmm... I suppose it's a question not of power really but skill. Regulating my strength is a big reason I train, then there's also just getting the most out of my abilities. I normally have the obvious use down automatically, but you can do so much more with them most of the time. Then there's my weapon skill. I

made a promise to someone that I'd get better at them and... well... I've probably been neglecting my fan skill a bit, but I do try to train it when I can," explained Kat.

"So... what you're like an baby with Rank 4 magic?" said Burnice.

Kat winced at the comparison, "I'm not THAT bad. I tend to get enough proficiency with anything I'm given to not kill myself or something dumb like that. I also have regeneration to help me get through my mistakes...

"But still... somewhat. I can bully my way through a lot of fights simply because I have my demonic fire and my regeneration. Demonic fire is something that can let me win eventually, if I last long enough and my regeneration lets me take really favourable trades. Doesn't matter if I temporarily loose an arm if I take of their head at the same time, or if we just trade arms. Mine can heal," explained Kat.

"Right well... for this spar how about we go for first strike? Solid strike I mean. Not one that's blocked by our opponents weapons?" offered Burnice, knowing it was heavily in her favour... but it was just a spar.

"Sure... though... do you want me to wear this?" asked Kat as she pulled the restrictor band from where she had stashed it in her sash.

"Hmm... I know the answer I want to give... but what do you think?" said Burnice.

"I'm happy to put it on. I need to improve my skills, not push the limits of my power so it's probably better for both of us if I wear it right? Unless you really want to fight me at full strength?" said Kat.

"No, no, a contest of skill seems like the best way to go about this. It'll be nice to actually have a chance to win this time," said Burnice with a grin. Kat nodded and fixed the band around her wrist again. *This should be interesting. Not sure how well I can do against knuckledusters. Mai didn't cover how to fight against them with fans. Do I just treat them like an opponent using their hands?*

[Chapter 1166 Spars And Scars](#)

About an hour, and multiple spars later, Burnice was laid out on the ground panting. Sadly, Kat couldn't say she did all that well during the spars. With it just being to first contact, even her superior mental speed, it didn't help all that much. Burnice just seemed to have a bone deep knowledge of how to move ingrained within her. Sure, Kat knew she could win if she put all her strength into her blows or took off the limiter, but that wasn't the point. "Dammit, how are you not tired?" asked Burnice.

Kat shrugged, "I wouldn't say I'm not tired at all... but with regeneration and this limiter on it really wasn't a workout for me. Sure I could push against it, maybe try to build up some muscle... but that's just going to exhaust me for basically no reason. I'm still not entirely sure if my regeneration would let me build muscle. So... pure skill when we're about the same speed? I lose out it seems,"

"You're, not, the, one, on, the, floor," said Burnice between breaths.

Kat just rolled her eyes, "Ah yes, make it sound like I got more than a single win for every ten of yours,"

"You were doing better towards the end," pointed out Burnice.

Kat shrugged. *Yeah I guess I was. Towards the end it was closer to one in three... which is a big improvement in theory. In practice those wins likely had more to do with the fact you were already mostly exhausted so I'm not sure they count. Still, what do I say in response? Burnice seems really interested in giving me more credit than I'm due.* "While that statement isn't a lie, I do feel like it's still misleading," was what she decided on.

"Hey, a win is a win," said Burnice.

Kat once again rolled her eyes. Burnice wasn't looking so the gesture was mostly meaningless, but it made Kat feel better. *Oh sure. 'A win is a win'. Makes me feel real good about myself to know that the only way I can get a reasonable win rate against you is to first run you into the ground, and then start trying. Why can't you just accept that you out-skill me? It makes sense. I'm not annoyed by the fact. I AM annoyed by this overly humble stuff.

Is this supposed to be your way of making sure there are no hard feelings after yesterday? Because if so I feel like this is a horrible way to go about it. I feel more confused than I did before this whole thing started. I mean... I at least understood what Burnice was feeling then. Now I've got no idea. Is she being nice? Is this some new form of mental torture? I just don't know.*

"If a 'win is a win' then shouldn't I be congratulating you? You won more matches, and you won the final match," pointed out Kat.

"Ah, but I'm not the one still standing," said Burnice with a grin facing the sky.

"This wasn't meant to be a test of endurance though!" exclaimed Kat. "That was literally, never the point. Why are you trying to give me so much credit?"

"Because you seem allergic to it? I mean, I found the fact you were doing so well against a weapon that you've clearly never fought before. Especially as I can see that you haven't been training with your own weapons long," said Burnice.

Hmm... not a bad point. "While I still don't think abusing my endurance to get a win in a contest of skill is following the spirit of the game, I can at least admit to that. I'm still practicing, but Mai was a good teacher and the basics weren't terribly hard to pick up. Apparently I'm quite compatible with fans as a weapon. A rather... obsessed... elf? Told me," said Kat.

