

After The End 101

The Beginning After The End – Chapter 101

ARTHUR LEYWIN'S POV:

The silhouette of an enormous castle shrouded in darkness continued growing larger but whether I was approaching the castle or the castle was moving towards me, I had no idea. As the silhouette grew closer, I was gradually able to make out the details of the castle: the fluttering house flag resting on the top of the highest tower, the splendid fountain carved with intricate features, the high gates with sharp spikes and barbed wire.

Little by little, the shadows covering the castle receded, exposing more of the castle's exterior. I could see the image of a flaming phoenix on the house flag and crows gathering atop the gate. However, a horrendous feeling began creeping up my back, the closer I drew. I arrived below the towering gates and locked eyes with a particularly grotesque crow. It regarded me for a few seconds but then let out a caw and resumed its feast.

What was it eating?

I couldn't see from the bottom of the gate, but for some reason, I felt a need to know what the ravens were eating.

This unrelenting urge to find out...

I began climbing up the gate, ignoring the spikes from the barbed wire digging into my hands. The higher I climbed, the more crows gathered atop the gate, joining in on the festivities. At some point, I became shrouded in crow feathers so much that I could only see black. I roared out for them to disappear, but no sound came out. Despite the inaudible shriek, the flock dispersed, revealing what they had been so eagerly consuming.

It was the decapitated heads of Tessia and my family impaled on black spikes. There were chunks of flesh missing from their face. Without their eyelids, their milky eyes seemed to stare distantly as their lip-less mouth hung open.

As I reached for them, to remove them from the spikes their heads were skewered on, all of their gaze suddenly focused on me and they screamed at me, revealing the insects that had burrowed themselves inside of their mouths.

"ALL YOUR FAULT!" The sudden volume of their voices made me lose my grip on the gate and I was sent falling down as their lifeless eyes continued to stare at me.

I bolted up from the stone ground I had been lying on. Cold sweat had already drenched my clothes as I sat there heaving for breath.

It was just a dream.....

I stared down at my hands to find out that they were trembling. As I tried to control my breathing, an unfamiliar voice startled me to my feet.

I whipped my body towards the sound, only to be staring at a darkened figure in the corner of my cell.

As she stepped out towards me, I was able to see who she was.

“Hi, there,” the woman said coaxingly, except her mouth wasn’t moving. Her voice had a soothing timbre that tickled my ear.

It dawned on me that the woman who had just spoken was Alduin’s remaining lance. I had caught a glimpse of her earlier today, except, just like before, she was covered in a cloak that hid her appearance.

What surprised me more was the fact that despite how close she was to me, I wasn’t able to sense her presence at all. It reminded me of when Virion released his second stage of his beast form, except, it seemed as natural as breathing for her.

“Do not talk. I bring you a message from King Eralith,” she whispered from underneath her cloak, leaning close to me as she handed me a piece of paper.

I read through it as soon as the letter was in my hand.

Dear Arthur,

While explanations and apologies for the recent events concerning the disaster at Xyrus Academy are in order, I fear the scale of this incident is much deeper and more sinister than what it appears to be on the surface.

You do not have much time. Come a few hours, the Council will deem you and Cynthia Goodsky as the perpetrators of the act of terrorism that had befallen on Xyrus. Director Goodsky will be sentenced to public execution, but you and your bond will only be imprisoned. I’m sorry I could not help you much in this matter; my voice simply cannot win against the unified front of the dwarves and humans.

What I’m about to tell you next is something that was not meant for my ears. I have yet to find all of the missing pieces, but what I did hear between King Glayder and Dawsid, was that they are planning on delivering you to someone. I do not know who, but it seems to be the only reason why they’re keeping you alive and intact. I have already sent my father, along with a few escorts, to take your family to a hidden location where they’ll be safe from those who wish to do your family harm or use them against you. Think of it as a small compensation for all that you’ve done for Tessia. I hope this, at least, gives you some ease of heart. Even if my lance can free you from your cell, once you step outside, all of the other lances will be notified. My apologies as this is all I can do for you for now. Stay strong and be firm.

Alduin Eralith

As soon as I folded the letter, it crumbled into ashes between my fingers. Looking back up, the female lance named Aya, that I had expected to see, was no longer there, disappearing as quietly as she had appeared.

I had to admit that there was a heavy burden that had been lifted from my chest. The safety of my family had been a concern for me the entire time. Due to the information passed on from Windsom, the Council’s behaviour since our first meeting made me question the possibility of the Vritra playing a

part in all of this. However, now that the Council had decided on the public execution of Director Goodsky, I was almost certain that the Vritra were involved.

I had originally suspected the Wykes house being involved by somehow tilting the odds against my favor for killing Lucas; they were a family of high wealth and influence after all. But the Wykes family has no reason for involving the Director of Xyrus Academy. Even if Goodsky wasn't from an influential family, her name alone bears weight all over the continent. The Wykes family alone wouldn't be able to influence the Council enough to make them do something so rash like condemning her to public execution. Even if pushing the blame on Goodsky would ease some of the burden the Council would face from the public, her death wouldn't be worth it...

Unless there was a third party involved calling the shots, either bribing or forcing the Council.

Letting out another deep breath as I sat down, thoughts of how I had refused to grow attached to anyone in my past life because I didn't want any weaknesses came to mind. Shaking my head to try and disperse the thoughts, I leaned my back against the cold wall, thinking and coming up with a plan.

"Get up!" a sharp baritone voice snapped.

My eyes fluttered open at the abrupt bellow and clanging of the metal gate.

