

The living space smelled faintly of cedar and whatever Mai had scorched in the skillet earlier — something that had started as dinner and ended as a dare. Lights were low, just the one floor lamp with its crooked shade and the blue-white flicker bleeding from the screen. The couch, long enough only because Shammy had once stared at it until the shop delivered a replacement that could actually accommodate her without folding her knees to her chin, now held all three in comfortable collapse.

Ace lay stretched along the length of it like a blade someone had left out to air-dry, head pillowed on Mai's thigh, socked feet hooked over the far armrest. One violet eye half-open, the other lazily tracking the ceiling crack that had appeared after last month's tremor and which none of them had bothered to fix. Mai sat upright enough to be useful, silver hair loose and catching the TV glow, one hand idly tracing the short uneven strands at Ace's nape. Shammy occupied the opposite end, all 195 cm of her somehow coiled without crowding, bare feet tucked under her, remote balanced on the ridge of her knee like it might explode if handled wrong.

Mai exhaled through her nose. "If it's another cooking show I'm vetoing with prejudice. My retinas still haven't recovered from the flaming banana incident."

Ace made a small sound that might have been agreement, might have been sleep. "Mhm."

Shammy's fingers flexed around the remote. The air around her wrist gave off the faintest static pop, like a match struck underwater. "I am merely exploring the electromagnetic layer," she said, voice low and thoughtful, the way she always sounded right before something interesting happened. Click. Click. Click. A nature documentary, a late-night auction, a man yelling about knives. Then—

Arena lights slammed the room gold and red. Crowd roar rolled out of the speakers like distant thunder. A folding chair met a spine with a crack that made the subwoofer rattle the coffee table. Shammy's thumb froze mid-press. Her hair — silver-white with that faint ionized sheen — lifted half an inch, strands drifting upward as if the room had suddenly remembered it contained weather.

"They are striking each other with folding furniture," she observed, calm but accelerating, the way wind picks up before rain decides to commit. "Is this ritual combat or performance theater? Why does the striped official permit the metal chair? And that one — the painted face — is he allowed to exist outside the rules?"

Ace's head lifted one vertebra at a time. Compact body uncoiling without hurry. Violet eyes narrowed at the screen the way they narrowed at anything that felt like an old argument she was secretly fond of. A small smirk tugged one corner of her mouth. "Kayfabe."

Shammy tilted her head. The motion sent a soft pressure drop across the couch, warm air sliding over Ace's shoulders.

"Translate."

"Everybody knows it's fake," Ace said. "Nobody says it while the lights are on. Chair's legal because the ref's pretending not to see. Story reason."

Mai's silver brow arched without the rest of her face moving. She kept stroking the back of Ace's neck, slow and deliberate. "Story reason. Adorable. Next you'll tell her the ropes are made of trust and broken dreams."

On screen the painted-face wrestler — face half white, half rage — grabbed the chair again and brought it down like punctuation. The crowd lost its collective mind. Shammy leaned forward, elbows on knees, somehow still managing to keep her long frame from eclipsing the smaller two. Her electric-

blue eyes were wide, fascinated, the same expression she wore the first time she'd watched rain hit a window and realized water could fall sideways if the wind argued hard enough.

"Why is the large man in the mask shouting in Spanish while the smaller one sells the pain so convincingly?" she asked. "Is the selling compulsory? Can I learn it? Also the crowd chants numbers — is that a countdown to structural collapse or merely enthusiasm?"

Ace sat up properly now, cross-legged, elbows on her own knees, mirroring Shammy's posture in miniature. "Selling is art," she said. Dry, flat, like she was reading specs on a blade she already owned. "You take the bump like it hurts because the story needs it. Crowd's counting because the ref's slow counting to three. And yeah. You could learn it. You'd break the ring."

Shammy's smile arrived slow, the kind that made the overhead light flicker once in sympathy. "I would be gentle." "Doubt it," Ace answered, but the violet in her eyes had gone prismatic at the edges, the way it did when something amused her enough to risk a fracture.