"Why did you say that 'elf' part like it was a question?" asked Burnice.

"Right... so the thing about that is, my fans were picked up during the first round of the tournament. I found one of Thyme's hidden caches while working with a woman named Grace. Though... for the elf part. Her and her team were all elves, but not originally. Some of them at least, were originally other races. Apparently they stumbled on an ancient temple and a curse transformed them into elves.

"Some of them were more upset than the others, and I'm not sure if Grace was anything but an elf... I just felt it would be a bit rude to ask about the specifics. Still, it means that Grace may have been an elf... or she may not have been, but she was an elf when she recommended me the fans," explained Kat. I think you should take a look at pandasnovel.com

"That... is a very strange curse. Though... now that you mention it I think Marigold might have offhandedly mentioned something about that group once before... I think they wanted to go into the

dungeons below the elven palace in search of a way to counter the curse. They were turned down of course, unsealing those dungeons is a massive undertaking and the monsters down there are quite strong. Mostly Rank 3 and 4 things.

"It is opened occasionally to give the highest Rank knights and adventurers a place to train, but it was opened only two decades ago, so there are no plans to open it for another three, if not longer. Though, I can't be certain that's where they wanted to go. As I said, it was just something Marigold might have mentioned once, not any time recently either," said Burnice.

"I wonder if they're still trying to get down there. Actually... do you know if they won the chance to re-enter?" asked Kat.

Burnice shrugged, "Sorry Kat. It was just something I heard in passing. I didn't have anything to do with the mountain climb thing either. Well, I know the results were big news... but I didn't pay any attention to it when said news came out. I honestly couldn't say,"

Kat let out a sigh and said, "It's a bit of a shame. I might have to ask Thyme if I want to see how they're managing. I do wish I could help them out... but I didn't leave a way to contact them and it's not like we were great friends... it's just... being stuck in a body you don't like seems pretty awful,"

Burnice shrugged and said, "I don't know. I wouldn't mind a new body. It'd get rid of the scars,"

"Would... would it be rude to ask about those?" asked Kat.

bandasnovel.com Burnice shrugged, "Dunno. Maybe at some fancy dinner party it would be, but they're pretty obvious, and obviously old. If I hadn't gotten over it in over a decade I'm obviously never going to. Which, to follow up the unasked question, I got them when my house burnt down. Nobody else was hurt, my parents were both out at the time.

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"My mother was off getting groceries and my father was out working when the house caught fire. I was young, maybe... three or so? I don't remember the event much. Just the flames and the pain afterwards. From what I've been told, nobody knows how the fire started, and as a little kid I didn't know I needed to run. One of the support beams collapsed and a small piece of it fell on my face.

"It knocked me out and the fact I was just there in the fire for a while is why I have scars. My parents couldn't afford the price to get rid of them all. Which, to be fair to my parents, they'd just lost their house and most of their stuff, then they had to pay for the healing just to keep me alive. I nearly did die apparently, but I pulled through.

"I've probably got the money to remove them now... but I've had these scars for so long I'm not sure I want to, or need to get them healed. They don't hurt, they don't impair my vision. I was somehow lucky enough to keep full functionality in my eyes and jaw muscles. It's all cosmetic and well... most of the people who were going to bully me over my appearance aged out of it. I haven't had anyone react overly negatively to my appearance in years, even amongst elves or fae.

"Perhaps if I was more interested in dating I'd want to look my best... but I'm an elf, I've got time. I want to build up my power quite a bit more before I start looking for someone. Maybe in a century or two I'll

be more willing to get it healed... but well, if I find someone I love before then? Perhaps it would be a good test. To see if they are comfortable with me as I am," explained Burnice.

"I suppose it's a very different matter when you can get your scars looked at by a healer at some point, and when you've got so much life," said Kat with a nod.

"You make it sound like you don't," said Burnice offhandedly.

Kat shrugged, "I grew up amongst humans. Humans that didn't really practice magic. They all had this idea that they'd die in less than a century. So... I'm still not quite sure what it means to live that long,"

[Chapter 1167 Breakfast With Burnice](#)

Kat and Burnice currently had a table to themselves. Burnice was eating breakfast and Kat was playing around with a bit of food. One of the things on offer were these see-through green balls that tasted a bit like a mix between an apple and a grape. Kat had eaten two, and was now running the third one around her bowl to pass the time. There was a bit of small talk, but Burnice was focused on eating more than anything else.

So Kat was quite happy when Lily stumbled downstairs. She was yawning deeply, and her ears were flicking all over the place. Kat did have to raise an eyebrow at Lily's outfit. It was a light blue shirt with purple flowers on it and short pants that had waves sewn onto them. Lily's tail was waving happily at her back as she flopped down next to Kat.