Rolling to my stomach, I push myself up, stretching the aching bones in my body from sleeping on the hard, stone ground.

I expected to see Olfred since he was the one that had brought me to the cell, but instead, I had the unfortunate pleasure of waking up to Bairon's happy face; and by happy, I meant a scowl of impatience laced with a hatred for my very existence basically written on his face. I don't blame him, since I had been the one to kill his younger brother, but I sensed, for some reason, that his death wasn't the only reason for his blatant animosity.

"The Council is waiting," Bairon spoke sharply, opening the gate. The lance grabbed my arm roughly and half dragged me out of my cell after binding my arms and attaching the sealing artifact back on my chest.

"Good morning to you as well. I see you're not much of a morning person," I chuckled, trying to keep myself from falling as he continued jerking my arm.

The lance said nothing in response, though his cold glare spoke volumes. As we made our way towards the exit, I noticed that the cell Director Goodsky had been held in was open.

We arrived in front of a different room from yesterday; the large double doors that towered high enough to admit giants were closed shut, with m.u.f.fled sounds coming from the other side.

"You don't know how much I'm looking forward to the trial," Bairon said, his jaws tensing, while his grip on my arm became even tighter.

"Don't worry, I'll be sure to treat your family with the same sentiments you showed mine." The lance turned to me, his lips curling upwards in a smirk, just enough to reveal his sharp canine.

*** You are reading on <https://ReadFreeWebNovelonline.com> ***

Had I not received the letter earlier last night, I might've actually been worried, but knowing they were safely hidden and that for now the Council needed me alive and intact, his empty threats didn't mean much.

"Are you honestly trying to pick a fight with a thirteen-year-old?" I shook my head, using my best expression of disappointment.

A sharp tug lifted me from the ground and suddenly, I was face to face with Bairon. "I don't think you understand what's about to happen to you right now. You're going to either end up dead or wishing you had died while your pet is going to become a prized pet for one of the kings. You think this only affects you? I'll make sure your family and anyone you even remotely cared about faces a miserable death." he spat out as my legs dangled above the ground.

"Yes yes, the great Lance Bairon is going to take vengeance for his lunatic younger brother, who chose to go to the dark side and kill innocent students, by tormenting the teenager who put him out of his misery and killing his family too. All hail Lance Bairon!" I tried acting surprised, but I suspected my monotonous voice gave it away

I could see his right hand ball up into a fist, but he just clicked his tongue in disgust, tossing me back onto the floor with enough force to send me rolling towards the tall double doors. Dusting myself off as best as I could with my arms tied in front of me, I remained seated, leaning my head back on the doors as I gave Bairon a wink.

Either Bairon didn't see or he chose to ignore me, but as I was about to say something, I heard faint sounds coming from the other side of the doors. After a.s.similating with Sylvia's dragon will, my entire body had been strengthened, including my senses and reflexes. It wasn't to the point where I would be able to last a few minutes against a lance without magic, but my hearing was strong enough to vaguely make out some familiar voices inside the protected room.

"...perpetrator of..."

"...refusal to answer..."

It seemed like the Council was about done with the sentencing for who I could safely a.s.sume to be Director Goodsky.

"... sentenced to public execution."

The last statement rang particularly loud from Dawsid's booming voice.

After a moment of silence, the tall doors I was leaning against suddenly swung inward without a creak, causing me to tip backwards. Looking up from the floor, I spotted the same guard, who had admitted Varay, Olfred and I during the first Council meeting, regarding us without any emotion.

"The Council is ready," the guard said, shifting his gaze from me to Bairon.

Picking myself up, I was able to lock eyes with the former director of Xyrus Academy as she was escorted back out by two guards.

Her gaze was firm but her jaws were tensed in suppressed anger as she passed me by.

Keeping my expression deadpan and unreadable as I trudged towards the Council, I studied each of their faces.

Sitting down on the single chair, wordlessly, I waited for them to start. Bairon appeared behind Blaine Glayder and as the double doors shut with a loud thud, the room was filled with an eerie silence. The Dwarf King was the first to speak, his eyes glued to the stack of papers he had begun shuffling through.

“Boy, let it be known that the Council is merciful. Even though your heinous actions against a fellow schoolmate would normally result in at least the incapacitation of your mana core, we agreed that since your actions were for the sake of the greater good, your sentencing will instead be as followed: Arthur Leywin is to be stripped of his previous title as a mage and the benefits that come with. He is also to be imprisoned until further notice.” Dawsid spoke in a grandiose manner, as if he actually thought of himself as benevolent.

There was a brief silence; I suspected the Dwarf King was waiting for me to shower him with gratitude and other forms of flattery before he spoke again.

“Is there anything you would like to say?” he questioned.

“Just a few questions...Your Majesty. While my first punishment is apparent enough, what do you mean by imprisoned until ‘further notice’?” I tilted my head.

“Upon the next few weeks, we’ll be monitoring how the disaster at Xyrus Academy is faring with the victims and their families. As soon as we see that enough time has passed and the memories of your actions have more or less dissipated from the public’s minds, we will release you. Think of it as a sort of provisional detainment instead of imprisonment,” Blaine explained, mustering up a smile that didn’t quite reach his eyes.

“I see. Fair enough, I suppose. What of my bond?” I asked. As soon as I was released from my cell this morning by Bairon, I had tried communicating with Sylvie, only to be met by silence.

“The Council is already being kind enough to let you live, yet you ask for more?” Glaundera snapped, banging her thick palm on the raised desk.

