

Chapter 76 - Transparent

Massaging my cheeks gently, I found myself sitting inside Miss K's office once more.

She was leaning her back on her desk, staring at me with an intensity that made me feel like a kid caught sneaking out after curfew. It was obvious this whole situation had something to do with the Anima sprites I saw swirling around the dojo and the mini-tornado of them around Miss K herself, but I felt totally out of my depth—I had just barely begun to scratch the surface of what Anima even was.

There was no way I could explain it coherently to someone as sharp as Miss K.

“So, you got something to report to me, my dearest?” she asked in a sickly sweet tone, her expectant look making it clear she wasn't buying any nonsense.

Internally groaning, I racked my brain for an answer but came up empty.

It wasn't that I wanted to keep the whole Anima thing a secret, but I genuinely didn't know what I was even dealing *with*. This was completely uncharted territory for me—none of this magic-y stuff had ever been in the game, as far as I knew.

“Ehh...” I stalled, trying to buy some more time for my brain to come up with something smart to say. Ultimately, I decided to go with the flow and be somewhat open—Miss K was the only person I'd confided in about the System so far.

There was no point in backtracking on whether or not I trusted her now.

“I can see... colours? Like strange specks of colours floating around. There were a ton of them inside the dojo, and there's also quite a lot of them just... swirling around you. What are they?”

I figured if I was already spilling the beans, I might as well try to squeeze some info out of her too.

A toothy, predatory grin slowly spread across Miss K's face as she looked down at me, making me squirm in the chair and almost forget about the sting in my cheeks.

“You can see Anima, huh?” She asked, more rhetorical than anything. “You are one strange girl, aren't you? Just a few days ago, you seemed completely unaware of Anima as a whole; not even feeling the massive suffusion of life sprites in the arena you fought in. Yet now you're capable of seeing them? Is this part of your unique connection? Be honest with me, Sera. Remember, we have a deal.”

Her insistence on our deal was surprisingly forceful, but I got where she was coming from.

A few days ago, I was clueless about Anima, but now I had apparently hit some significant milestone if Mr. Shori's reaction was anything to go by.

The real question was: How much did I want to divulge?

Miss K already knew a bit about the System in my head, sure, but that didn't mean I could trust her completely. She'd held up her end of the bargain so far, but it had only been a few days—barely enough time for her to plan any kind of betrayal if that was her intention to begin with.

It might've been paranoid, but I really didn't want to end up in some lab for the rest of my (second) life.

So I only really had two choices, as far as I could see: Either I threw Mr. Shori under the bus, potentially risking him getting beat up or killed by the magic police—if those even existed—or I fessed up and explained more about the System inside my head, potentially risking a permanent lab assignment.

'Fuck me... I should've asked Mr. Shori how to turn this shit off and pretend I never heard about Anima in the first place,' I thought ruefully, before taking a deep breath and making a decision.

"Yes, it's part of that connection; somehow."

There was no way in hell I would risk Mr. Shori.

I didn't know if there was such a thing as magic police or if Miss K's faction, if there were any, was somehow opposed to Mr. Shori's, but I refused to risk it. I owed the man more than I could possibly repay, so the least I could do was keep my mouth shut and take it on the chin.

"I only realised that this 'Anima' was a thing a few days ago, and then, a few hours ago, my vision suddenly exploded. The connection inside my head gave me a rough rundown of what Anima might be, but I barely understood anything. Now I can see these specks—ehhh, *sprites*, I guess. They're absolutely everywhere and I can't seem to turn it off."

I did my best to stick to the truth, even though I was holding back quite a bit of information.

Miss K had already proven way too perceptive for me to try lying to her. I was nowhere near skilled enough at [Deception] to consider that a good idea.

The best deception I could muster was keeping as much intel to myself as I could while not openly lying.

Miss K's eyes narrowed, but she nodded slowly before asking the worst possible question, "Who taught you?"

I tensed up involuntarily, despite my Ego's best efforts to keep me calm.

There was no way I could lie and say I taught myself. Even if I knew what Anima actually really was, it didn't seem like something a random 15-year-old could just stumble across by themselves.

'I could always blame it on the System,' I thought, desperately trying to find a way out without causing trouble for Mr. Shori. *'But that could cause its own issues... Damn it! Maybe I could—'*

"Alright, fine," Miss K's voice interrupted my frantic thoughts. "No need to tell me. I can see it's causing undue stress. Just remember, Sera, I'm *not* your enemy. We have a deal, and I intend to keep it."