Kat gave Lily a few scratches behind the ears just to get her purring before grabbing some breakfast for her girlfriend. When Kat got back, Lily just looked adorable. Like a sleep cat. Her face was squished against the table and her ears were still twitching. Kat put the plate down and then ran her fingers through the fur on Lily's ears. Setting Lily purring again.

"You two are disgustingly cute," said Burnice between bites. "Obviously I know elves can be cute when you get them to wiggle their ears... but damn if I'm not getting an appreciation for beastkin watching this,"

"Huh... you know, that's not something I've thought about. The world I grew up in is mostly human... so... do many couples form between races?" asked Kat.

Burnice made a 'so-so' gesture as Lily continued to purr, ignoring the food to bask completely in the feeling of Kat's hands. "It depends. A lot of relationships come down to proximity. People are inherently lazy, and they'll pick someone they grew up with, or work with or whatever. Of course, Auctifer is pretty famous for his... broad tastes, so it's not like it used to be back when my grandparents were growing up. It's pretty widely excepted, at least for elves, that you can love whoever...

"But far more practical concerns tend to keep people within their own species. The big one is lifespans. Unless you're talking about the strongest of the strong, the true 1 percent of the species in terms of power... then we have wildly different lifespans and that's inevitably going to lead to heartbreak. Of course... there is a rather disgusting practice, or at least, I hate it, of young elves finding a human to marry.

"They treat them less like a spouse and more like a pet, keep them around for sixty or so years, and then when they inevitably die just... move on. It's a disgusting subculture in my mind, and I didn't mean to stumble into it. Marigold goes to... interesting places. She THOUGHT it was something else, and I'd believe her considering she beat up most of the elves there before leaving..."

"But yeah... not a great look for us as a species. Though, frankly, the humans that go along with it aren't always blameless. I asked around a bit afterwards... and some of them know what's going on, but find it acceptable. Any kids they do have, if they even manage it, get to live longer with a parent that can provide for them. Then well... some humans just really like elves for some reason."

I see elves are still fetishised even in a world where they exist. Not a surprise. Though, I suppose it also isn't a surprise that elves fetishise humans in different ways. "Right... but what about the other races?" asked Kat.

Burnice shrugged, "Look it's not really something I look into all that much. Remember I'm not that interested in romance right now. I only know as much as I do because of Marigold, so you could ask her if you want. I just thought you guys were cute, nothing more,"

Kat nodded. Lily was adorable, and Lily was still completely out of it because of Kat's constant petting of her ears. *I suppose I shouldn't have expected Burnice to have thought about this sort of thing too deeply. It's not like I've spent time on it either.* "Sorry, it just seemed like an interesting topic," apologised Kat.

Burnice waved a fork at Kat while chewing. After a few moments she said, "No hard feelings, just don't expect me to know too much about romance or weird sex stuff. That's Marigold's territory. I mean, Vanya might know because well..." Burnice paused, not sure if she should admit it out loud, then shrugged. If Marigold didn't want it spread around, she should've said so. It wasn't subtle. "Vanya is... Marigold's... I don't really know what they count it as but Vanya's normally around when Marigold is off being adventurous. Vanya is just less likely to answer questions,"

"So... they aren't dating?" asked Kat.

Burnice groaned at the question, "Honestly Kat? I don't have a clue. All signs point to yes, but both of them say they're just friends with benefits. Vanya further goes on to insist that she's just doing her job as Marigold's attendant slash, bodyguard. Which... no? Auctifer may be a bit unorthodox but he's never going to mandate that sort of thing for the servants. Unless Marigold's Mum did up a special contract just for Vanya..."

Burnice left it there, the implication clear enough. "Strange," said Kat with a nod. "I suppose... I can just ask Marigold about it later if I want to get to the bottom of it,"

As Kat said this, Gareth tapped Kat on the shoulder, "Mind if I join you girls here?" he asked. I think you should take a look at pandasnovel.com

Kat looked over at Burnice who had a weird look on her face. Glancing back at Gareth, Kat was quick to work out the reason why. Gareth had no shirt on. He was wearing a pair of shorts that didn't quite reach his knees and nothing else. Kat could see a few faded scars and a lot of muscles... but... well... *Why isn't he wearing a shirt?* "Umm... Burnice?" said Kat passing the buck.

Burnice glared at Kat but said, "Sure you can sit here... though what's with the whole..."

"No shirt thing?" said Gareth stepping in just to get it out of the way as he sat down with his breakfast. "Well, after nominating me for the volleyball contest, Green decided it would be 'only right' that I skip out on wearing a shirt. To ensure this, she had Nixilei help remove all the shirts from the closet before I woke up,"

"Not sure I can believe Green actually woke up before you for anything," said Kat.

pandasnovel.com Gareth gave a small laugh but nodded, "Yes, I know, very impressive. Still, signing me up for the volleyball contest is one thing, but taking all the shirts? Including my entire set of armour? I feel like that's a step too far so I'm punishing her by ignoring her for the rest of the morning. She should've just asked. I'm not sure I'd have agreed but well... she is my fiancé so..." Gareth finished off with a shrug.