“Keeping your bond is another issue, Arthur. Part of the sentencing where you lose your rights as a mage means that you will no longer be able to keep your bond.” Alduin had been the one to tell me this. Had it been anyone else, I would’ve reacted differently, but reading the subtle meanings in his intonations and words, I knew he was only trying to keep me from trouble..

As our eyes stayed locked for a few more seconds, I forced a stiff nod.

“I understand, Your Majesties.”

“Good. Bairon, take him back to his cell but keep him chained up,” Blaine waved us away. I studied the expressions of everyone there one last time. While Blaine’s face was more self-assured than yesterday’s trial, his wife still looked pale with guilt. The dwarves were both haughtily arrogant, making me more certain that they were the ones most involved with the Vritra while the Alduin and Merial both wore stoic expressions as masks.

I could tell Bairon was furious but he stayed silent throughout the trip back to my cell. I decided it was best not to antagonize him in his current state so I remained mute as well.

I had expected to be taken to the same cell I was in before, but I was instead brought down to a different holding place. With an actual bed and toilet, I would've mistaken it for a room if it weren't for the bars that kept me from escaping.

After tossing me inside with a bit more strength than necessary, the lance left wordlessly. My arms were still chained together in front of me while the artifact stayed embedded into my chest, limiting my abilities.

I couldn't tell how many hours had passed or whether it was night or day since there weren't any windows, but as I sat there patiently, the sound of soft footsteps approached.

"It seems you were expecting me," the voice sighed.

My lips curled upwards as I gazed upon a strikingly familiar face.

"About d.a.m.n time, Windsom."

The Beginning After The End – Chapter 102

DAWSID GREYSUNDER'S POV:

"Hehe... hehehe," I pursed my lips, trying to contain the laughter building up inside me.

"Cheers, My Love, for the madness that will soon be coming to an end." I held up my goblet as I leaned forward.

"Cheers." My wife smiled back, touching my glass with hers to make a hollow 'clink'.

Leaning back in the leather armchair much too big for myself, I relished the dry taste of fermented fruits that cost me about as much as a small house. Admiring the extravagant rings on each of my fingers, sparkling against the candlelight, I couldn't help but smile widely.

"Just think, Glaundera. After this, no longer will our people be stuck in holes at the bottom of this continent. With His new rule, we, along with our people, will be there to serve directly beneath him. Dwarves will no longer need to be tools that slave away, forging weapons for the humans. We will be the chosen race that will lead this underdeveloped continent into a new era alongside Him," I sighed.

"Was He really that powerful, Dear? You are the only one that has had direct communication with this 'being'. What was he like?" my wife leaned her head on her arm, getting comfortable.

"It was nothing like I'd ever imagined. I've had my share of time fighting mana beasts when I was younger. Unlike the old dwarves that stick to their traditions, I carried no pride in the weapons that I had built. What satisfaction was there in watching someone mindlessly swing the weapon you poured your blood and sweat into crafting? No, the only weapon I ever finished, I had made for myself. Using my war axe, Full Cleave, I slayed hundreds of mana beasts of all classes. There were some that could send shivers straight down my spine with just a passing glance, while others could petrify even the strongest of mages with a glare" —I took another sip from my glass— "Yet, when he first made himself known to me, I couldn't breathe. My head felt like it was getting pounded by hammers while my whole body stung

as if each pore was being stabbed by tiny needles. I've lingered at the gates of death countless times, but nothing had ever made me so fearful."

Looking down at my hands, I see that they were trembling. "I told you this before, but I truly felt like I was facing a G.o.d. I had this overwhelming notion that he didn't need me in order to achieve his goals, yet he was giving me this chance. He chose us, My Love. He chose us," I whispered.

"I believe you, My Dear. And when he takes rule of this Continent, what was it that he promised us again?" My wife scooted next to me, cuddling against my arm as her large hands wrapped around my waist.

"He promised us everything we could ever hope for: vast wealth, magical capabilities that are beyond comprehension, more people to serve us, and best of all, an eternity to enjoy them all. Glaundera, I can finally, once again, swing Full Cleave. No more will this crippled body of mine hinder me," I said, my voice growing louder the more excited I became.

"That's great, My Dear. Truly, being in the Council is hindering your full potential," my wife cooed, coaxing me as she rubbed my belly.

I leaned further back, enjoying her touch. "Hah! We three kings have a joke we say to one another. We joke around how the three kings of this generation all lack the talent and potential as mages, calling it the Dicathen's Kings' Complex. Screw them! Unlike the other two, I was once a great mage. Being an orange core mage by the time I was at my prime, I would have soared to greater heights if it wasn't for that d.a.m.ned incident that left me in this pitiful state."

What I never told my wife was that the 'incident' happened because I had some fun with a peasant girl.

I unconsciously licked my lips as I recalled that night. It would've been a lot more enjoyable if she wasn't screaming so loudly.

I don't know how her husband found out, but he was crafty enough to get me alone, even using his own wife as bait. Of course, I ended up killing the both of them to hide my little secret, but not before he was able to land a wound on me that would forever cripple my mana core. "Curse them! They should have just quietly accepted their fate; in fact, they should've seen it as an honor!" I cursed. To have put me in such a pathetic state, even torturing and killing them wasn't enough.

"Dear, hush! The dwarves all respect you and you know that," my wife scolded gently, snapping me out from my bitter memories.

"Respect? Bah, bull t.e.s.t.i.c.l.es! They all grudgingly obey me because of the two lances I have in my possession. I can feel it. Their eyes when they look at me, I know that they're thinking: 'Why is such a weak dwarf leading us?' 'He was just born lucky. He doesn't deserve the crown and lances.'"

