

Fairy Tail 215

Chapter 215: Receiving Challenges

Earth Land, Ishgar, Kingdom of Fiore, Magnolia.

October 15, x784.

Shortly after the match ended, Makarov announced that there would be another half an hour break before the finals began. This prompted most of the spectators to leave their seats to buy some refreshments, use the restroom, or start chatting animatedly about what happened during the semi-finals.

"Well, damn." Alfonzo muttered after seeing the outcome of the match between Team Ultear and the Thunder god Tribe. "I haven't fought Bickslow since the S-Class Promotion Exam five years ago. And he's gotten pretty strong since then."

"And Fried can write his runes in the air now, too." Elicia added. "If he could do that during that exam, it would have been harder to sneak up on him."

"But that's good, right?" Sun asked, tilting her head to the side innocently. "If they're stronger, then the guild is stronger, right?"

"Sun, you're, like, uber-cute!" Marin said excitedly as she lunged at Sun and wrapped her in a hug.

Alfonzo and Elicia both blinked in surprise when they saw the two hugging. Though it was not uncommon for Marin to wrap her friends in hugs, that was not the thing that surprised them, however.

"Did that really just happen?" Alfonzo asked while rubbing his eyes in disbelief.

"I thought it was just a hallucination." Elicia said, tilting her head to the side much like Sun had done before. "But if you saw it too..."

The thing that surprised them was the fact that they both saw the scenery behind Sun turn into a solid, pale yellow background. After that, a series of dots made their way across the background while a question mark appeared over Sun's head. When they blinked, however, the scenery change back to normal.

"Hey, are you guys okay?" Marin asked after seeing the blank looks on Alfonzo and Elicia's faces.

Shaking his head to push those questions away, Alfonzo was just about to answer until he felt something soft pressed against the back of his head while a pair of arms wrapped around his neck from behind.

"Congratulations on making it to the finals." Alfonzo heard as a few strands of white hair hanging before his eyes.

"Thanks, Mira." Alfonzo replied, leaning his head back on the pillowy sensation that he had come to enjoy.

With his head resting on Mirajane's bosom, Alfonzo looked back and saw Elfman and Lisanna standing behind their sister. Juvia, the fourth member of their team, was not with them, however.

"Elfman, Lisanna, how are you two after your fights?" Elicia asked, bouncing over to Lisanna for a hug.

"I feel fine." Lisanna replied, returning the hug with a smile. "Losing doesn't feel good, though."

"Yeah, especially when it happens after underestimating your opponent." Elfman added in a frustrated tone. "But I won't be doing that ever again. I'll learn from my mistake, like a real man."

"That might be the best use of your catch phrase that I've ever heard, Elfman." Marin said with a smile.

Turning towards Marin, Elfman opened his mouth to reply. Before he could, however, he was slammed into from behind and knocked over the seats the rest of Team Steel Threads were sitting on before falling to the ground.

"Huh?" There was a collective exclamation of confusion after seeing Elfman being knocked to the ground.

Then, as one, the members of Team Steel Threads and Team Strauss looked back to where Elfman was standing and could only shake their heads.

"Hey, Alfonzo!" Natsu shouted from the spot where Elfman once stood. "When the tournament is over, fight me!"

"*Sigh* I knew this was coming." Alfonzo muttered. "And why would I do that?"

"Because I didn't get to fight you in the tournament." Natsu replied.

"That's because you lost." Alfonzo said nonchalantly. "Anyway, shouldn't you want to fight Max again? He's the one who beat you, after all."

"Oh, I'm gonna get my rematch with him." Natsu said with a grin. "But I wanna fight you now."

Bang!

"That's enough." Erza said, hitting Natsu on the top of the head from behind. "Can you not see that he has to prepare for the tournament finals?"

"Ow... Geez, Erza..." Natsu whined while stroking the top of his head. "I already said after the tournament. What's the big deal?"

With that, Erza and Natsu began bickering. Meanwhile, Gray and Lucy also approached the group.

"Alfonzo." Gray said in a solemn tone once he joined the rest of the group. "I want you to put me through the same training that Gildarts put you through."

"Don't like losing, huh?" Alfonzo asked with a smile. "Well, I guess I don't really mind. But how will Ur feel about you asking someone else for training?"

