

Chapter 114 - Control

The realization that the System might not just be a 'me' thing slammed into me like an invisible freight train, knocking me back a step. I staggered away from Miss K's desk, suddenly feeling like I'd been punched square in the chest.

Miss K immediately reached out, her strong grip catching me gently by the shoulders.

"Whoa, hey! You alright there, Sera? Maybe you should sit down for a second?"

She eased me back into the chair, though I hardly noticed, my thoughts already spinning wildly out of control.

'If the System isn't just mine, then what the hell has all of this been for...?' I wondered frantically, trying to keep my head above the torrent of implications. *'If it's just out there, if other people could have it...'*

My Ego immediately pushed back, trying to steady the rising panic, as I had ordered it to do. *'No, stop it. Keep it together, Sera. Just because the System operates within the rules and laws of this world, doesn't mean everyone has it. It only means it's **possible**.'*

I took a shaky breath and forced myself to comb through memories, desperately looking back at every single interaction I'd had since arriving here. I sifted through faces, conversations, odd moments—anything at all that might've hinted someone else had a System of their own.

But no matter how hard I looked, I drew a blank.

'If anyone else has access to it, they're a hell of a lot better at hiding it than I've been,' I thought, allowing a tiny bit of relief to creep in. *'Or, more realistically, maybe nobody I've met actually has it at all. If even Miss K, with all her experience, has never seen or heard of something remotely similar, then maybe the System really is absurdly rare—or possibly even unique after all.'*

"Sera...?" Miss K's concerned voice suddenly cut through the fog, snapping me back to reality.

I jolted slightly, my eyes quickly finding hers again. "Ah! Yeah, sorry—I'm fine now. Just got a bit woozy for a second, nothing to worry about," I said hastily.

Probably a bit *too* hastily, judging by the skeptical look Miss K shot me in response.

Before she could press further, I swiftly redirected the conversation back toward safer, more obsessive, ground. "Anyway, you mentioned something about a ton of sprites, right? Can you tell me anything else about that? What exactly does it mean when there's so many like this? I honestly have no idea about Anima, so I'm totally lost here."

To my complete surprise, the hastily thrown-together distraction *actually* worked.

Miss K's expression shifted instantly, the earlier concern fading away, replaced by a look of pure, almost childlike fascination as she remembered the whole torrent of anima sprites again.

"Oh, right, the sprites!" she exclaimed, practically bouncing back into her chair and scooping her notebook and pen off the floor. Lords, Sera, there were *so many*," Miss K began excitedly.

She gestured wildly with her hands, trying to illustrate the sheer volume she'd witnessed. "As I mentioned earlier—or did I mention that, even?—most of them were blue—I mean, absolutely *flooded* with blue—but there were some green and orange ones mixed in there as well."

She paused for just a moment, tapping her pen against her chin thoughtfully. "Honestly, I don't have a perfect answer for you. I've never even *imagined* something like this could happen. But if I had to take a wild guess, I'd say those sprites—especially the blue ones—were responsible for actually delivering the information to your brain."

She glanced up, a thoughtful look crossing her face. "You know how you said there's no conscious transfer? Well, maybe that's because it's the sprites doing all the heavy lifting. You're not getting a conscious download of information, nothing for your brain to process, because they're just...putting it straight into it somehow... Or something like that, at least. As for the orange and green ones..."

Miss K trailed off for a second, biting her lower lip as she struggled to find the right words.

"They might've helped, uh... remodel your brain somewhat? Maybe they reshaped or altered something to accommodate the influx of knowledge brought by the blue sprites...? Because, frankly, Sera, no regular brain could suddenly handle this amount of information without some kind of restructuring, I don't think... Just from the description of the choice itself, there was a ton of knowledge it would have to deposit in practically an instant."

Then, seemingly embarrassed by her lack of solid answers, she quickly added, "Again, please don't take this as fact in any way. It's really nothing more than guesswork, and probably not even very good guesswork at that. I've known for a while that I'm not really an expert on Anima at this kind of depth, but honestly, today's just driven that home in a pretty brutal way," she admitted, shoulders slumping slightly in annoyance. "And that's pretty fucking frustrating, if I'm being completely honest with you."

The sulky expression on her face almost made me want to laugh, despite how bizarre and unsettling this whole situation had become. The idea that the System had actively restructured my brain wasn't something I wanted to hear said aloud.