Kat looked around until she found the table with Green pouting and Nixilei smugly eating breakfast. When she saw Kat's gaze she waved, and Kat waved back. "Why does Nixilei seem so smug about this?" Kat asked as she turned back around.

"Just at a guess?" said Gareth. "I'd say Nixilei recommended just asking, and Green responded with 'it's more fun' or 'it's funnier this way' and Nixilei decided to go along with it for her own amusement. Regardless of my reaction, it Nixilei likely would've found it amusing," **nOvElNext.Com**

"Hey Kat?" said Burnice.

"Yes Burnice?" said Kat.

"Should you... I dunno... maybe let your girlfriend eat at some point?" asked Burnice.

Kat looked down at Lily who was now drooling slightly on the table, her eyes glazed over and not even trying to look composed anymore. "... Maybe," answered Kat as she carefully lifted her hand off Lily's head. Lily pouted and tried to follow said hand for a bit, but eventually she came back to herself somewhat, and gained a massive blush in the process.

"So... is that a weird sex thing?" asked Burnice.

Lily's blush deepened and started to spread down her neck, "What! No! I'd never do something like that in public! I mean... it does feel nice... but not like... erotic nice. It's... I don't know how to explain it. Maybe... hmm... what happens when someone places with an elves ears?" redirected Lily.

"Properly? It becomes super erotic. We have a tonne of nerve endings in them to help us work out where sounds are coming from and help judge how the wind is blowing. So... seemed pretty erotic to me," stated Burnice.

Lily shook her head, "No, no, no it's not like that at all. It's... It's like cheating with a back massage? Yeah that sounds about right. It's super relaxing and very comforting. Like a whole bunch of hugs and a massage wrapped up in one," explained Lily.

Burnice just stared back and said, "Hmm... sounds at least kinda erotic to me," Lily huffed and looked away pouting.

[Chapter 1168 Volleyball Rules](#)

As everyone made their way outside for the volleyball round, Kat felt the need to ask. "So what's with the outfit Lily? It doesn't look bad... but I know for a fact that you don't own a shirt that looks like that, at all. It isn't really your style either..."

"Oh, yeah I checked out the closet that apparently has 'auto-sizing clothes' and it's all tropical themed stuff. It's not just flowers, but ocean stuff, trees, beach themed stuff, basically anything to make you think 'tropical holiday'. Sure there were a few flowers that didn't look familiar at all, but it wasn't exactly hard to figure out the theme. Oh, but they're way more than just 'auto-sizing'" explained Lily, as she turned around to show off her tail happily swinging from the back.

Kat could see that instead of wearing her pants low, or just wrapping her tail around her waist there was actually a spot for it. Though Kat did notice it seemed to shift around slightly as Lily's tail moved. "I see, that is more than just auto-sizing, though... it might be necessary for beastkin," said Kat.

Lily shrugged, "Maybe? In the end, I just thought wearing something like this was a cool idea so I went with it. Oh and of course I picked purple because there was no silver and with your demonic fire we sort of match!"

Kat gave Lily a quick hug, "That's great," said Kat with a smile. As they made it outside, Kat saw that pretty much everyone was wearing something casual. Most weren't quite as... casual as Gareth was without his shirt, but nobody was wearing any visible armour. Burnice did have a cloak on, but apparently she'd changed since this morning and now it was a light green instead of black. Oh, and March's clothes looked like they fit properly this time.

Wait... does that mean yesterday the outfit she was wearing... was one she owned? When was the last time she could fit comfortably into something that tight! Honestly, credit to whoever made it because those stitches held up well... but it wasn't exactly doing March any favours in the looks department.

[Eh, maybe the danger was part of it. The whole 'I could bust out of this shirt at any time' idea.]

Is... is that a thing?

[I dunno maybe? I wouldn't be surprised if it was.]

I feel like it's just a nice dress she's had for a while.

[Maybe, but it's a bit of a boring answer isn't it?] Kat didn't deign to respond to that question. Instead, she spent more time looking at everyone's outfits. Green was wearing a big sunhat that looked way too big for her frame, a half-shirt, and short pants that barely covered her thighs. Nixilei was wearing a much smaller sunhat, alongside a thin looking set of shirt and pants.

Kress decided solidarity was for chumps and wore a long flowery t-shirt that went to just above his knees with short sleeves and waves on it. What Kat could see of his shorts, it seemed they had sandcastles printed on them, though that was mostly a guess. Stan was of course wearing nothing but a sinfully short pair of pants that seemed glued on. Kat looked away from that particular sight quite quickly.