"Then we can kill all those that had once looked down on you, simple as that. And you will do it with your own two fists." My wife moved her hand up, stroking my beard with her thick fingers as she looked up at me, her soothing smile accentuating her powerful square jaw. "You forgot one thing, though."

“Of course. He also promised us fertility. We will finally be able to have sons and daughters of our own to carry on the Greysunders blood. In fact, why not see if he has already blessed us with it.” I put down my wine gla.s.s and shifted my body to face my wife. As I looked deep into her dirt brown eyes, I dug underneath her clothes to feel her warm, coa.r.s.e skin. I could feel her shudder from my touch as I continued softly rubbing her back, slowly reaching lower and lower.

As her eyes closed in pleasure, I used my other hand to untie her thin gown. When I slipped my hand underneath her top, she gasped in surprise from the chill of my fingers on her firm, exposed bosom.

I slipped off her gown to reveal her defined shoulders, smiling at the mesmerizing sight. I never understood the tastes of human and elf men, all wanting thin women. A real woman has to have muscles like these.

My wife inched closer impatiently as I took my sweet time undressing her; coaxing her as I spread her legs—

Bang!

The door to our room slammed open, only to show my guard, who had been stationed outside, looking wide-eyed at us.

“What is the meaning of this!” I roared. “How dare you barge in without—”

Like a wooden plank, the guard leaned forward and dropped to the ground without a word. Upon realizing that there was a hole through his back where his heart should’ve been, I immediately sprang up from our previous intimate posture.

He was dead.

“My greetings, Greysunders.” A cold, ho.a.r.s.e voice filled my ears. As I took a step back, I could see my wife quickly redressing, fumbling as she herself got off the couch.

“How dare you barge into this room? Do you know who I am?” I screamed, fear filling the very depth of my soul as I stared at the figure. I couldn’t make out his features from the shadows of where he stood.

“That is of no importance. You two are the only infestations I need to take care of,” he spoke evenly.

Just as a light flashed towards us, a wall of molten lava intersected just in time to stop the intruder’s attack. However, I could taste the blood that trickled down from the tip of my nose into my mouth from the glowing needle that was barely stopped in time by my lance’s magic.

“OI-Olfred! How could you let someone just barge into my room?” Stumbling backwards, my firm rebuke to my lance ended up sounding much more like a frightened whimper.

“My apologies, Your Majesties. I do not know how he managed to get in but I have notified Mica as well. The intruder will not be leaving,” my lance stated. Even as he gave my wife and me a curt bow, his eyes never left the shadowed figure.

Mica was the second lance under my command. While she wasn’t as obedient as Olfred, her skills as a mage was enough to allow me to be lenient with her.

“Good, good. T-take care of that intruder right now! I want him alive if possible!” I pointed my finger at the figure, hoping my wife wasn’t able to see that it was trembling fiercely.

“I seek only for the Greysunders’ heads. Needless bloodshed is not my desire,” the voice spoke coolly.

I backed up against the wall involuntarily when he spoke. For some reason he left me feeling terrified. No, now with Olfred is here and Mica on her way, I should have nothing to worry about.

“Unfortunately, the thing I seek is your head,” Olfred hissed, his limbs becoming engulfed in flames as he manifested mana into them.

The bright flames emitted from my lance as he dashed towards the intruder revealed the latter’s features, and knowing exactly who I was facing did not quell the fear inside me. Instead, it made me even more horrified.

He was elderly, with long, white hair tied tightly into a ponytail, flowing down like a stream of liquid pearl. Yet, despite his age, he stood, poised, with his hands elegantly placed behind his straight back. Both of his eyes were closed, bringing further emphasis on a third, unblinking eye in his forehead that glowed a radiant purple.

[Magma Knights]

As my lance casted his spell in a whisper, five soldiers made of magma were instantly conjured from beneath the intruder. However, as they reached for the elderly man, they crumbled into pieces with merely a faint blur of the intruder’s arm.

Olfred continue to conjure magma knights but each time they arose, they were just as quickly diced into little pieces by a movement too fast for my eyes.

“Bestow onto me,” Olfred chanted through gritted teeth.

[h.e.l.’s Armor]

My lance’s body completely erupted into dark crimson flames as he approached the intruder. As the flames subsided, I could see the intricate armor made of magma that had covered Olfred. Glowing red runes intricately covered the armor, as a cape of billowing fire flowed down his back.

“Haha! This is what you get for being so arrogant! Die!” I cheered manically. A crazed smile formed on my face as I watched my lance about to destroy the intruder that had left me in such a pathetic state.

Olfred’s first blow landed squarely on the intruder’s face, even completely decimating the wall behind him with the shockwave. My fist clenched in excitement as I awaited to see the b.l.o.o.d.y mush that his face should’ve now become.

However, as the dust cloud faded, I felt my mouth hang open from shock. The intruder’s face was intact and unblemished, yet Olfred’s armored arm was snapped in two, his fist reduced to a b.l.o.o.d.y pulp. I could see splinters of white coming out of his knuckles from where his bones snapped.

“I admire your skills for a lesser being. Your powers could prove useful for the future of this continent, but now, you are only an irritant.” As the intruder spoke, he manifested a thin, glowing blade from the tip of his finger.

His next movement was so quick, it seemed as if he had teleported, but he was simply moving at such a monstrous speed that my eyes couldn't comprehend.

The intruder blinked a few feet to where Olfred stood on guard, and the tip of his glowing saber gently touched the center of my lance's armored chest.

"Break."

