

**The World of Otome Game
is a Second Chance for Broken Swords**

Story Starts

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**Chapter 10.5 -
Of Pre-Mature Story Progressions
and Wagers**

Meltryllis had been having a nice day.

The thought surfaced as she gripped the air-bike's handlebars, feeling the hum of the enchantment core vibrate through her palms. A simple, uncomplicated observation that she held close like a warm stone in winter. Since morning, she'd been at Leon's side—walking the festival grounds, sampling food from the Bartfort booth, watching him negotiate with Lady Atlee in that measured way of his where every word carried precisely the weight he intended. Erica had been there too, quiet and watchful, but the princess had departed for the palace an hour ago, leaving Meltryllis alone with Leon and the others.

Like a date. Almost.

The days when both she and Durga had remained at the territory had been long ones. Months of tending to the viscounty's development, coordinating with Luxion's drones, managing the dungeon harvests—all necessary work, all valuable. But the distance from Leon had ached in a way that went deeper than the sympathetic bond. She understood why he'd chosen to leave them behind.

The face she wore belonged to someone Leon had loved. Someone who suffered for her entire life—tortured, violated, broken—and died before he could save her. Every time Leon looked at Meltryllis, every time his gaze lingered on the fall of her violet hair or the curve of her jaw, she'd seen it. That

flicker. The ghost of Sakura Matou passing behind his eyes like a shadow across the sun.

She and Durga had chosen these faces deliberately. Not to torment him—never that. But to exist before him as living proof that Sakura's likeness could belong to warmth, to laughter, to the present rather than the past. Slowly, painfully, it was working. The flicker came less frequently now.

And then Art and Ria had arrived.

Two new guardian spirits, contracted from the cosmic dungeon's altar. Art with her stoic silence and enormous sword, Ria with her boundless energy and infectious enthusiasm. Neither wore Sakura's face—but someone else's, also cherished, also loved, though the weight was different. Their presence had shifted something in Leon—and that shift was what had allowed her and Durga to accompany him to the academy at last.

She was thankful for that. Genuinely, deeply thankful.

The spectator benches buzzed with conversation as the six riders aligned at the starting marks. Meltryllis caught fragments—odds being called, names she didn't recognise, speculation about whether guardian spirits had an unfair advantage on identical machines. She'd spent the festival talking with other guardian spirits and attendants throughout the day, learning the unspoken rules of their world.

The relationships between guardian spirits and their masters varied enormously depending on rank. Among lower nobles, propriety dictated strict boundaries—male students contracted with male guardian spirits, so female attendants or guardian spirits in female form for male students of lesser houses were frowned upon entirely.

Of course, it was a total reversal for females of the lower houses, where they could parade their male attendants and guardian spirits, and very openly participate in carnal acts in private.

Leon's guardian spirits were all female, and he brought them nonetheless despite the looks.

But higher nobility operated with considerably more... flexibility. Females generally contracted only with female-form spirits, whilst higher-ranked male nobles chose whatever they found comfortable. The rules, as always, bent for those with power.

She knew why Prince Julius and his retinue had contracted predominantly with male guardian spirits. Marie. The blonde girl had wanted—

Meltryllis felt heat crawl up her ears.

Setanta had talked about it. During sparring sessions with Art or Ria, the brash spirit had spoken freely about his nights with Marie, about what the prince's household shared between them. Crude details delivered with casual frankness—Setanta genuinely didn't understand discretion. The other guardian spirits had all heard. They'd all been... curious.

It was pleasurable, Setanta claimed. Natural. Expected, even, among higher nobles.

At least Leon had acknowledged the possibility. He'd asked them for patience. That was enough. For now.

"Melt."

Leon's voice cut through her reverie. She blinked and found him standing beside her bike, a half-helm in his hands. He held two more under his arm—one for Art, one for Ria.

"Here." He fitted the helmet over her head, his fingers brushing her temples as he adjusted the strap. Then his hand moved to the collar of her bodysuit, where the zipper had worked slightly loose during the walk from the dormitory. He tugged it up with businesslike efficiency, his knuckles grazing her collarbone.