In response, Gray flinched visibly. It was clear that he had not considered how his master would react to having someone else take over his training. He did not have to considerate for long, however.

"Oh, my foolish student." Ur said, approaching the group with Ren, Gozaburo, and Masa in tow. "If you wanted your training kicked up a notch, all you had to do was let me know."

The twitching smile on Ur's face made Gray take a step back on reflex. It was clear that she was not happy that Gray went behind her back to ask someone else to assist in his training.

On a side note, as soon as they were close enough, Gozaburo ran past everyone else without a word and started gushing over Sun, heaping loads of over the top praise. At the same time, he, not so subtly, threw insults at Alfonzo for not participating in the tournament thus far.

Meanwhile, Ren could only roll her eyes at Gozaburo's antics, which were a much lighter version of how he used to act when it came to Alfonzo. Masa, on the other hand, only smiled wryly.

A moment later, however, Gray's expression turned into one filled with resolve.

"Yes, please train me harder, Master." Gray said, bowing his head.

At first, Ur was taken aback. However, she smiled warmly at her student a moment later.

"Fine." Ur replied. "Starting tomorrow, we'll turn the dial on your training to eleven."

"Actually, I would like to go through some intense training, too." Lucy said, also with a resolute expression on her face. "When Phantom Lord tried to kidnap me in front of my apartment...."

"Former apartment." Elicia pointed out. "The offer to live with us is still open, by the way."

Lucy's expression became gloomy at the thought that her lease was voided when her own magic spell was the reason that her apartment building was so badly damaged, even if it was to defend herself.

"I'll... consider it." Lucy replied before she glanced between Alfonzo and Elicia. "From the people I've come to know, you two are two of the strongest wizards I know. And I want you to train me to be stronger."

"Sure." Alfonzo replied casually with a smile.

"Why not." Elicia replied simultaneously.

"I know I'm not very strong but--- Huh? What did you say?" Lucy asked, not expecting the two to accept her request so easily.

"Well, we're members of the same guild." Elicia said, answering Lucy's doubts. "There's no reason for us to not help you, is there?"

"Besides, the stronger everyone is, the better they can protect themselves." Alfonzo added. "Which means we won't have to see any of the people we care about hurt."

Immediately after Alfonzo's words finished, Lucy's face reddened slightly. The fact that Alfonzo was smiling at her warmly was not helping the redness go away, either.

"Thank you." Lucy said quietly with her head lowered, to hide the blush, and poking her index fingers together.

'Why does hearing him say that I'm someone he cares about make me feel so warm?' Lucy asked herself as she stole a glance at Alfonzo, who was still smiling at her.

"It doesn't matter if he has to fight Laxus in the finals!" Natsu shouted, his argument with Erza drawing everyone's attention. "It's not like Laxus can even touch him!"

"Oh, is that what you think?" A rather deep male voice said from behind the group.

Turning in the voices direction, everyone saw Laxus and the Thunder God Tribe approaching.

"Oh, Hey, Laxus." Alfonzo said with a nod. "What's up?"

"I only came to tell you that our fight in the finals won't go the same as all the others." Laxus replied after he finished glaring at Natsu.

"Does that mean you have something new to show me?" Alfonzo asked, a bit of anticipation in his tone. "If so, I'm looking forward to it. I can feel that you're quite a bit stronger than the last time we fought. You're even stronger than when I stopped you from doing something stupid when you attacked Gajeel."

"Hmph!" Laxus snorted, though the disdain that usually accompanied it was nowhere to be seen. "You'll find out in the next match. Provided your team lasts to the last round."

"The chances of that happening are miniscule." Fried said nonchalantly.

"Well, unless Alfonzo decides to fight in the first one on one fight, that is." Bickslow added. "None of us are dumb enough to believe we can take him one on one yet."

"Yeah, because any of you could beat Lici, ..." Marin said, rolling her eyes.

Fried and Bickslow, as if they had somehow forgotten about Elicia, froze momentarily. Then, they turned their attention to Elicia, who was sitting right next to Alfonzo and smiling at them brightly.

"Shit!" Bickslow exclaimed in a whisper. "I actually forgot how strong she is. I mean, we never really fight with her. Lately all I do is stare at her from a distance."