Romilda and Marigold both had sarongs on, but they looked to be about the same size. Not relatively. Literally. Romilda's covered most of her legs and looked a bit like a dress. Marigold's covered her ass and basically nothing else looking positively indecent. Her bikini top wasn't helping matters either as she stood proudly in the sun. Romilda just wore a shirt. novelnext.com

Vanya was wearing a similar ensemble to Marigold, but she had a small towel wrapped around her top like a cloak and her sarong reached down to her knees. Even then, she was still looking around somewhat nervously as if everyone was looking at her. Perhaps she was only wearing it because Marigold forced her into it?

Midnight and Mauve wore matching shirts that contained a whole rainbow of colours swirling around the centre and seemed quite pleased with their choice of attire. Blue, on the other hand was wearing an open robe of her own set of swimwear, which were all Blue. Apparently Blue wanted to be on theme or something today.

pandasnovel.com Everyone else was wearing some variety of more standard shirt and pants, with the only notable thing being that Nell was wearing hers tied off to the side to show off her abs, and a few bits of scarring contained on said abs.

With everyone ready for Thyme to come out in their own fancy dress... everyone was a bit surprised when instead, Thyme showed up in a full suit and tie, a briefcase and a desk that all slowly raised itself up from the ground. "Hello and welcome to the volleyball tournament" droned Thyme. "I'll have everyone submit their list of entrance into the submission basket on my left," Thyme tapped the box that said 'submissions in' "and then we can go over the detailed rules for the volleyball section,"

It didn't take long to fill out the sheet. It was just four lines. I think you should take a look at pandasnovel.com

Team name.

Volleyball participant.

Wood Chopping Participant.

Mystery Game Participant.

"Thank you all for handing in your participation sheets. Do know that all information filled out on the participation sheet is considered legally binding," Thyme continued to drone on, making it seem like they were completely uninterested in what was going on right now. "As you have already been informed, it's a doubles match, first to three points, one with every other person here. Some additional clarification though...

"Magic is allowed, both on the ball and on other players... but only on your half of the net. If I see any spells tacking effect on the other side of the net, the first time you'll lose a point, then the second time your team will be disqualified from the round, and the person responsible will be taken out of the tournament. I'll work out how I'm going to deal with the holes that leaves in teams if it happens.

"Now. How you score points. If the ball touches in bounds on your opponents side. You get a point. If your opponents touch the ball a second time, that is, once per person on the other side, then you gain a point. If your opponent hits the ball and it lands outside of the marked play area, you gain a point. If the

net is hit... nothing special happens, so just refer to the other rules. Oh, I almost forgot. Destroying the ball will also lose you a point.

"I don't know how you'd destroy it. I made it from durable materials enchanted to be even tougher, so you'd have to really go out of your way to destroy it, but if you are responsible for it breaking then you lose a point. Lose too many balls and I mad get angry at you. Any questions?"

"How does serving work?" asked Marigold.

"Someone starts with the ball, and throws it. Holding the ball before the start of the round doesn't count as a touch, so you can throw it up and hit it back down if you want. When serving you have to start behind the back line of the court," answered Thyme in that same boring drone.

"Anything else?" asked Thyme. Nobody answered so Thyme nodded. "Right, with that done we can go over the contestants and see who gets the first bi. We've got, Marigold, Gareth, Blue, Burgandy and Carl. Also, by entirely random chance I swear, Blue gets the first bi. So the teams for the first round will be, Marigold and Gareth, vs Burgandy and Carl,"

*Huh. Seems like an interesting mix. Blue is the only dedicated caster here, and I'm not sure what the others do really. Gareth of course, is strong and had a bit of earth magic. Marigold is... a masochist and a bit weird but I'm not entirely sure what her magic is just yet. Though based on the lack of scaring on her... maybe she's a healer like Nixilei? Carl and Burgandy... I really don't have any ideas. Carl was the guy with the Tonfas and Burgandy had a bow on her the other day... *

Well, I think the first round will go to Gareth. Marigold seems quite strong and capable, and I know Gareth is. The real matches will come down to how useful Blue's magic is, and what Carl and Burgandy can pull out. There is anything obvious that shows off what kind of affinity they have... and I don't know how much magic they can really use without their enchanted stuff either.

[I wouldn't be surprised if Thyme also put certain spells in everyone's outfits. Probably seems more fun that way.]

You think?

[Hmm... let me just...] Lily flexed her power through her outfit and found... a slight connection to shadow. Pulling on it, Lily could sort of feel that the shadows in her pockets were larger than intended. [Oh yup. These outfits definitely have some spells in them.]

Well... things just got interesting then didn't they?

[Chapter 1169 The Funny Number Is Appropriate For This.](#)

Marigold and Gareth, vs Burgandy and Carl featuring Blue on the sidelines.

Gareth POV chapter.

Gareth stepped onto the oversized volleyball court, marked out with thin wooden strips around the edges that rested on top of the sand. If he was from Earth, he'd notice the proportions were all wrong, but alas, to him this all seemed completely normal. The court had tripled in size, though the net remained at about the same height. Gareth stepped onto one side, with Marigold following closely behind.