The touch lasted perhaps two seconds. Meltryllis's pulse hammered for ten.

He moved to Art next, who accepted her helmet with a single nod. Then Ria, who bounced in her saddle whilst Leon secured the strap beneath her chin.

"Just have fun," Leon said, stepping back. His eyes—one gold, one silver—swept across all three of them with an expression that might have been fondness beneath the usual measured calm. "I don't mind whatever result happens. Good luck."

'Have fun.'

Meltryllis tightened her grip on the handlebars. The enchantment core purred beneath her, responsive and eager. She might not have Art's border patrol experience or Ria's raw aggression, but she'd ridden recreationally enough to understand momentum and balance. And she was a guardian spirit. Her reflexes exceeded anything a normal human rider could match.

The track official raised his flag. Six engines hummed in unison, the sound blending into a single low chord that vibrated in Meltryllis's chest.

The flag dropped.

Fenn launched from the outer mark with textbook precision, his body low and forward, the air-bike surging ahead by half a length before the first turn. Art matched him from the inner position, her acceleration marginally slower but her line cleaner through the curve. The two riders knifed into the first pylon section side by side.

Meltryllis held back. Deliberately.

The first lap was for learning. She could feel it in the way the compact rider beside her—the one with burned knuckles—hadn't committed to full throttle either. He drifted alongside her through the sweeping left-hand turn, his eyes flicking sideways behind his visor. Testing. Measuring. Seeing how she responded to proximity.

She gave him nothing. Maintained her line, kept her speed steady, let the bike carry her through the elevation change that lifted them fifteen metres above

the main straightaway. The track unfolded below—a ribbon of enchanted stone winding through artificial terrain, pylons marking chicanes where riders had to thread between narrow gaps.

Ahead, Art and Fenn fought for the racing line through a tight sequence of pylons. Neither yielded. Their bikes nearly touched, handlebar to handlebar, before Art's superior reflexes let her slot through a gap Fenn hadn't committed to. She emerged half a bike-length ahead.

Ria had found her opponent, too. The cable-armed rider on her outside had pressed in during the first corner, forcing Ria wide. Rather than resist, Ria had let him take the position—then immediately stuck to his rear, drafting in his wake, studying his braking points and turn-in angles.

'Clever girl.'

Meltryllis focused on the burned-knuckle rider. He was smooth—no wasted movement, no dramatic inputs. His bike travelled through each corner as if on rails. She noted his braking zone for the hairpin at the track's far end, the way he shifted his weight fractionally before each direction change.

They completed the first lap in a rough formation: Art leading, Fenn second, the cable-armed rider third with Ria glued to his rear, Meltryllis fourth with burned-knuckles fifth, and the remaining positions shifting between the last riders.

The crowd murmured. No drama yet. No contact. Just six riders circling like wolves, learning each other's teeth.

The second lap started with Fenn making his move.

Through the first corner, he drove his bike hard into Art's space—not quite a ram, but close enough that the threat was undeniable. Art held her ground, her line unwavering, but the pressure forced her to brake a fraction earlier for the pylon section. Fenn exploited the gap, threading his bike through the pylons on a tighter line that Art's defensive position had opened up.

'So that's how they want to play.'

The compact rider made his intentions clear to Meltryllis on the elevation change. As the track rose, he edged across, crowding her toward the outer barrier. His bike drifted into her line with deliberate, measured aggression—not enough for a penalty, but enough to force her choice: brake, or hold and risk contact.

Meltryllis held.

Their fairings kissed. A scrape of composite against composite, a shower of sparks dancing on the wind. The burned-knuckle rider didn't flinch—he leaned harder, pressing his advantage. Meltryllis felt the vibration travel through her handlebars, the bike protesting the lateral force.

She dropped her inside shoulder, shifted her weight, and let the bike's nose dive beneath his line as the elevation crested. For an instant she was lower than him—below the normal racing plane—and then the track plunged downward and she was simply faster, gravity and positioning combining to slingshot her ahead.

Behind her, Ria had grown tired of patience.