The h.e.l.'s Amor, ranked one of the highest fire-attribute defensive spells, shattered into dust. Blood spewed out of Olfred's mouth as he was flung across the room and into the wall that I was backed up against.

I could only stare blankly at the scene. A shiver ran down my back as I felt the intruder's unblinking eye on me.

*** You are reading on <https://ReadFreeWebNovelonline.com> ***

My throat was too dry to even swallow, let alone utter a word. As I looked at the trembling figure of my wife, an earth-shattering sound made me whip my head back.

"h.e.l.lo King and Queen. Mica is sorry that she's late!" a familiar voice chirped from within the cloud of dust.

"M-Mica! Your King was almost killed! Hurry up and dispose of that man!" I spouted out, holding onto my wife.

Mica was an anomaly amongst dwarves. She didn't have any of the usual traits that would make a dwarven lady attractive. She was short but thin, with pale creamy skin instead of the usual bronze skin that was so admired.

Her features made her appear as if she was a feeble human child, her slightly pointed ears the only indication that she was really a dwarf. Despite her meagre appearance, her abilities in gravity manipulation was monstrous. Wielding a giant mace more than triple her size, she was able to freely control the weight of anything within a certain radius.

As the dust cloud dissipated, I could see that the intruder had completely dodged Mica's surprise attack.

"Another annoyance." The intruder's voice sounded a bit more put off this time, but that could've just been me.

Before he could make his way towards me, the ground crumbled around him and my lance.

"Welcome to Mica's world. Don't die!" my lance giggled as she easily swung her giant morningstar.

"Excellent gravity manipulation," the intruder nodded as he approached my lance. I could tell Mica was caught off guard when her opponent so easily walked towards her, each of his steps creating a deep imprint as the floor tiles cracked from the increased gravity.

Even with my life in danger, a nagging feeling of jealousy sprouted. This is what I desired— power to fight like this; to be at the apex of strength and magical capabilities.

“How can you move so easily? Your body weighs more than four tons!” Mica hissed as she slowly retreated, maintaining a careful distance from him.

“Is that your limit?” The man asked.

“Huh?” my lance responded, not expecting a question in response.

“It seems it is.”

“What limits? Mica has no limits!” my lance yelled as she jumped up for her final attack. Imbuing more mana into her weapon, I could see slight ripples in the s.p.a.ce around it due to the distortion of gravity. “Eat this!”

Her mace swung down with a force that I suspect could bring this entire castle to the ground, but the intruder simply lifted a single finger in response, effortlessly stopping the otherwise monstrous strike.

A wave of hopelessness overcame me. Despite the magnitude of my lance’s power, I knew she couldn’t win.

I scrambled to my feet. I can’t die here. I need to escape.

From the corner of my eye, I saw a flash of light as the intruder formed a glowing blade that pierced through Mica. From what I could see, there was no wound from where she was slashed, but it must’ve done something to her since she fell to the floor with the whites of her eyes visible, her mace crashing heavily onto the ground.

That useless brat couldn’t even provide me with enough time to escape.

The intruder turned to face my wife and I with his thin glowing blade..

Glaundera shrieked with her finger pointed menacingly at the figure, “Y-you don’t know who you’re messing with. My husband will soon be the new right hand of Agora of the Vritra, an almighty deity—”

“Shut up!” I hissed, striking her face before she could finish.

“Asura. There are no deities in this world, only asuras,” the man corrected as he slowly approached us.

“P-please, have mercy and spare me O’ Great One.” I could feel a growing warmth between my legs as I got on my knees and begged.

“Do you want to live?” he asked as his single eye looked down at me.

“Y-yes! Please! I’ll do anything!” I pleaded as I tried to wrap my head around the situation at hand. Who, in this continent, could possibly dispose of a white core mage so easily?

“I see that Agora failed to choose his p.a.w.ns with proper caution,” he continued, his voice filled with contempt.

“Please, I’ve never even met him. He only called out to me, threatening to kill my wife and my people had I not obeyed. I-I beg you. This was all against my will,” I pleaded, prostrating myself on my hands and knees as my forehead touched the warm puddle of my own urine.

“Very well. Release the two lances that you have in your possession from the oath,” he commanded, his voice even and cold.

“R-release?” I stuttered.

“Yes. Is that a problem?” His single eye narrowed.

“No, of course not.” I took off the artifact that I had always kept around my neck and imbued my mana signature into it. As I released the oath, blood dribbled down the corners of my mouth.

I was instructed by my father to never undo the oath, that it could and should never be undone. However, my life was at stake here.

As both Olfred and Mica glowed a faint red indicating that the artifact’s bind has been released, I looked back at the intruder.

“T-there! I did it.”

“Good. They were unfortunate to have such a poor master, but they will be useful pieces in the upcoming war,” he responded, nodding as he looked at the two lances.

“N-now please. Let me go.” I hated how my voice sounded so weak and desperate.

“I’m sorry, did I say I’d let you go?” As I looked up, there was a change in his expression; for the first time a small smirk formed on face.

I tried responding but nothing came out.

No words... no sound... no breath...

Looking down, I could see the gaping hole in my throat and all I could do was stare at him, my jaw slack. As my vision faded, I peeled my gaze from the intruder and glanced at my wife. She was staring back as she reached desperately for me, a hole in her chest while blood soaked her thin gown.

Everything darkened. I could feel a cold hand grasping my soul, pulling me away from my body.

“Let the game of chess begin.” The intruder’s last words echoed from afar as my consciousness drifted into whichever level of h.e.l.l the hand decided to take me.