A wave of relief washed over me, thoroughly surprised at her level of understanding and kindness to allow me to leave Mr. Shori out of it.

"The deal doesn't involve divulging all your secrets, so I won't be mad at you for keeping it to yourself," she continued, gently cupping my face in both hands and directing my eyes to hers. "But make no mistake, Sera: Anima is a *dangerous* thing to toy with. Whoever is teaching you, don't blindly trust them. If the wrong people find out about your apparent massive aptitude for it, there will be more trouble than you ever thought possible."

My eyes widened at her candid warning, and I nodded desperately, which finally prompted her to let go of my face.

Unlike the earlier cheek-pulling, this time my cheeks didn't hurt but felt strangely nice. Her hands had been surprisingly soft and gentle, almost erasing the earlier pain from my body's memory.

"That whole thing does bring up a lot of additional questions and things we'll both have to consider going forward," Miss K said, breathing out a big sigh. She clearly felt a sense of responsibility to keep me safe to some degree—something I was very thankful for.

"First and foremost, this actually accelerates your training regimen quite a lot. You see, Anima *is* technically part of the curriculum here, but only for students who have mastered the first five steps already. You're skipping the line quite heavily to some degree here, and we'll have to account for that."

I was about to interject and say I wouldn't mind just going with the normal training regimen like everyone else, but Miss K held up her hand before I could even form the words, as if she could read my very thoughts.

"Don't try to tell me you'll go with the normal route; that's not possible. Once the genie's out of the bottle, you can't put it back in. Now that you've unlocked your body's attunement to Anima, it will naturally start interacting with it, whether you want it to or not. The dojo is set up to make attunement easier—the life sprites you've seen in all the coloured training areas—but even without this setup, you'd still experience a different outcome than usual, simply because you've attuned already."

My confused look seemed to strike a chord in Miss K, and she laughed briefly before continuing to explain.

"What I'm saying is this, Sera: You're an Anima practitioner now, whether you want to be or not. That means we'll have to teach you how to work with the Anima around you, otherwise it will hamper your growth. Your body and mind will continuously try to fight it if you don't. Think

of it like a strong gust of wind: You can either fight against it and move slowly or move with it and accelerate your steps, but you can't simply ignore it."

Pushing herself back to a standing position with a simple flex of her legs, Miss K towered over me for a moment, mustering me intently, before finally stepping past me toward the door leading back into the dojo itself.

"For today, we'll do things by the book, but starting next session, I'll have some extra exercises and extra-curricular training for you. Keep the whole Anima thing on the down-low and don't let anyone know about it. We clear on that, Sera?"

Her words were hard and forceful, underlining the importance of what she was asking from me.

"Yes, Ma'am. I didn't intend on telling anyone anything anyway, but I'll definitely promise it, too," I replied honestly and earnestly. Miss K seemed willing enough to keep my secrets for now, so there was no reason to deny her request; especially because it already aligned with my preferences anyway.

"Wonderful. Now let's get back and get the session started before the rest of your group starts burning down the dojo," she said with a mischievous smirk, turning to leave the office.

"Ah, eh...!" I started, catching her just before she opened the door. She turned back toward me with a questioning look on her face.

"How... How do I turn off this colour vision thing? It's going to be exceedingly difficult to keep this hidden if I can't even see any of the other people in my group because of all the life sprites in the training room."

Miss K looked momentarily taken aback, then burst into a full-on belly laugh, leaving me standing there, confused. I hadn't thought the question was that funny, but apparently, it was.

"That's fucking great," she finally managed to squeeze out between bouts of laughter. "You're absolutely right, of course. You can't really function properly when you can't see. Don't mind me laughing here; it's just that your entire path to get here is so *thoroughly* backwards and nonsensical that it somehow just makes perfect sense for you. From what I know about you so far, you seem to manage to get in over your head quite readily."

I wanted to protest, but on second thought, I couldn't exactly deny it.

I didn't know the "proper path" for learning about Anima, but I definitely hadn't followed it. The System had sprung it on me like a mousetrap.

Calming herself down enough to wear a content grin, Miss K stepped away from the door.

"Now, let's see if we can't get you your vision back, shall we? First, however you learned to attune to Anima, I hope it came with some sort of channelling, because otherwise we're in a bit of a bind."

My nodding prompted a sigh of relief from her.

“Great, at least *something* went the proper way. I can work with that. So, try channelling however you learned to channel your Anima, but focus it on your eyes instead of whatever you were taught to do.”