I mean, sure—I had already suspected something along those lines. The System clearly reshaped my body when I upgraded Skills or Attributes like Body or Reflex. But hearing out loud that it might be adding, removing, or outright changing things inside my actual *brain*?

Yeah, that was a fresh new nightmare I'd have rather kept locked behind a very thick mental door labeled "Do Not Open."

Miss K's eyes caught mine again as she half-rose from her seat, leaning forward seriously. "Sera... listen. This whole thing, I—I honestly don't know what to make of it. I promised I'd keep your secret, and I fully intend to honor that, no matter what happens. But I'll be straight with you—the sheer amount of Anima that just flooded into you? It has me concerned."

I blinked at the sudden gravity in her voice, taken aback by how openly worried she sounded, but kept quiet and let her continue.

"Anima isn't something people just toss around casually like a bunch of blanks might throw around creds for cheap liquor. It's ancient, powerful stuff—supposed to be used sparingly and carefully. At least, that's always what I've been taught," Miss K explained slowly, trailing off for a moment as she seemed to grapple with her thoughts.

After a pause, she gave a firm nod, apparently reaching some internal decision.

"If you're okay with it, I'd like to discuss this whole situation with an old colleague of mine."

She immediately held up her hands, placatingly, like she expected me to object—though honestly, interrupting hadn't even crossed my mind yet. "Of course, I wouldn't mention anything specific about you—no dates, no times, no identifying details. I'd just frame it as something strange I saw at random and couldn't investigate further. My colleague's a genuine expert when it comes to Anima, or at least a lot more of an expert than I am, and I'd feel better getting their opinion. I'm honestly worried about your long-term health here, Sera."

I took a moment, processing the request carefully, not wanting to give a quick answer despite my gut reaction being an immediate "yes."

'This might actually be my best shot at getting some solid information on Anima—especially the long-term consequences of whatever the hell the System is doing to me...' I thought.

But at the same time, the very real problem of every extra person who heard about this increasing the chances of it eventually circling back to me was also something I had to keep in mind. And now that I knew the System probably wasn't just some cosmic coincidence, but something deliberately created by someone or something *in this very world*?

Yeah. That risk suddenly felt very, very real.

My hand rose almost automatically, fingers cupping my chin thoughtfully as I hummed to myself, letting Miss K know I was mulling things over.

Could I really trust her to keep things under wraps? Probably not entirely.

There was never a guarantee for something like that.

But honestly, after everything I'd just dumped on her today—about the System, about myself, about reality itself—any damage was likely already done. That particular train had long since left the station.

Did I even have a choice but to say yes at this point? To put my trust into Miss K and just hope for the best...?

I let out a long sigh before slowly nodding. "Yeah, okay. That sounds like a good idea. Just... Please keep it as vague and anonymous as possible, Miss K. Honestly, I'm pretty worried I'll end up strapped to a table in some corpo lab somewhere for the rest of my life."

Miss K nodded gravely, holding my gaze with an intensity I'd rarely seen from her. "I fully understand. I promise you, on my title of Grandmaster of Martial Arts, that I'll keep your secret safe and secure. Nobody—no matter who they are or what they offer—will ever track this back to you through anything I say. You have my word."

Strangely enough, her solemn promise genuinely eased the tight knot of anxiety that had formed in my chest. To have her practically swear on her Grandmaster title wasn't just empty reassurance—it carried real weight.

After all, a Grandmaster wasn't just some meaningless title you could slap on a business card. To become one required dedicating your whole life, every ounce of passion and effort, to a singular topic. It was about respect, integrity, and personal honor—something deeply meaningful, even if it wasn't like she'd actually lose the title for breaking a promise.

It was the kind of thing that mattered on a personal, almost spiritual, level.

"Now," Miss K continued, a bit hesitantly, drawing my attention back up from my thoughts, "I fully realize we've been in here way too long already. The others are probably worried, or worse, cooking up wild theories about what's happening—but... I'd really like to run a quick series of tests, if you don't mind. Just to see if the option's description actually holds up. I still have no idea to what degree this whole thing actually works."

When I didn't immediately respond, she hurriedly added, "Both from an intellectual curiosity standpoint and, even *more* importantly, from a safety perspective. I mean, I can't exactly toss you back out there against Kenzie without checking this out first. You're already struggling with that... *other side* of yours. Completely ignoring a life-altering surge of Anima on like just happened on top of that would be irresponsible at best and straight-up unforgivable from a teacher's standpoint at worst."