Mai shifted, just enough to let Ace settle back against her without losing contact. She sipped from the glass she'd been nursing — something clear and cold that caught the TV glare. "Gentle is not in your dictionary, atmospheric. Ace is just trying to keep her childhood intact. Don't let her fool you — she owns three replica belts she pretends are paperweights."

Ace's hand found Mai's wrist, thumb brushing the pulse point once, twice. Not a correction. Just acknowledgment. "I have restraint," she said. "I haven't suplexed either of you tonight."

Shammy's static crackled brighter, a soft ozone hum that made the loose strands of Mai's hair lift. "Yet. The night is young. Shall I fetch the coffee table? It looks regulation size."

Mai's voice dropped into that velvet-knife register she saved for maximum effect. "Do it and I'm filing for structural divorce on grounds of atmospheric treason."

"I'd watch that match," Ace said immediately, deadpan, eyes never leaving the screen where a high flyer was measuring the distance to the top rope like a physicist calculating terminal velocity.

The dive came. Body folded mid-air, perfect arc, sickening landing. Shammy actually drew a short breath — not dramatic, just a small compression of atmosphere that made the room feel momentarily thinner, then richer. "He just folded himself in half voluntarily. Is there insurance for that? Does the Federation pay medical or is it part of the... kayfabe honor code?"

"They pay," Ace answered. Short laugh, once, like a blade flicking out and back. "And he'll do it again next week. That's the point."

Mai turned her head, silver eyes catching Shammy's static first, then Ace's fracture glint. She set her glass down with deliberate care. "Point being, our depth vector here used to practice those dives off the backyard shed until I threatened to weld the ladder shut. Now she explains it like she invented restraint."

Ace's shoulders moved in what might have been a shrug. Her hand stayed on Mai's wrist. "Shed was regulation height. Approximately."

Shammy's laugh rolled low, pressure wave gentle enough not to rattle the snacks. "Approximately. I admire the precision of your denial." She gestured at the screen with the remote like a conductor indicating a difficult passage. "And the one with the beard and the tattoos — he is clearly enjoying the

crowd's disapproval. Is that... sustainable? The hatred? Or does it require periodic recalibration?"

Ace considered. "Sustainable until the next heel turn. Then he'll be the good guy and everyone will cheer and pretend they never booed."

Mai leaned sideways, resting her chin lightly on top of Ace's head for a moment, silver hair spilling forward. "You're both hopeless. Ace is defending ritualized violence with the same tone she uses for knife maintenance. Shammy is treating it like a weather system that needs monitoring. I'm surrounded by enthusiasts."

"Not violence," Ace corrected, quiet. "Timing. You miss the timing, the whole thing collapses."

Shammy tilted her head the other direction, hair drifting across her shoulder like slow lightning. "Timing. Like when the pressure front meets the cold air and decides whether to become a storm or just a conversation." She pointed again. "That one just kicked the other one in the face and the crowd is singing his name. Is the face-kicking also compulsory?"

"Optional but highly encouraged," Ace said. "Especially if the boots are new."

Mai snorted. "You two are going to make me explain to the building manager why the couch now smells like ozone and nostalgia. Ace, stop looking at the top rope like you're mentally measuring it against our ceiling. Shammy, stop calculating wind resistance for the next suplex. I'm trying to have a low-stakes evening."

Shammy's expression softened, but the static stayed, warm now, like the air right before thunder decides to stay polite. "Low-stakes is novel. I approve. But the large man in the mask is now climbing the ropes while carrying another man. This violates several laws of mass and narrative."

Ace's violet eyes tracked the spot. "Powerbomb incoming. Watch the sell."

The move landed. Crowd erupted. Shammy's eyes widened fractionally — enough that the room's humidity shifted, a soft warmth blooming against Ace's back and Mai's side. "The smaller one is selling the pain like his spine filed a complaint in triplicate. Beautiful. I want to learn the vocabulary. 'Bump.' 'Sell.' 'No-sell.' Is there a dictionary? Can we acquire one?"

Mai's fingers found the nape of Shammy's neck — reachable only because Shammy had leaned in — and gave a single teasing press. "We are not acquiring a wrestling glossary. Ace already mutters 'Vince would never allow this' in her sleep. We do not need to feed the obsession."