*Ok, I don't know anything about my competition, but I can work with Marigold well enough. I've heard more than a few rumours about her... but she should be a decent teammate. Honestly, the real challenge for this round, and a few of the following ones, will be making sure not to get Green mad at me. *nOveInext.CoM*

I mean, who choses to wear so little? Granted I might not be wearing a shirt, but I'm worried that Marigold's top will come off if she moves too much. Something that's likely to happen. That towel around her waste is barely sufficient but at least it's something. Blue and Burgandy both have much more reasonable outfits, so perhaps I should focus on them?

Eh, it's not like it's easy to stir up Green's jealousy, but that's not something to just take for granted. No, leave that for now. Focus on the game. I can go over potential measures to keep my fiancé happy later. Perhaps I can ask Thyme for a picnic basket and go on a moonlight date somewhere on the island? Yes, that sounds wonderful.*

Gareth felt the sand shift beneath his feet as he hopped from one side to the other. *Hmm...* Gareth stomped down on the ground and flooded it with his mana. He felt some parts of his clothing react to the excess mana, but simply filed it away for now. Burnice, seeing this copied his action, resulting in the entire playing field solidifying into sandstone. "Well that sure does defeat the point of 'beach volleyball'" said Thyme, in a cheery voice.

Gareth whipped his head around to see Thyme dressed up in bright colours and an open floral printed shirt, knee length pants that had sandcastles decorated with colourful shells on them, and open toed shoes. Thyme had just barely present breasts and a feminine figure while keeping a rather androgynous but loud voice. The long hair did tip the scales a bit further. Of course, the cap and sunglasses felt like a bit much.

I suppose Thyme couldn't keep up the dreary act long. Which almost felt like an understatement. Thyme had situated themselves on a high chair that let them see the entire board. It was decked out with colourful shells of its own and had a bright yellow and red cloth as a sun shade over the top, with a pink flag on one side and a blue one on the other.

Gareth turned to the other side and found a matching Thyme, with their shirt practically falling off and a more masculine frame. They hadn't said anything yet, but instead of flags they had a scoreboard on either side. Both said 00 right now, and the numbers could be flipped over to mark out the current scores.

"Hey Gareth, do you think you could hand me a long hard rod?" asked Marigold, knocking Gareth out of his introspection.

"What?" asked Gareth, partially thinking he'd heard wrong as he turned to see Marigold posing to show off her legs.

"A nice hard rod. I didn't bring my axe, and Thyme might have disallowed it anyway... but if you make me a nice thick rod from between your rocks then I can bounce around the arena much more easily. For that's magic, and it's only being used on our half of the field," said Marigold with a grin.

"Did you really have to ask for a stone pole like that?" asked Gareth as he walked to the edge and did just that. Trying not to leave a hole in the court now that he'd solidified that.

"What? Not used to having women handle your rod?" said Marigold, causing Gareth to almost lose control of the magic he was using. It wasn't really a spell, but it did require some careful manipulation.

παΠδαςNovel.com "Can you lay off the inuendo? I'm rather happy with my fiancé thank you very much, and I don't particularly feel like dealing with... whatever this is," said Gareth as he gestured vaguely in her direction as he pulled the pole Marigold had asked for from the ground. Gareth didn't bother making an axe head or anything fancy, just getting it solid enough for use was already somewhat difficult. He didn't know if it would hold up as it was let alone if he tried to give it an edge.

"Are you sure? If you've got a fiancé surely compliments about your rock hard rod is commonplace... unless... well I suppose she does tend to sleep a lot. Perhaps you're pent up?" said Marigold.

Gareth hurled the stone at Marigold, not really caring if she caught it or not. As it happened. She didn't even try, Marigold bent her knees a bit so that the pole would impact her right on the left tit. "Oh? Slapping my boobs with your thick rod? Why whatever would your fiancé say?" said Marigold without shame.

"I'd say it's a great show keep going!" shouted Green from the sidelines with a thumbs up. Marigold, of course, shot back a grin and her own thumbs up while Gareth buried his face in his hands. *Why did I agree with this? And why is Green enjoying this so much? Wait. No, she's the one who still calls the Queen 'Titty' I know exactly why she's enjoying this.*

"I'm glad you're all enjoying whatever this is," said Thyme with a grin, speaking from both bodies at once, "but we do need to get started. So... Blue! Who's serving?"

"Wait me?" said Blue, shocked at the question. I think you should take a look at παΠδαςnovel.com

"Yup! That's your prize for being denied the chance to get all hot and sweaty with three other people first thing in the morning. It's not true compensation, but it's all I can offer," said Thyme, feigning sadness while pretending to wipe tears away from their faces.