The Beginning After The End – Chapter 103

Chapter 103: Peculiar Congregation

ARTHUR LEYWIN’S POV:

There was an expression of ever-so-slight amus.e.m.e.nt reaching the raised brow of Windsom’s sharp eyes. The asura, still donning a military-esque uniform paired with a trim, side-swept hairstyle to match, held out my bond.

“Sylvie!” I exclaimed. I bolted up from my seat but was extra careful in picking her up out of Windsom’s hand. Upon careful inspection, there were no visible wounds on her body, and by the rhythmic breathing, it seemed that she was simply asleep.

Letting out a relieved sigh, I carefully placed my sleeping dragon on my head before regarding the asura standing before me.

“Thank you.” I gave him a meaningful nod to which he responded with a look a parent would give to one’s child after he or she had misbehaved.

“I had known you were rash, but to think you would get yourself and Lady Sylvie caught so soon, and by the ones involved with the Vritra no less,” he reprimanded.

“To be fair, I was saving the academy from the Vritra,” I half shrugged, as if that would validate my actions.

“You need to understand that you and Lady Sylvie’s safety should take the most precedence as of now.”

“Windsom, there were people inside that academy whose life I considered more important than my own.” My face grew stern, reflecting the resolve in my voice.

Windsom regarded me for a moment before speaking again. “Was it for the Elf Princess?” he asked as if he already knew the answer.

“It-it wasn’t just for her,” I defended, my voice coming out a lot more unconfident than I had wanted.

“No matter,” the asura sighed. “What’s done is done. Speaking of this, what I do not understand is why the perpetrator of the incident took your friend, Elijah, with him.”

“I don’t know either...” I was at a loss as well, and no matter how many times I pondered about it inside my cell, I couldn’t come up with a reasonable explanation.

“I don’t know,” I repeated. “But I need you to help us out of here, Windsom. I need to find out where they took Elijah and—”

“And what? Save him?” the asura cut in, his deep-set eyes cold and penetrating. “You can’t even escape from this place but you think you have the ability to save him?”

After letting out a deep breath, he lowered his voice and continued. “Besides, I know roughly where the man named Draneeve took your friend.”

“Really? Where?” I unknowingly grabbed onto his sleeve as I said this.

“After investigating the artifact left at Xyrus Academy, I suspect it was a teleportation device that Draneeve had used to escape, along with your friend Elijah... as well as the device he had used to...”

“... to get here,” I finished the sentence, a feeling of dread growing inside me. “They took Elijah back to Alacrya, didn’t they?”

“Most likely,” he replied, his voice cold.

I slumped back against the wall, staring at my feet as neither of us spoke for a while.

“Windsom, following my train of thought, I was going to suggest that I follow Elijah to Alacrya in the hopes that he would still be alive so that I can save him. You would then probably going to respond by telling me that I shouldn’t even dream of it since I’d get killed as soon as I step foot...” I looked back at him and a truly rare moment dawned on me where I had no answer. “So what do I do?”

“Well I wouldn’t say you’d die as soon as you stepped foot,” the asura smiled slightly, hints of empathy evident in his usually cold voice. “But yes, it would be suicide. Luckily, the p.a.w.n the Vritra Clan had sent left before you arrived, otherwise they would be much more wary of you. As of now, they hold an interest in you enough for them to want you in their possession, alive, but if they find out that you actually have Lady Sylvia’s innate will as well as her daughter, then I’m afraid even the asuras will have a hard time keeping the two of you safe.”

“What am I to do then? Just give up on my best friend?” I countered. “I calculated the possibility of receiving aid from the Elf King and I also knew you’d help us escape, but even thus, there wouldn’t be a safe place for us to stay. Considering that the Council is working for the Vritra, I would either have to stay where my family is hiding, or burrow somewhere deep within the Beast Glades.

“Staying hidden with my family, I wouldn’t be able to train without revealing my mana signature to the lances, endangering my family and Tessia’s. If I choose to go to the Beast Glades, I most likely wouldn’t survive long enough to get any reasonable training done.” I thought of the echoes of the giant mana beasts that we pa.s.sed on our way here, and how even the lances were cautious enough not to brazenly mow through.

“You seem to have quite a good grasp on the situation at hand,” the asura acknowledged, giving me a terse nod. “How much have you managed to connect the Vritra with the Council?”

“Enough to reasonably suspect that the ones most closely connected to the Vritra were the Greysunders. The humans seemed to be favoring the opinion of the dwarves as well, but I have a hunch that they are reluctant,” I thought aloud.

“Impressive,” Windsom admitted. Sliding back his left sleeve, the asura looked at his watch. “Arthur it is about time we—”

“Who are you.” a voice interrupted.

Both Windsom and I turned our heads to see that it was Bairon.

“It seems he has finished taking care of things,” Windsom muttered softly to himself.

‘How did you get in here?’ The lance’s eyes narrowed as his glance flickered between the asura next to me and the supposedly locked up dragon on top of my head. Despite how rash Bairon had acted with me, I realized that he was actually very cautious and level-headed under normal circ.u.mstance. He regarded Windsom with caution, not leaving any openings in his stance even when they were separated by a reinforced cage.

“I asked how you got in here,” Bairon growled, his eyes glued on the mysterious visitor. “Are you with the other intruder?”

“Yes,” Windsom replied indifferently, taking a step toward the lance.

“Then an explanation is no longer necessary.” Bairon raised his fist like a loaded cannon as the gathered electricity crackled and popped around his arm.

[Flash Ray]

I frantically jumped out of the way, upon knowing what was coming. Windsom had forgotten to remove the artifact strapped to my chest, disabling my mana flow. If I were to get hit with that spell, there wouldn't even be ashes left to bury.