The golden-haired spirit erupted from her draft position with a burst of acceleration that caught the cable-armed rider mid-corner. She dove inside, her knee nearly grazing the pylon marker, the air-bike tilting at an angle that should have been impossible. The cable-armed rider swerved to avoid contact, losing momentum, losing position.

Ria roared past him with a whoop that carried even over the engine noise.

But the cable-armed rider recovered fast. He swung wide, found clean air, and hammered back alongside Ria through the long sweeping curve. The two of them battled side by side, neither willing to concede, their bikes so close that Meltryllis could see sparks where their foot pegs traded paint.

Art and Fenn fought ahead—the pylon section had become a war of centimetres. Fenn blocked the racing line through each gap, forcing Art to take wider, slower approaches. His positioning was excellent, his awareness of her bike's nose impeccable. Every time Art found a gap, Fenn closed it.

Until Art stopped looking for gaps and made one.

Through the final chicane before the start-finish straight, Art braked impossibly late. Her bike's nose drove alongside Fenn's rear, and rather than yield, she held her position through the corner. Fenn's options narrowed to two: move aside or collide. He moved—barely—and Art surged through on the inside, reclaiming the lead as the lap ended.

The crowd had found its voice. Cheers erupted from the benches, mixed with groans from those who'd backed Clarice's team.

The final lap started violently.

Fenn threw his bike at Art's position before the first corner even arrived. No subtlety now—he drove straight for the inside line, forcing Art to respond or be pushed off the track. Art responded by dropping back half a length, then immediately swinging to Fenn's outside, using the wider arc to carry more speed through the turn's exit.

But the compact rider was waiting.

He'd positioned himself in the gap Art vacated—deliberately sacrificing his own battle with Meltryllis to block Art's preferred line through the pylon section. A team move. Clarice's riders had planned this.

Art found herself boxed. Fenn ahead, burned-knuckles beside, the pylons compressing the available space. She couldn't brake without losing position catastrophically. She couldn't go inside—the pylons were there. Outside meant the compact rider's wall of a body.

"Ria!" Meltryllis called through the wind.

Ria didn't need to be told twice. The golden spirit hammered forward from her fourth-place position, her bike screaming as she pushed the enchantment core past recommended output. She arrived at the pylon section like a thrown spear, driving her nose directly into the burned-knuckle rider's rear quarter.

Not quite contact. Not quite clean either.

The compact rider twitched—an instinctive flinch, a fractional deviation from his blocking line. Half a bike-width of space opened between him and the pylon.

Art took it.

Her bike threaded through the gap with millimetre precision, fairing almost brushing the pylon marker. She emerged behind Fenn but free, the box broken. Ria peeled away from the compact rider, having sacrificed her own position to free her teammate.

'My turn.'

Meltryllis had been biding. Three laps of observation had given her every braking point, every line preference, every unconscious tell. The cable-armed rider ahead of her favoured early braking into the hairpin—consistent, predictable, safe. On the final lap, safe was a weakness.

She braked late. Later than comfortable. Later than wise. The hairpin rushed at her and she tipped the bike into the turn with her knee skimming the track surface, the enchantment core groaning under lateral load. The cable-armed rider's startled flinch sent him wide and gave her the inside line.

She emerged ahead. Fourth place now, behind Fenn, Art, and the compact rider.

The elevation section approached. Meltryllis could see Fenn pulling away from Art—the redhead had found a final reserve of speed, his bike eating metres with each second. Behind Meltryllis, Ria fought to recover from her blocking sacrifice, tangling with the cable-armed rider through the chicane.

Fenn crossed the line first.

Three points for Clarice's team. The red-headed rider punched the air, decelerating into the cool-down zone.

Art was second. Two points for Leon's team. The stoic spirit showed no reaction, simply easing her bike across the line with mechanical precision.

Meltryllis pushed. The burned-knuckle rider was beside her—right there—their bikes level through the final chicane. He blocked inside. She went outside. He drifted wide to cover. She braked hard and switched inside.

But he was too good. Too experienced. His recovery was instant, his blocking angle perfect.

Ria appeared from nowhere.

The golden spirit's bike surged up from behind, and instead of going for the line herself, she drove straight at the compact rider's outside. Forced him to acknowledge her existence. Forced him to protect his flank for a single heartbeat.