I stared at her for a few seconds, trying to parse what she wanted me to do exactly, then assumed my rudimentary stance I’d learned from Mr. Shori.

Miss K raised an eyebrow almost immediately as I started drawing the sigils with my fingers. The moment I began channelling whatever Anima I could grasp, her surprised voice broke my concentration.

“Wait, wait, wait. Stop right there, Sera!”

“Ahh...What did I do? Is everything alright?” I asked, worried I’d done something seriously wrong.

I had never really channelled Anima without Mr. Shori’s supervision, so there was a pretty good chance I might have messed something up, even if my System-granted muscle memory and knowledge seemed content with what I’d done just now.

“What are you doing with your hands? Are... Are you *drawing sigils*, Sera?” Miss K asked, her voice a mix of utter disbelief and confusion.

“I... Ehh... Maybe?” I answered, uncertain about what exactly it was that I was doing. The knowledge downloads hadn’t gone in-depth on this whole “drawing sigils” thing, so I wasn’t sure if that’s what I was actually doing.

“It’s how I was taught to use Anima. Isn’t that what you told me to do?”

Her flabbergasted expression spoke volumes, and I cringed internally for once again stepping right into a minefield.

“Who in the ever-loving fuck taught you about Anima?! Who is this absolute moron that teaches sigil drawing before explaining how to turn off the Anima vision?!” Miss K suddenly erupted, throwing her arms up in exasperation—something thoroughly out of character for the usually stoic and playful woman I knew.

“Fuck me... Alright, let’s try this differently then; but we have to hurry,” she added after a deep sigh, stepping close and cupping my face once again.

As she drew her face closer to mine and I immediately felt heat rise rapidly to my head; her smooth, olive skin and supple lips drawing my eyes without much recourse.

“Ahhh...” I tried to speak, but she held my cheeks firmly, making it more of a strange mumble.

I tried to wrestle out of her grip listlessly, feeling thoroughly strange about the whole situation, but stopped immediately when she briefly squeezed my head.

“Look in my eyes, Sera. Focus on them.”

I felt her breath way too close to my own mouth and nose, a shiver running down my spine and belly. Her eyes, a captivating mix of brown and yellow, seemed to pierce right into my soul, making it nearly impossible to look away.

'Holy shit, get your shit together, Sera! She's your teacher and she's just helping! Focus, girl. Focus!' I kept telling myself, causing my Ego Attribute to finally kick in and calm down my body somewhat.

The warmth of her touch and the closeness of her presence made my heart race, but I tried to concentrate on her words and follow her instructions—this wasn't the time to wonder about what the actual fuck was going on with me.

"Now, channel your Anima and focus it on your eyes, just like I said. Forget about the sigils. Just draw the Anima around you into your eyes. Trust me, this will work."

As I started to focus, trying my best to follow her instructions, I could've sworn I heard her whisper "...I hope," but I decided to ignore it.

Channelling Anima without the exact setup that Mr. Shori had taught me, including the sigils—which was what they were apparently called based on Miss K's insistence—proved to be exceedingly difficult.

At first, I wasn't sure what to do except stare into my Sensei's mesmerising eyes as she had ordered. But when my thoughts drifted to more unproductive places and my Ego Attribute had to rein them back in forcefully, I realised it wasn't going to work without more effort on my part.

Tapping into the knowledge and muscle memory I had gained from both the Anima and [\[Anima Razor\]](#) downloads, I tried to find the specific sections that dealt with channelling the energy itself, rather than using it.

Surprisingly enough, it didn't take long.

The System's knowledge downloads had left behind an almost instinctual library that would immediately provide what I was looking for with the right prodding.

"Channelling" seemed to be the right keyword.

The knowledge inside my head sprang forth like a newly tapped oil well. Immediately, I felt my mind focus in a slightly different way, recognizing small bouts of energy floating around me like a strange sort of sixth sense. Focusing on my eyes and, in turn, on Miss K's eyes right in front of my own, I tried channelling whatever this strange sixth sense was telling me existed.

At first, nothing happened, but then, slowly but surely, I saw small, blue-coloured sprites leave Miss K's eyes and gently float toward my own. I instinctively tried to pull away, to protect my eyes from being hit, but her grip on my face was ironclad, allowing not even a millimetre of movement.

"Keep your eyes open, it's working," Miss K whispered.