Marigold burst out into a mad cackle as she leaned heavily Gareth's rod to keep herself from falling over. Gareth just kept his head in his hands. Not wanting to engage in this nonsense. Especially not now that Thyme and Marigold seemed to be teaming up. Blue looked around awkwardly at the contestants, then a Thyme, then, deciding that she didn't really want to deal with this either cast a spell to summon up a water-ball.

Blue then hid it behind her back. "Carl! How many balls do I have hiding behind my back?"

"Um... one?" responded Carl.

Blue nodded, "Burgandy?"

Burgandy frowned at the question, but answered, "Three,"

"Gareth?" Blue asked.

Hmm... I don't really know how many... but lower numbers are probably better... unless Green went right to her maximum? Not sure... but let's go with... "I'll go with Five," said Gareth.

Blue nodded, then turned to Marigold who answered before Blue could even ask, "I think you've got two great big blue balls behind your back,"

"Well I'm happy to say you're wrong Marigold, the answer was three. Burgandy, do you want to serve first or second?" said Blue, not looking at Marigold who was pouting in Blue's direction.

"Um, first, we'll serve first," said Burgandy.

Blue nodded, "There you go Thyme. Burgandy's team can serve,"

"Boo, I wanted you to be forced to choose. Would you go with the team that beat you once before? The member of your own race, the fae? The princess in an attempt to curry favour with the elves? The human lordling that is striving for better interracial relations? Or perhaps trying for Carl, and perhaps curry favour with the only person I'm certain is single on the field," said Thyme.

"Um, I have a boyfriend thank you very much," said Carl.

"Wait you do?" said the female Thyme. "And you didn't tell me? For shame,"

"Hey, and if we're doing this technically speaking I'm unmatched," said Marigold wiggling her eyebrows and ears in Blue's direction. "I've seen some wicked water spells in the bedroom and I'm more than happy for you to pick me up,"

Everyone in the audience turned to Burgandy. "Fuck off I'm not telling you guys if I'm dating anyone or not,"

"She's single!" shouted Willow. To stir things up more.

"So are you, you little shit," retorted Burgandy.

"Yeah, and I'm not trying to hide that fact!" shot back Willow.

Blue shrunk into herself and slowly started to hide behind Thyme's oversized chair, not wanting to get mixed up in... whatever the heck was going on now. *Welp. Things have gotten out of hand, and Thyme's clearly just making things worse. Is this Thyme's idea of how to break the ice with everyone? I get that we didn't really mingle much after yesterdays games... so is Thyme trying to force stuff to happen?*

[Chapter 1170 Volleyball Match 1 Part 1](#)

Marigold and Gareth, vs Burgandy and Carl featuring Blue on the sidelines.

Current Match Score 0-0

Gareth POV chapter.

Eventually the minor innuendo war calmed down and everyone got into positions. Both teams seemed to inactively gravitate towards splitting up instead of sticking close together. Burgandy and Carl were sitting at diagonals from each other, with Carl in front, and Burgandy at the back, ready to make the first serve.

On the other side of the net, Marigold and Gareth had split up, with Marigold claiming the front slot so that she could wave her ass in Gareth's face, or more usefully, her tits in Carl's. How effective waving her tits in the face of a gay man would be? Only time would tell. Gareth wasn't going to complain and incite more lewd comments so he just moved to the back, with them both sitting in the centre of the court, instead of at diagonals.

Time would tell which starting strategy was the best. Burgandy served without much fanfare, though it was a bit light on. Perhaps she was concerned with hitting the ball too hard and breaking it, despite Thyme's assurances, or perhaps she underestimated how much force she needed to put into it. Regardless of the truth, it falling down just barely on the other side of the net meant Marigold could hit it back easily.

She sped straight up and slapped the ball down with her free hand, sending it away from Carl the best she could. The court however, wasn't too wide, and Marigold had telegraphed the attack massively, so Carl had started running even before the ball had made contact with Marigold's hand. It was trivial for him to make a play for it, and he sent the ball straight up into the air. "Burgandy, your shot!" shouted Carl.

Burgandy glared at Carl's back, not entirely happy with his choice to send it so high up. She glared at the sun with a hand over her face as she ran forward, to try and line up her own shot. Carl had launched the ball with considerable strength, if not his maximum, and it took a few moments for it to start falling back down. Burgandy waited just a moment more then kicked off the ground, launching herself up... and cracking the stone she'd made underneath.

pandasNovel.com Gareth noticed this and was already working on shoring up his own side of the net, pumping more mana into the earth and packing the sand in tighter, making it denser then before and hopefully less liable to start breaking. Perhaps if he had time or was more trained he could do better, but he'd make do with this for now. **novelnext.Com**

Burgandy went to slam her hand down on the ball, hoping to aim for the middle of the court and mess Gareth and Marigold up with a lack of communication, perhaps getting them to run into each other. Sadly, with the sun in her eyes, she whiffed the slam, completely missing the ball.