Meltryllis threaded through the inside.

She crossed the line third. One point for Leon's team.

The compact rider took fourth—no points. Ria and the cable-armed rider followed, irrelevant to the scoring.

The official's voice boomed across the track: "End of regulation—Team Atlee: three points! Team Bartfort: three points! We have a tie!"

The crowd erupted. Voices rose in a wave of excitement, stamping feet and clapping hands creating a percussive roar that shook the barrier railings. Betting chits waved in the air as spectators argued and recalculated.

"Additional lap!" the official declared. "Same rules apply!"

The six bikes surged forward without waiting for the echo to fade. Meltryllis's arms burned from the sustained effort, but the enchantment core still hummed strong beneath her. She rolled her shoulders, shook the tension from her wrists.

Art caught her eye. A fractional nod.

Ria grinned beneath her visor—feral, hungry.

This time, Ria didn't hold anything in reserve. She launched forward out of the first curve as if fired from a cannon, her bike rocketing ahead of the field with startling acceleration. Fenn reacted—surging after her—but Ria had committed everything to the opening burst.

The first corner arrived, and Ria was three lengths clear. Her line through the pylon section was ragged, imperfect, carrying too much speed for the tight gaps, but she held it through sheer reflexes, the bike's tail kicking sideways as she muscled it through each direction change.

Behind her, Fenn led the pursuit. Art and the compact rider fought for third, their bikes scraping paint through the elevation section with metallic shrieks. Meltryllis settled into fifth, the cable-armed rider behind her, both of them watching the chaos unfold ahead.

The hairpin. Ria took it wide—too wide—and Fenn closed the gap to a single length. But Ria's exit speed was higher, the wider arc carrying more momentum, and the gap reopened through the following straight.

Through the chicane, Ria's lead stretched. She crossed the line first.

Three points for Leon's team.

Now the maths shifted. If both of Clarice's remaining riders finished ahead of Art and Meltryllis, the tie held. If even one of them fell behind, Leon's team won.

Fenn took second. Two points for Clarice.

Art fought the compact rider through the final section. His blocking was relentless—every gap closed, every line denied. Art's frustration showed in her riding for the first time, her inputs growing sharper, more aggressive.

But the compact rider held. He crossed third. One point for Clarice.

Art took fourth. No points.

Leon's team: three. Clarice's team: three.

"Tied once more!" The official's voice cracked with excitement. "Ladies and gentlemen, we go again!"

The energy from the crowd had transformed into something physical—a wall of sound that pressed against Meltryllis's chest as she settled back onto the starting mark. Spectators stood now, pressed against the barriers, their faces alight with the feverish joy of unexpected drama.

Clarice's team had adjusted. Meltryllis could see it in how they positioned at the line—Fenn on the inside, the compact rider directly beside Art, the cable-armed rider slotted next to Ria. They'd matched up deliberately, committing to a man-marking strategy rather than pure racing.

"They'll mark you both again," Meltryllis said quietly, pitched beneath the crowd's roar.

Art nodded once.

Ria's grin hadn't faded. "Then break the marks."

"No." Art's voice was flat, certain. "Let them mark us. Melt takes first."

The logic was brutal and immediate. If Clarice's riders committed two bodies to containing Art and Ria, only Fenn remained free to race. Meltryllis against Fenn, one-on-one, with no interference.

But Fenn was better. Faster over a single lap, more experienced, his racecraft honed across two professional seasons.

"I'll handle Fenn," Ria said. "Art, you take the marks. Melt—"

"Race," Art finished.

The flag dropped.

Fenn surged forward. Meltryllis matched him—bar to bar off the line, her bike screaming alongside his. The first corner arrived and they were level, two machines travelling in perfect parallel through the turn.

Behind them, Art deliberately slowed. The compact rider and cable-armed rider responded instantly, converging on her position—then hesitated. Art wasn't meant to be both their marks; Ria was still among them, her bike weaving through the formation with unpredictable aggression.

Confusion. A moment's hesitation.