A certain part of me couldn't help but think that her husky whisper-voice was very nice. Ignoring that part as best I could, I tried my best to force my eyes to stay open as more and more blue sprites floated towards me from my Sensei's eyes.

It was an odd phenomenon, to say the least.

Having something get closer and closer to your eyes while you try to force them to stay open, with every fibre in your body screaming at you to close them to protect yourself... It was not unlike using contacts or eye drops, except there was very clearly some kind of colour involved and no optometrist to reassure me that it wasn't unhealthy.

I really hoped that Anima sprites didn't include microplastics.

I just had to trust that Miss K knew what she was talking about and hope that the strange blue sprites didn't cause any lasting damage as they started accumulating on my eyeballs.

The strangest part, however, was that I didn't actually physically feel the sprites as they started touching my eyeballs.

I could sense them with that strange sixth sense that I was using to channel the Anima, but my eyes didn't sting, nor did I feel the need to rub them or get rid of something inside of them.

It was like the sprites simply didn't exist in a physical sense to begin with.

They moved with a gentle, almost deliberate grace, like tiny fireflies on a mission. The closer they got, the more I could see the intricate patterns within each sprite, swirling with energy and purpose.

Miss K's face, inches from mine, remained intensely focused, her eyes never leaving mine.

As the blue sprites accumulated and passed a certain threshold, my vision started to clear.

The overwhelming chaos of colours swirling around Miss K's face began to fade, replaced by a clearer, sharper view of the world around me. I could even see her features more distinctly than ever before now—the determined set of her jaw, the slight curve of her lips, and the glint of approval in her eyes.

"See? No sigils required," she said with a grin, her tone playful but sincere. "Now, slowly stop channelling Anima, but keep the focus on your eyes, or you'll lose the sprites."

I followed her orders to the letter, gradually letting go of the sixth sense while trying to "hold" onto the sprites affixed to my eyes. Gradually, more and more sprites disappeared from my senses, until I could only recognize the ones accumulated on my eyes.

Then, finally, I lost sense of them as well, but my vision stayed the same.

"I... I think I did it?" I said cautiously after a few seconds, keeping my eyes focused on Miss K's, but trying to see if any colours remained in my peripheral vision. "I don't see any colours at all anymore, and I don't feel the sprites either."

“Wonderful! Great work, Sera! I transferred quite a number of blue sprites to you, since I doubted you’d be able to channel enough from the ambient Anima to fully saturate your eyes. The fact that you managed to capture them this quickly, however, is exceedingly promising. You really *are* a natural at this!”

As Miss K removed her hands from the sides of my face and freed my head with an enthusiastic smile, I instinctively moved forward just a tiny step, searching for the warmth of her fingers once again. I quickly stopped myself, making it seem like a strange stutter-step in response to her freeing my head.

‘Jesus fucking Christ, what is wrong with you, Sera?!’ I chastised myself, feeling a hint of desperation. This was definitely not my usual reaction to being touched by somebody—right?

“You should now be able to switch between slightly enhanced vision and your Anima vision at will,” Miss K nonchalantly explained as she moved toward the door again, thankfully unaware of the tumultuous thoughts inside my head. “I’ll be giving you some exercises to work on at the end of today’s session to teach yourself how to do that. For now, just leave the sprites where they are, so you can actually function properly.”

Ushering me towards the door with one hand, she opened it with the other. “Let’s go start today’s session. We’re a few minutes late already because of all this. I really dislike waiting and making people wait.”

I hurried to move past her, but was briefly stopped by a strong hand on my shoulder. She gave me a knowing smirk and added, “Unless you’d prefer a cold shower first? We can start the session without you.”

A surge of heat rose to my head as I rushed out of the office, Miss K’s melodic laughter trailing behind me into the training hall of the dojo. I quickly made my way over to Kenzie, grateful for the distraction. I lined up next to her, joining the rest of the group already en route to receive today’s session plans from our Sensei.

“Hey there, Sera,” Kenzie greeted me with a quizzical, half-way concerned tone in her voice. “You okay? You didn’t get into any trouble, did you?”

I shook my head but remained silent, not trusting myself to speak as I tried to calm down.

‘She fucking knew all along!’ I thought, utterly mortified. *‘System, can you please just kill me? This whole second life thing isn’t working out. Just throw my soul in the garbage, please?’*

Unfortunately, the System was once again being a goddamn traitor and I did not simply cease to exist.

Miss K strode over in her usual gait and stopped a few feet in front of us to give us the rundown for today’s session...