"Indeed." Fried replied in a whisper of his own. "Ever since the S-Class Promotion Exam five years ago, I haven't engaged her in battle. So, I also forgot about her."

"Hmph!" Evergreen snorted, staring at Elicia as she continued. "If you're so confident, then come up for the first round of the finals."

"Oh, it's been a while since we fought, Ever." Elicia said happily. "I wouldn't mind a match with you in the finals. Do you have a new trick, too?"

"Though I wouldn't call it a trick, you would be a fool to think that I have not improved over the years." Evergreen said, turning her nose up in pride. "And should you accept my challenge, I'd be happy to let you find out."

"Ooh! Sounds like fun." Elicia said happily. "I'm in!"

After she finished, she looked at Sun and Marin.

"Unless either of you want a try, that is." Elicia said.

"Nah, I'm okay." Marin replied, waving dismissively. "I'm really not good at fighting one on one... yet."

At the thought of swinging her daggers fast enough to cause wind pressure, Marin's eyes lit up with excitement. Then, she remembered that Masa used [Knife Magic] before standing from her seat and bouncing over to Masa to ask for advice.

Sun, on the other hand, had not even heard Elicia's question. Instead, she had a stiff smile on her face due to her father's over the top praise of how well she had done in her two matches. On top of that, her smile would twitch every time Gozaburo said something negative about Alfonzo.

"Well, since there were no objections, I guess I'll fight you, Ever." Elicia said with a smile.

"Good! Then, prepare to be defeated. And after your defeat, everyone will see that the epitaph, Queen of the Fairies, should belong to me." Evergreen said with pride written all over her face. A moment later, however, she wore an expression of annoyance as she continued. "And stop calling me, Ever!"

"Shouldn't she fight Erza for that title?" Lucy asked to no one in particular.

Ignoring Lucy's question, Laxus and Evergreen glared at their opponents for the finals while their opponents, Alfonzo and Elicia, smiled back with anticipation.

A moment later, Laxus turned around, making his way back to his own seat with the Thunder God Tribe following behind him, Evergreen holding her glare for another moment before following.

As soon as Laxus and the Thunder God Tribes backs were turned, Alfonzo and Elicia turned and made eye contact, holding a brief conversation with their eyes.

Alfonzo: 'They're gonna use it, aren't they?'

Elicia: 'I hope so. I really wanna see if Ever's [Stone Eyes] will work on me.'

Alfonzo: 'I doubt it. You have so much more magic power than she does. And even if it does work, it probably won't hold for long.'

Elicia: 'I guess you're right. But still...'

Alfonzo: 'But I wonder if Laxus is gonna show off to the whole town. And if he does, will I be able to control it like I did with Gajeel? I'm really curious.'

By the end of their conversation, both Alfonzo and Elicia were smiling widely, leaving the rest of the group, those that were paying attention to them at least, a bit more confused.

"Well, I guess I'll go see what the old man is up to." Ur said, not wanting to hang around the younger wizards any longer. "I'll see you guys later. Oh, and Ren, let's have a drink after the parade is over."

"Sure." Ren replied with a smile. "Sounds like fun."

With a small wave, Ur walked away. Not before telling Gray when and where to meet her for their training tomorrow morning, though.

"That Laxus seemed really confident." Ur muttered to herself. "I wonder what he's got up his sleeves. He kinda sounded like he forgot how many times he's got his ass kicked over the years."

While Ur considered what kind of growth or strategy Laxus had to finally overcome Alfonzo, she arrived next to the platform where Makarov had been overseeing the tournament.

Unsurprisingly, Ur found Makarov smiling widely as he looked over the entire venue. What she did find surprising, however, was the fact that there were tears forming in his eyes. On top of that, his smile would twitch violently every so often.

'What's wrong with the old man?' Ur asked internally after Seeing Makarov's twitching smile. 'This is really good PR for the guild, so why does he look like that.'

"How could I be so stupid?" Makarov muttered to himself, answering Ur's unasked question as he continued. "Why didn't I charge admission? The bleachers are full and there are even more people standing to watch. I could have made a killing... If those kids had told me about this beforehand, I could have had everything set up."

Smack!

"I should have known." Ur muttered after face palming.