"I don't mutter," Ace said.

"You do," Mai and Shammy answered at the same time, then glanced at each other and shared the small, synchronized smirk that always left Ace pretending to be annoyed while her fracture lines glowed softer.

On screen the match bled into a backstage segment — heated words, shoving, the promise of next week. Shammy watched with the focus she usually reserved for incoming pressure systems. "They are negotiating the next conflict using only volume and proximity. No structural analysis. No contingency mapping. How do they survive without you, Mai?"

Mai's laugh was quiet, fond. "They don't. That's why it's theater. Real life requires the silver-eyed one to prevent spontaneous combustion."

Ace shifted, turning enough to rest her temple against Shammy's arm — the height difference making it feel like leaning against a warm cliff. "You'd be terrifying in the ring. One atmospheric drop and half the roster would tap from sheer politeness."

"I would be fair," Shammy said, voice like distant thunder wrapped in velvet. "I would allow three chair shots before equalizing."

"Generous," Ace deadpanned.

Mai reached across, stole the remote, clicked the volume down half a notch so the crowd became a pleasant hum instead of a roar. "Fair. Generous. You two are already writing the script for Shammy vs. The World and I'm the only one who remembers we have no ring and no audience except each other."

Shammy's hand found Mai's free one, long fingers threading carefully, mindful of the difference in scale. The static settled into a low, comfortable frequency that made the lamp bulb glow just a shade warmer. "Audience of two is sufficient. Or three, if Ace stops pretending she is not cataloguing every move for future reference."

Ace's smirk returned, small and sharp. "I'm not cataloguing. I'm appreciating craft."

"Appreciating craft," Mai echoed, voice dripping mock solemnity. "That's what we're calling the way your foot is twitching like it wants to try that moonsault off the back of the couch."

"My foot has impulse control," Ace said. Then, after a beat: "Mostly."

The commercial break hit — loud music, brighter colors, something selling energy drinks to people who clearly needed sleep. Shammy lowered the remote to the cushion between her thigh and Mai's knee. She settled back, spine straightening then deliberately softening so her shoulders framed both smaller women without enclosing them. One arm draped along the couch back, fingertips brushing Ace's uneven hair, the other hand still loosely holding Mai's. The air pressure in the room eased into something perfectly balanced — not still, just survivable.

"This is absurd," Shammy said quietly, the words carrying no judgment, only warm observation. "I approve. Continue the channel exploration tomorrow?"

Ace's eyes had drifted half-closed again, but her voice stayed present. "Only if you stop asking about the pyro budget. And the insurance. And whether the ropes are load-bearing."

Mai leaned into the shared space, silver-blue eyes catching both of them in turn. Her free hand found Ace's, completing the quiet triangle. "Budget and kayfabe and chair legality. You two are hopeless. But the couch stays warm, so I allow it."

Shammy's static softened to a barely-there hum, the kind that felt like breathing. Ace's shoulders dropped another fraction, the compact frame finally surrendering its usual readiness. Mai's thumb traced small circles over the back of Ace's hand, then Shammy's wrist — mapping, always mapping, but gently.

On the TV the commercials ended. Another match queued up — different wrestlers, same glorious nonsense. Shammy's hair settled. Ace's violet undertone quieted. Mai's silver gaze held steady, amused and anchored.

The three of them stayed exactly where they were, tangled without urgency, breathing patterns slowly syncing to the distant roar of a crowd that would never know it had three very dangerous, very tired, very fond viewers who had decided tonight the only stakes were how long they could make the absurdity last.

Shammy spoke once more, almost under her breath, the words meant for the room rather than the screen. "Next week they will do it again. Different costumes. Same chairs. Same story that everyone already knows the ending of." Ace's reply came without opening her eyes. "Yeah. And we'll watch."

Mai smiled against Ace's hair. "Of course we will. Someone has to keep the atmospheric one from adopting the entire roster as a weather project."

The static answered with a single, affectionate pop.

The match resumed. None of them moved to change the channel.

The night stretched, lazy and warm and exactly survivable — the way only nights like this could be when the triad had already learned every harder way to stay intact.

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