I couldn't exactly argue with that logic—she had me completely beat on this one.

I'd already been a loose cannon earlier, nearly hurting Kenzie because I'd completely lost control of my own instincts. After getting an absurd amount of Anima forced into my brain—which likely rearranged who-knows-what—I was definitely in no position to push back against Miss K's concern.

Not to mention, if I was being totally honest with myself, I was pretty damn curious about what this Perk actually did, too.

"Alright, yeah," I agreed, keeping my voice cautious rather than eager. The last thing I wanted was to give away just how interested I actually was and lose any advantage I might still have in this conversation.

Miss K's face instantly lit up with excitement. "Wonderful!" She clapped her hands together, practically bouncing back to her journal to scribble down a few notes. "Okay, let's see what exactly this choice did..."

She flipped rapidly through the last pages, eyes scanning over her earlier notes as she muttered softly, "...*absolute balance and control... regardless of terrain...*"

Then, with an almost mischievous gleam in her eye, she glanced from me to the chair I was sitting on, a wide grin spreading across her face.

"Alright, Sera," she said confidently, pointing at the chair beneath me. "Stand up on that chair and balance it on just one leg."

My eyebrows shot up immediately. "Uh... I don't think that's gonna work..." I said, my voice doubtful, but I still got to my feet slowly. Anxiety fluttered slightly in my chest.

I wondered if now might be a good moment to mention that I had a bit of an issue with heights—or at least, with standing on anything unstable—but decided to keep it to myself for now.

Carefully, I positioned myself, placing one foot on the back of the chair and the other on the front edge of the seat. It already felt shaky as hell.

"Alright, let's try this..." I muttered skeptically, deciding to start cautiously by balancing the chair on two legs first. No need to rush into a hospital visit on day one of testing.

Against every last bit of my expectations, I actually pulled it off—easily, at that.

The chair rose onto two legs beneath me, and I just... balanced there.

No wobble, no trembling knees, not even a hint of shakiness.

All the anxiousness I expected, the cautious instinct to flail my arms around and steady myself—it just wasn't there. Instead, I felt this sense of perfect equilibrium, this total control over every ounce of my body's weight distribution and the position of the chair underneath me.

It honestly felt beyond surreal.

Miss K's eyes went wide as dinner plates, frantically scribbling notes down in her journal, her pen flying over the page in chaotic movements as she tried not to miss a single detail.

Occasionally, she'd glance up with an expression somewhere between disbelief and absolute fascination, only to dive right back into her rapid-fire writing spree.

Meanwhile, I just stood there, amazed at myself.

I'd never exactly been athletic back in school—especially when it came to acrobatics or gymnastics. Balance beams, handstands, and all that stuff? Let's just say I wasn't earning any medals in PE class.

Yet now, I felt as steady as a stone statue.

It was like my body had been custom-built for exactly this kind of feat.

Feeling a burst of excitement at my newfound talent, I decided to push things even further.

Without stepping down or even adjusting my grip on the chair, I carefully shifted my weight, intending to balance it all on just a single leg.

To my complete astonishment, it was just as effortless.

The chair moved beneath me—rocking forward a bit, then shifting gently backward—but it wasn't chaotic or uncontrolled at all. It was like I knew exactly how it needed to move, exactly how much pressure I needed to apply, and exactly when to shift my weight again to balance everything perfectly.

Then, with just a tiny shift of my hips and a subtle adjustment to my center of gravity, the chair smoothly flipped onto one leg.

It was flawless—no shaking, no wobbling, just perfect, rock-solid balance.

"By the Lords..." Miss K breathed out, her mouth literally hanging open in shock.

Honestly, I felt pretty much the same way.

"This... this is fucking insane," I muttered, staring down at the chair below me, hardly believing what I'd just done. I was casually balancing on one chair leg like some sort of circus acrobat.

Miss K quickly shook herself free of the initial shock, going back to jotting down furious notes.

"I'll admit," she finally said with a chuckle of disbelief, "I didn't actually think this would be possible for you. Your body control so far has been arguably the worst of everyone in the group except Kenzie... I just figured this would be a good way to test your new limits—to see exactly where your new balance would fail."

Her words trailed off for a second before she chuckled in disbelief again and shook her head, "But here you are. How does it feel? Can you feel anything?"