A condensed sphere of electricity shot out from the lance's fist, disintegrating the reinforced metal bars as if it were tissue. However, Windsom stayed glued to his position as the spell rapidly approached him.

I braced myself for when the ball of lightning would collide with the asura, but as Bairon high-level magic reached Windsom, the asura simply reached up and caught the spell as if were a rubber ball.

I knew, undoubtedly, that Windsom would be able to handle the attack, but even I didn't expect it to be done so easily.

Crushing the orb of condensed lightning in his palm, he turned to me, gesturing with a flick of his head. “Looks like we have our way out.”

I let out a snort of laughter, but before we could say anything else, Bairon had already reached Windsom.

“Child. There is no longer a reason for you to fight me,” Windsom said coolly as he easily dodged the barrage of strikes and kicks imbued with lightning. Unlike me, Bairon's lightning magic seemed to mostly consist of external spells.

[Thunder Lance]

Bairon activated a spell in the midst of his attacks, conjuring five spears made of lightning to stab down at Windsom.

I had moved in the cell to avoid the brunt of their fight, but as I continued observing, it looked to me like Windsom was actually... bored.

“Enough.” With a simple flick of his arm that seemed slow in comparison to Bairon's rapid succession of attacks, the lance's face was buried in the ground. The entire cell shook as a spiderweb of cracks split the reinforced floor, Bairon's sunken head being the epicenter.

*** You are reading on <https://ReadFreeWebNovelonline.com> ***

From catching his spell to burying his face, Windsom was doing a fine job humiliating one of our continent's strongest mage.

“Heel,” Windsom said impatiently as the lance struggled to free his head from the ground. Although Bairon's face was scratched and a little b.l.o.o.d.y, he was otherwise unfazed.

“Bairon, stand your ground.” My ears perked at the familiar voice. It was Varay, the female lance that had engaged Sylvie, and was capable of going up against two lances herself.

“I don't understand. He's with the intruder!” Bairon spouted, turning to face his fellow lance.

“HE is a deity, not someone you can be addressing so flippantly!” Varay snapped back, her voice particularly cold. “My apologies, O’ Great One. Our King humbly asks for your presence.”

Despite knowing what Windsom was, it still stunned me to see Varay actually bow to someone. In comparison, Bairon had such a look of confusion that it was actually pretty amusing.

“D-Deity?” The lance stuttered stupidly.

“Correct. And now that you know what I am, ignorance is no longer an excuse,” Windsom answered, looking down harshly at Bairon. “Bow.”

By the way Bairon’s head slammed into the ground again, it looked like Windsom had done something to forcibly make him kneel, but it was a pleasant sight to see nonetheless.

We were led back to the room where my trial had taken place, except this time I wasn’t chained. Bairon had very reluctantly broken my shackles and removed the artifact inhibiting my mana flow after the whole fiasco ended.

A different guard from last time opened the door for us, revealing the people inside the room.

“W-Welcome.” King Blaine was the first to speak, rising from his chair. His complexion, along with Queen Priscilla’s, was almost sickly as they sat around an oval table that hadn’t been there previously.

Sitting adjacent to the human king and queen were Tessia’s parents, Alduin and Meralith, along with their hooded lance that delivered the note to me the night before. Both the King and Queen of the elves acknowledged me with an uncomfortable greeting, but otherwise stayed silent. Also sitting on the table was Director Cynthia, who wore a baffle expression to compliment her disheveled appearance.

When I locked eyes with the man sitting next to her, I unknowingly leaped back on guard. All of the hairs on my body stood on end as every fiber of my being begged for me to run away from the elderly man that had a single eye on his forehead.

“Arthur. It is okay,” Windsom consoled.

I found it odd that the Greysunders weren’t present, but the rest of the people inside of the room, minus the one person I didn’t know, rose up from their seat and gave a small, respectable bow to Windsom.

Acknowledging their gestures, he motioned for me to take a seat with him at the table. As I sat down next to Windsom, I could feel the gears in my head turning, trying to make heads of the situation at hand. Here I was, sitting next alongside the Council and their lances; Director Cynthia, who had been a prisoner sentenced to death; and a man, whose ident.i.ty I had no clue about.

There was a palpable tension in the room, enough to drive a normal person out of this room in sweat and fear. I had placed Sylvie on my lap during this time so I was currently petting her when I heard someone rise from their seat.

Unexpectedly, the one to get up was the man I had instinctively wanted to escape from. It seemed as if he had three eyes, yet two of them were closed. His white hair was tied in the back, reminding me of Virion when I had first met him.

“For those who do not know who I am”—the purple eye on his forehead focused on me—“I am Aldir.”

“Windsom and I have been sent here to give you lesser beings a chance of survival in the imminent war with the Vritra,” the asura continued without pause.

“So, just as we feared, there really will be a war...” Alduin spoke aloud as if he was simply voicing his thoughts.

“I have done the first step of discarding the corrupted. My role here now is to oversee the remainder of what you lessers call ‘the Council’ and instruct you on the necessary preparations to fight against the Continent of Alacrya.”

As soon as the word corrupted came out, both Blaine and Priscilla Glayder froze, their complexion becoming paler.

“Y-Your Majesty. If I may say something...” Blaine was the one to speak, and by the manner of his speech, it seemed that something must have happened to make the King appear so meek. “You have clearly shown us your capabilities, enough for me to believe that you are not someone of this realm. The difference in our abilities are to the point where I am unsure of why you would need us. Can’t you simply go to the Continent of Alacrya and defeat the Vritra?”