Ria capitalised. She drove her bike directly at Fenn's rear, closing the distance with explosive acceleration. Fenn sensed her approach—checked his mirror—and drifted right to block.

Meltryllis went left.

The pylon section opened before her. Empty track. Clean air. She committed everything, threading the pylons on a line that scraped her knees against the markers, trusting muscle memory honed over the preceding laps.

She emerged ahead. Half a length on Fenn, who had lost momentum covering Ria's fake.

The elevation section rose. Meltryllis climbed, her bike's nose pointed at the sky, the enchantment core straining at maximum output. Behind her, Fenn recovered—the gap stopped growing. The redhead was too skilled, too fast, too experienced to lose from a single mistake.

The hairpin approached. Meltryllis braked early—safe, controlled—and Fenn arrived on her outside, his bike level with hers through the turn. They exited together, side by side, the final chicane ahead.

Fenn moved inside. Meltryllis covered. He switched outside. She drifted with him. The chicane compressed the track to a single bike's width, and both of them drove for the gap simultaneously.

Contact.

Fairing against fairing, the bikes grinding together through the turn. Meltryllis felt the vibration in her teeth, the bike's handling destabilising as Fenn's mass pressed against her machine. He was heavier. Stronger. The physics favoured him.

She gave ground. A fraction—enough for Fenn to slot ahead through the gap. He emerged from the chicane with his nose in front, a quarter-length of lead, the finish line rushing toward them.

Meltryllis tucked low. Lower than racing posture allowed. Her chin touched the instrument panel, her body compressed against the bike's frame, reducing drag by the barest margin.

Not enough.

Fenn crossed first. Three points for Clarice's team. His fist rose in triumph as the bike decelerated.

Meltryllis crossed second. Two points for Leon's team. Less than an arm's breadth behind.

Behind them, the battle for third had become apocalyptic. Art had broken free from the marks—both of Clarice's remaining riders scrambling to contain Ria instead, who had driven straight through their blocking line—she simply didn't care about paint damage. The three of them crossed the line in a cluster—

The compact rider edged Ria by less than a handlebar's width. Art surged through behind them.

Third: compact rider. One point for Clarice.

Fourth: Ria. No points. Fifth: Art. No points.

"Final result!" The official's voice cut through the crowd's thunder. "Team Atlee—four! Team Bartfort—two! Your winner—Team Atlee!"

The spectator benches exploded. Cheers, groans, chits exchanged, hands shaken. Clarice's sponsored riders circled the cool-down zone with raised fists, Fenn pulling alongside the compact rider and cable-armed man for a three-abreast victory lap.

Meltryllis brought her bike to a halt at the barrier. Her hands trembled on the handlebars—adrenaline, exertion, the ghost of that final chicane still rattling in her bones. Second place. An arm's breadth from victory.

Art pulled up beside her, silent. Ria arrived a moment later, her grin replaced by something more complicated—frustration warring with exhilaration.

"That was—" Ria began.

"Fun," Art said quietly.

Meltryllis looked at them both. Then back at Leon, who stood at the barrier with his arms folded, watching all three of them with an expression that held no disappointment whatsoever.

'Just have fun.'

She pulled off her helmet, let her violet hair tumble free, and found that she was smiling.

Clarice appeared at Leon's side, her posture carrying the satisfaction of a wager won. She extended her hand; Leon took it with good grace.

"Your spirits ride well," Clarice said. "Fenn told me he nearly lost."

"Nearly isn't quite enough, apparently." Leon's tone held dry amusement rather than any sting.

"I believe you owe me dinner, Lord Bartfort."

Leon just shook his head and sighed.

"I believe I do, Lady Atlee. And what is the wish?"

"I shall tell you during said dinner."

Meltryllis dismounted, swinging her leg over the saddle with less grace than she'd have preferred—her muscles protested after the sustained effort. Art and Ria flanked her as they walked back toward the barrier where Leon waited. The crowd still buzzed, conversations animated, betting chits still changing hands in the stands above.

It had been a nice day. Despite the loss—or perhaps because of it, because the loss meant nothing when measured against the warmth of being here, at Leon's side, in the sun, alive and present and wanted.

A nice day.

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End

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