I shrugged lightly, which—in hindsight—should've thrown off my balance completely, but somehow didn't. "Honestly... it doesn't feel like anything at all. It's unbelievably subtle. Like the kind of control you have instinctively instead of consciously."

Miss K's eyebrows climbed higher in surprise as she watched me shift around effortlessly on the single chair leg.

"Think of it like when you toss a ball, right?" I continued, trying to put this bizarre sensation into words. "You don't consciously calculate angles, wind resistance, or trajectories. You just... throw it. Your brain does all that math in the background without you ever really realizing it, comparing to all the previous throws you've done in your life. That's exactly how this feels."

I paused, carefully moving again, shifting my weight slightly to lean forward and then back.

The chair underneath adjusted instantly, matching my movements flawlessly. "I don't even need to actively think about it, I just... *do it*. The moment I decide I want to move, my body automatically balances itself. It feels natural—completely second nature."

Miss K shook her head again, disbelief still clear on her face as she scribbled another quick note down. "That's... that's absolutely insane, Sera... I've never seen anything even remotely close to this except a High-Tier Skill Shard. But even then, it's not really subconscious, but via your neck-port and implant controlling everything. And certainly not happening so quickly; requiring quite some time to get used to letting go of the control required to use such a shard... The sheer scope of what's possible here is... I don't know. This... This is unbelievable."

Miss K fell silent, just staring at me like she'd completely forgotten how to speak or write or even move.

Honestly, I couldn't blame her—I was feeling the same sense of stunned disbelief myself.

Perks like [Lightfoot] were already bending reality in strange ways, sure, but [Elemental Balance]? This felt like it was in a league entirely of its own.

The fact that it had somehow rewritten the parts of my brain responsible for balance and control—flooding them with absolute, perfect knowledge—was both thrilling and deeply unsettling at the same time.

After a moment, my curiosity got the better of me, and I decided to push the limits even further. Carefully at first, I shifted my weight around, moving a little more rigorously, transitioning smoothly back onto two chair legs and then effortlessly onto a completely different leg.

Front-left to back-right, then forward again. Easy as breathing.

Then, encouraged by the fact that nothing seemed to shake me, I grew even bolder.

I practically started flipping the chair beneath me, intentionally using sharp, aggressive motions to jump from one leg to another rather than gently shifting my weight around.

Yet still—nothing.

No wobble. No desperate arm waving. Not even a slight shiver in my muscles.

I landed each transition perfectly, sticking every landing with absolute precision. Just pure, flawless control, every single time.

'Yeah... this Perk is seriously insane...'

Miss K finally snapped out of her stunned trance, blinking rapidly before shaking her head with a slightly bewildered chuckle. Her earlier enthusiasm and curiosity began creeping back in, even if it was somewhat muted by the magnitude of what she'd just witnessed.

"Alright," she started, eyes lighting up again, "that was incredible—but what about the rest of the description? It mentioned mastery over some form of Tai Chi, Aikido, Zen Meditation, and Yoga. I'd love to know what that's all about. You haven't felt anything related to that yet, have you?"

She tilted her head slightly, looking thoughtful, and I couldn't help but nod in agreement.

"Not really. I mean, none of that seems to have kicked in yet," I replied, stepping off the chair effortlessly and placing it back on all four legs without even a whisper of sound. "So how do we test something like that?"

Miss K smiled slightly, clearly enjoying the puzzle.

"Start by taking your stance," she suggested, walking around the desk until she stood directly opposite me, casually dropping into her usual combat-ready position.

Taking a deep breath, I slipped into the makeshift Sera-stance I'd been using since my very first fight in this world—a stance Miss K had steadily helped me refine over our training sessions.

But the instant I settled into it this time, I immediately realized something had changed dramatically.

My control over every muscle and joint in my body felt absolute—like my entire being had been carved from stone. My fingers didn't twitch or tremble, my arms didn't shift even a millimeter from where I'd placed them.

I stood there, motionless, balanced, and effortlessly steady.

But it wasn't just the control. My stance *itself* had subtly changed, too.

My previous posture had been scrappy and clearly improvised, something I'd cobbled together out of sheer necessity. Now, though, it felt fluid and purposeful—still familiar, yet distinctly improved.

My feet naturally placed themselves slightly wider apart, offering better stability, and my weight distribution shifted subtly toward my back foot, echoing the smooth fluidity of Tai Chi.

