

Last System 41

Chapter 41 - Mias Stance

"Go," Vaner ordered, focusing all of his attention back on me.

I didn't even need to focus on executing a perfect punch at my current stage. The two weeks of hard, constant training earned me this confidence.

But just like Mia before me, I wasn't going to go easy on this opportunity. Just like hers, my fate would be decided with my next, single punch.

'Now that I think about it, I kinda stopped worrying whether I should even aim to become that guy's direct disciple,' I realized.

I had those doubts as late as just a few moments ago. Only when Vaner stood up to me and clashed with another elder, all the thoughts about his credibility suddenly vanish.

Was he just trying to use me to his own advantage? That I could happily agree on. That was the very basis of most human relations, after all. The real question was, was he trying to squeeze my potential dry and then cast me aside?

To find out, I had no other choice but to prove I was actually worthy of grooming. And right now, this was the best card I could play.

I took a deep breath, held it in my lungs for a while, and then slowly let the air go. I didn't need to focus, but I still did nonetheless.

And then I punched.

Using the strength of my entire body, I sent my fist flying forward. Due to the difference in height between the tall elder and the average me, his stomach was the best target.

The step of my leg, followed by the swing of my hips, added their momentum to the punch.

My vision tunneled, and yet it didn't.

It was a strange feeling of having all my attention harnessed and planted on a single point in space. Yet, I could still see everything around it, proving that it wasn't my eyes playing tricks on me.

But there was definitely something wrong with the punch.

As if my fist entered some kind of air's current, it continued to accelerate even after I spent all my strength on the punch. Some kind of strange force continued to push my fist forward, guiding it precisely to the point I was focused on.

'It feels like a muscle memory brought to its limits,' I thought, right before my attack connected.

Tic.

The system alert entered my ears, only to disappear when a cracking noise resounded in the area.

Vaner's barrier shattered... but held on. Although turned into pieces, it still managed to somehow hold itself together, protecting the elder from the hit.

'Isn't it... bad?' I thought, retracting my arm.

The strange from before still coursed through my mind, forcing me to mindlessly retract my steps and cup my hands towards the elder.

"Thank you for your guidance," I said, unable to gather my thoughts.

'Wasn't it... worse than I did before?' I thought, the realization dawning on me.

The last time, I managed to not only fully break through the shield but also deliver the punch right into the elder's guts. It was weak, sure, but it happened.

And now... I failed to even break the barrier apart.

'That settles it,' I thought, a feeling of strange relief washing over me. I did my best; I failed; there was nothing to grieve about. Rather than wasting my time whining, I would rather look for another venue to grow.

"Not terrible... But not great either," Vaner commented, a smirk resurfacing on his lips.

"Are you satisfied with my performance, elder?" I asked, not giving myself any false hope. Right now, I simply wanted to end the situation as soon as possible without disrespecting the man so I could return to my training.

'A direct disciple or not, I still have wealth and the system! I will make it through anyway!' I told myself, fanning the flames of my determination.

It wasn't the first loss for me, nor would it be the last one either. I long grew past the stage where I would let a single defeat force me to surrender.

"So-so..." Vaner replied, his smirk turning into a smug smile.

"Elder, with all due respect," Mia interjected, stepping forward between Vaner and me as if she wanted to shield me from the elder. "I'm not going to accept your offer if you refuse to take my master as your direct disciple, too," she said, looking directly into the man's eyes.

'What?' My body shook in surprise. While the resolute look on Mia's face made her even more lovely than usual, I couldn't allow her to sabotage her own future just to help me out!

"A mere slave like you have the gall to speak to me like that?!" Vaner flared up, his own surprise quickly taken over by fury. "Do you realize that it's already a miracle that you are not someone's toy to play with?" he shouted, pointing his hand at the girl.

"I'm terribly sorry, elder," I rushed forward, lowering my head in the process. "I failed to keep my slave in check. As such, I can only beg for your forgiveness!" I shouted, bending my back in half while pushing Mia's at her back to make her do the same.

"Apologize right now!" I whispered in a hushed voice.

"I won't," Mia gently straightened her back, turning her head to the side and looking at the back of my bowed head. "I'm not going to change my decision. The only way for me to do so is to have you order me to accept it," she said, a kind, affectionate smile growing up on her lips.

"But we both know that you are not going to do this," she added a moment later.

My silence was enough of an answer.

This was a golden opportunity for her. Whether I would be accepted or not, she could escape all of her problems by becoming a direct disciple of a sect's elder. Even that young master would be hard-pressed to find any means to trouble her if she did.

But she was right.

If I were to order her now, I would cross everything I believed in. In order to make her use this opportunity, I would have to treat her like a real slave rather than a partner.

I bit my lips in frustration.

"Yes, I do have the galls to do that," Mia said, moving her eyes up at Vaner's face. "If not for my master, I would be a plaything long ago. He protected me when I was nothing but a burden. He trained me when I was nothing but a weak slave. He took on those who wished me harm when I could not defend myself," Mia spoke in a calm tone as if she wasn't standing up against an elder at all.

"That's why I'm not going to abandon him the moment his help is no longer crucial," Mia said calmly, a smile growing up on her lips.. "Just like he didn't abandon me when I was of no use to him."