"Shit," grumbled Burgandy, as she panicked and pushed as much mana into her shirt as she could, not properly aware of what it did, but hoping it would be useful. She was rewarded when a dome of earth exploded out from around her, draining her reserves of mana significantly, but launching the ball off towards Gareth at the back of the court, if slightly off to the side.

Gareth had no trouble lining it up, the angle was much better and he wasn't as put-off by the sun because of it. Marigold asked, "Are you going for a spike or hitting it to me?"

Well shit. I wasn't thinking of that. Not really. While the ball was heading Gareth's way, Burgandy was crashing back down to the ground in her earth dome. It was crumbling away even as she fell, the shirt not having taken enough mana to make it a permanent construct. *Let's just play it safe. I'll hit it up and let Marigold take the shot. The sun is still a bit in my eyes. I wish I had something to deal with that. Alas, I didn't think it was necessary for some reason.* "It's heading your way," said Gareth as he intercepted the ball.

Gareth smacked it upwards just before it would touch the ground, sending it upwards and slightly forwards. Marigold looked back and watched the ball fly towards her, a bit lower than she'd like, but that was fine. Marigold just let the ball come to her then she batted it over the net with as little force as she could, hoping for it to just barely clear the net.

Her plan worked, perhaps too well. The ball came back down smacking on the net, and giving Carl more than enough time to get under it and throw the ball upwards for Burgandy to hit it again. This time, the fae tries to hit it off to the side, forcing Marigold to run all the way to the edge.

Marigold manages it without issue because apparently nobody playing at the moment knows how to not telegraph their attacks in an obvious way. This pattern repeated itself for the next five minutes. Marigold discarding the pole she'd acquired during that time. The two teams smacked the ball back and forth, either in a very obvious way, or much too slow to catch anyone out. The fact that the ball was so bouncy and could only move so fast helping extend the rally massively. I think you should take a look at pandasnovel.com

The turning point came when Marigold jumped to return a ball early. Burgandy had set the shot up for Carl, he was going to hit it down, spiking it into the ground as hard as he could... but he was a bit too close to the net. Instead of smashing it into the ground, Marigold jumped a bit higher and smashed it passed him back towards Burgandy, hitting her boobs on the net in the process. Thyme, not obeying the normal rules of volleyball, so no problem with her touching the net, especially as she landed back on the correct side of it.

As for Burgandy, she simply wasn't ready for the ball to be smacked right back at her, she tried, but it glanced off her upper arm and sent it flying off out of bounds. "Score, 1-0 to Gareth and Marigold," announced Thyme.

The next round was over quickly. Gareth served, and Burgandy thought to be a bit tricky. Between rounds she'd found out that her boots summoned a large block of stone. She thought she'd hid her testing well enough, but the others were ready... not that it mattered. As soon as she knocked the stone up Thyme called out, "Score 2-0 to Gareth and Marigold,"

"Wait what!" hissed Burgandy, "Why did we lose the round? I didn't use magic on their side of the board!"

Thyme snatched the ball out of the air, stopping play to answer the question. "True, you only used magic on your half of the field, and I commend you for that. Sadly, you also brought the ground up the ball, and because of that, I have to give your opponents the point,"

"Wait... that's such bullshit!" said Burgandy. I used mana to summon that stone! Are you saying I can't use my earth affinity?"

"Not at all, however you will note that the spell, or rather, the enchantment, you used was to push up a pillar of earth from the ground, and then drop it back into place. The pillar is part of the ground, it isn't floating separately. If Marigold had used the stone pole she was carrying around early that would be fine. The stone dome you used early on in a panic was fine. You cannot however move the ground up and expect that to be fine," explained Thyme.

"It's clearly different though. I was obviously using a spell!" insisted Burgandy.

"Setting aside the fact it WASN'T a spell. Should I also allow anything to touch the ground? Both Gareth and yourself hardened it from the sand that it once was, and could be argued with similar logic that it is no longer the original ground, and is in fact, a spell. Thus allowing the ball to bounce on it as many times as you both like," explained Thyme.

"I still hold that it's completely different. Sure the ground is hardened, but we didn't move it at all. That pillar was an obviously raised section of the ground, and the fact that it was still connected shouldn't matter," insisted Burgandy.

Thyme let out a sigh, unsure of how to force the issue. They wanted to keep things casual, and this was an admittedly unclear section of the rules. Thyme wasn't sure if it was better or worse that it happened before the rally could really get started.

"I'm happy to give up that point," said Marigold.

"Pardon?" said Thyme turning to Marigold.

"If Gareth doesn't mind, I'm happy to say that the previous point doesn't count. We didn't even start fighting for the point properly, and Burgandy clearly didn't know it would cause issues. Plus, this is meant to be fun right?" said Marigold.

"Hmm... if Gareth allows it, so will I," said Thyme.

Oh come on. Put the pressure on me will you?