Meanwhile, my hands moved slightly forward, open and ready in front of me in a relaxed yet deliberate position reminiscent of Aikido, ready to redirect rather than block incoming attacks outright.

It wasn't a pure Tai Chi stance, nor was it classic Aikido.

Instead, my makeshift Sera-stance had seamlessly absorbed subtle influences from both styles, integrating them effortlessly into something entirely new and uniquely mine.

"Huh," Miss K said softly, her eyes carefully observing every detail, noting the subtle shifts. "Now *this* is something interesting..."

Miss K slowly circled around me, scrutinizing the exact positioning of every single muscle with laser-sharp intensity.

Honestly, if it weren't for my Ego running interference and the newfound ironclad control I had over my muscles, I probably would've started squirming at her very close scrutiny.

Instead, I stood there completely still, like a marble statue, waiting patiently for her to finish her analysis.

"Yeah," Miss K said, leaning back against the desk again, arms crossed casually as she watched me with an intrigued smirk. "Honestly, it's pretty impressive. Clearly, this isn't just some quick muscle-memory download slapped on—it's deeper than that. Your stance isn't just better, it's... *evolved*. You've managed to absorb parts of two entirely different martial arts into whatever scrappy form you started with, creating something totally new on the fly."

She shook her head slowly, letting out a low chuckle tinged with disbelief. "Normally, to blend martial arts styles like that so naturally, so seamlessly? It takes years. Fuck, I mean, some people spend their *entire lives* trying to achieve what you just did in a few seconds without any proper training at all."

She laughed softly, giving me a mock-serious glare. "Honestly, this whole thing feels a bit like cheating. Kind of bullshit, if you ask me... What did I even spend countless years training for, if I could have just gotten it Anima-forced into my head?"

I opened my mouth to protest, already prepared to tell her just how far ahead of me she still was, but Miss K cut me off with a dismissive wave, smirking as she anticipated my response without needing to hear it.

"Relax, I'm joking, Sera. I'm still a Grandmaster, remember?" she said, her tone playful but confident. "You've still got years and years ahead before you're even close to catching up to me, even with whatever this weird Anima-fueled talent of yours is. Even at your current, truly ludicrous rate of growth, I'll still mop the floor with you for another decade or two."

Her smile faded just a bit, though, as her expression turned thoughtful. "But seriously, someone observant enough—someone who really knows what they're looking at—they'd probably notice your absurd muscle control right away. Even if they don't know exactly what's going on, they'd know for sure that something isn't quite normal about you."

I wasn't totally sure if that was supposed to reassure me or worry me, but thankfully Miss K didn't leave me hanging for too long.

"There are genetic and bionic augmentations that can produce similar results," she clarified, "and there are also extremely extensive cybernetic rebuilds that involve spine, limbs, and brain enhancements. So it wouldn't be impossible to pass this off as cyberware if someone asks questions. But the problem is that you're almost entirely natural—or at least, as natural as a human can realistically get—and your control is utterly perfect. That's honestly astonishing. And even stranger, there's not a single trace of Anima residue. No lingering sign that Anima even had anything to do with this."

That last revelation caught me completely off guard. I felt surprise flash through me—but bizarrely, my eyebrows didn't rise in reaction.

'Oh... right,' I thought, realization dawning. *'Those are muscles too.'*

Since I'd been focused on holding my stance completely still, my subconscious had apparently put a lock on literally every muscle—even the tiny ones controlling eyebrow movements.

Curiosity suddenly piqued, I started gently loosening that mental hold, releasing one muscle after another. It felt weirdly liberating, like removing shackles from some sleeping giant and letting it move again bit by bit, finger by finger. Slowly, subtle twitches and subconscious movements returned as my body resumed its natural, idle state.

But even as my muscles slowly relaxed one by one, my control stayed rock solid.

My eyebrows relaxed first, followed quickly by my ears.

Then my cheeks, lips, throat—everything gradually started moving normally again, settling into their subconscious rhythms. But that's when I noticed something else entirely.

*'Wait... I can actually **feel** it happening?'*

Yeah, that was definitely new.

I could literally sense each individual muscle and its corresponding muscle group moving, how they interacted, how they worked together seamlessly to form all the natural expressions my face normally made without me even thinking about it.

'Okay, that's seriously freaky. I don't like that one bit.'

A shudder instinctively started to ripple through me, only to immediately get snuffed out by my now-perfect muscle control.

The only evidence it had ever existed was a slight twitch of my ears.

'Right, gonna have to figure out how to dial back some of this control...' I thought, then found myself suddenly chuckling at the absurdity of the situation, catching Miss K completely off guard.

"What's so funny?" she asked, genuine curiosity coloring her voice.

I flashed a quick grin in her direction, shaking my head slightly. "I just realized... I can feel every single muscle individually now, including how they're working together. I have complete control over them, down to whether they act autonomously or respond directly to my conscious control. I was laughing because I'll literally have to learn how to ease up and let go of some of this, just so I can pass as a normal human being again."

Miss K, ever the quick-witted teacher, broke into an easy smile, eyes sparkling with amused understanding. "Which is quite literally the opposite of what we discussed earlier. We started

by wanting to shackle just one specific part of you, and instead ended up shackling every part at once. That's a delicious bit of irony right there."

Miss K's expression grew serious again, the playful smile fading as she stepped smoothly back into position in front of me, settling once more into her relaxed, combat-ready stance.

"Alright, let's give it a shot," she said calmly, eyes locking onto mine. "Come at me. Maybe this new level of control already sorts out the issue we had before—could save us from awkward explanations once we head back out there."

I nodded, appreciating her logic.

Refocusing on my body, I eased into the stance again, feeling that eerie level of perfect balance settle back in instantly. With slow, careful steps, I started circling around Miss K, keeping my eyes locked onto hers as she mirrored my movements effortlessly.

Moving in this new stance felt bizarrely solid—like my feet were magnetized to the ground.

Each step I took felt heavy, like I was practically stomping, yet somehow my movements were whisper-quiet and impossibly steady. Even as I lifted one foot to move forward, the other felt as firm and stable as concrete beneath me. It was unnaturally comfortable, like I'd been practicing this for years rather than just discovering it mere minutes ago.

Miss K watched carefully, patiently waiting for me to make my move.

Taking a deep breath, I finally lashed out, throwing a quick punch straight toward Miss K.

Immediately, I felt the familiar surge of violent instinct—the impulse to aim for the throat or some similarly deadly spot—but to my relief, the sensation was immediately crushed beneath my newfound control. I could feel the urge desperately clawing at the edges of my mind, but it had no chance against the ironclad hold the Perk had granted me.

Unfortunately, that distraction made my punch clumsy and predictable. Miss K sidestepped it with almost comical ease, smirking as my fist sailed harmlessly past her shoulder.

"Good," she encouraged, clearly pleased by something in what she saw, even if my punch had been utterly pathetic. "Again."

Feeling more confident this time, I went for another quick jab, exhilarated by the sheer freedom I felt now that I wasn't constantly fighting back the murderous urge with every muscle movement.

I wasn't about to win a fight against her, obviously, but at least I wasn't worried about accidentally trying to rip out her windpipe.

Yet despite my newfound control, Miss K still effortlessly dodged my attack, fluidly stepping aside and even grabbing my wrist.

Before I knew it, she'd twisted me around and had me flat on my back on the ground—hard.

Harder than was necessary or she would usually have done.

I blinked up at her in mild surprise, shooting her a confused look.

She just chuckled, shrugging casually. "Don't give me that look. Had to remind you that you're still just a beginner, weird Anima-brain-surgery or not. Besides, considering the way your ego is probably inflating right now with your ridiculous new balance and control, I figure you deserved a little reality check."

I rolled my eyes, but I couldn't stop the small smile forming on my face.

Honestly, she wasn't wrong. At all.

Miss K's expression softened, turning a bit more serious again. "But, jokes aside—how are you feeling? About those... urges, specifically?"

I took a deep breath, mentally checking myself over, then nodded firmly. "Honestly? It feels fully under control now. Like, completely. I don't feel that violent impulse taking over at all anymore... It's like my muscles just follow my actual order, rather than subconsciously going for things I don't want them to."

She visibly relaxed, letting out a relieved sigh. "Thank the Lords... That's *exactly* what I'd hoped to hear."

Her gaze flicked briefly to the door before coming back to me. "Anything else you think we need to cover before we finally head back out there? Any lingering concerns?"

I gave it a moment's thought, then shook my head, feeling strangely at ease. "Nope, I think we're good."

Miss K smiled warmly, stepping back toward the door. "Alright, then let's head back. We've kept everyone waiting way too long already. I'm sure they're probably spinning some *wild* theories by now."

She opened the door, ushering me through it back into the dojo's training hall...