“What did that other asura mean by discarding the corrupted?” I leaned towards Windsom, whispering in his ear.

“The Greysunders have been eliminated and their lances are now under my control,” Aldir answered in Windsom’s stead.

Everything made sense. It seemed like the asura killed the ones working directly for the Vritra while leaving the Glayders with some sort of warning. That was why the human King and Queen were such a nervous wreck.

“And as for your point, King Glayder. Yes it would be simple enough to gather the asuras and personally fight against the Vritra. However, the Vritra Clan, along with the three other clans that are under their command were all former asuras that have broken our law. Even we can no longer calculate how much stronger they have truly become. Moreover, a battle of that magnitude will undoubtedly level the world. And that’s me being conservative,” Aldir continued as he faced the frightened King.

King Glayder responded with stunned silence as we all tried to imagine the magnitude of a battle that could sink continents.

Aldir continued speaking, “We asuras and the Vritra Clan had agreed upon a treaty where no higher beings can directly attack one another or interfere with any lesser beings. Instead—”

“Hold on. Doesn’t the fact that you killed two ‘lesser beings’ go against your words?” I cut in.

The asura’s glowing, purple eye narrowed as it peered into me, but after a brief moment Aldir’s lips curled into a smirk.

“Dicathen had received no direct aid from us asuras, but is now up against a population governed directly by Agrona of the Vritra. Even with my actions, he wouldn’t be rash enough to break the treaty for us simply evening out the playing field,” Windsom answered in Aldir’s stead.

“What of the black-horned demons that have been invading our land for years? One was even responsible for killing a lance!” I countered.

“You’re talking about the owner of this fragment?” Director Goodsky was the one to answer, holding up the black fragment of the horned being that killed Alea Triscan.

“Boy, I see it wasn’t a lie when Windsom said you are not simple. The being responsible for killing the lance, and the ones that have snuck into this continent are not asuras. Those monsters were once lesser beings such as yourself that have gone through countless experiments,” Aldir spat, obviously disgusted.

“So there are monsters that are not asuras capable of destroying the strongest mages in our continent? Is it even possible for us to win?” Merial Alduin, Tessia’s mother spoke for the first time.

“Yes, but they are limited and Agrona’s precious trump card in this war. Now that he knows of my presence, he will not dispatch them so recklessly as before.” Aldir sat back down, his whole body turned toward me.

“Think of me as a general in this upcoming war. It is for the asuras’ best interest that we are able to defend this continent. Now, Windsom, isn’t there something you and the boy have to do? I will take care of the rest here. We require countless preparations before we could defend ourselves”

Giving the three-eyed asura a nod, Windsom pulled me up, leading me and the sleeping Sylvie out of the room.

“Something we have to do, Windsom? Isn’t it important that we partic.i.p.ate in the discussion? Shouldn’t we be there in the room as well?” I asked as I followed the asura.

“That is not your fight. Aldir knows what he is doing and will do his best to prepare you lessers for the imminent war. When that time comes, if you do not want to be useless, we need you stronger.”

“Makes sense, so what are we going to do?”

“First, we’re going to visit your family. You will need to say your goodbyes to them.” The asura’s back was still facing me, making it unable to determine whether he was joking or not.

“Goodbyes? What goodbyes? Where will I be going?” I pulled back the asura’s arm, surprised as he turned around so easily.

“I’m taking you and Lady Sylvie to the homeland of the asuras. Your training will be held in Epheotus.”

The Beginning After The End – Chapter 104

Chapter 104: The Great Eight

“Am I allowed to know all of this?” I questioned, removing a sharp branch out of my hair.

We were currently hiking through a familiar part of Elshire Forest after Windsom had teleported us nearby. It took me only a few moments upon arrival to realize that I had been to this part of the forest before with the Eralith family; we were headed towards Elder Rinia’s hideout.

“You have been given permission to stay in Epheotus so you will figure it out sooner or later. While memorizing the information that I’ve told you isn’t necessary, it is always beneficial for one to know the

culture, mannerisms and politics involved when in unfamiliar territory. Especially if you have to interact with the important figures of said place.” Windsom advised, not bothering to turn around as he continued pushing branches and vines out of his way. “But I have a feeling that you already know the importance of that.”

“Of course,” I smirked. “But knowledge without understanding is but a sword stuck in its sheath. Now, you’ve told me the what, Windsom, but you’ve yet to tell me the why.”

“Very true,” he admitted. “Do not worry, we’ll get to that soon enough.”

I went on. “Okay, so there are sev... no, eight races of asuras in Epheetus. Each race consists of multiple clans, but only one clan within their respective race are t.i.tled as one of the High Eight?”

“The Great Eight,” the asura corrected immediately.

“What race was the Vritra Clan?” I tried to imagine multiple times in the past what sort of creature the Vritra Clan might be, with their horns and grey complexion, but nothing came to mind.

“The true form of the Vritra Clan is that of a fearsome serpentine asura called the Basilisk. It will be good for you to take note of the races and clan names of the Great Eight.”

“What became of the Basilisk race after the Vritra Clan and other Basilisk clans’ betrayal? I pressed on, swatting a particularly annoying insect that had probably thought my ear would make a good resting spot.

“Excluding the fact that the Vritra Clan was replaced by a lesser clan as part of the Great Eight, some of the more radical races pushed to annihilate whatever remained of the Basilisk race. Fortunately, the ties between each race reach far back in history; friends of the remaining Basilisk clans stood up for them. In the end, measures as drastic as a genocide were never taken; it would be foolish for a whole race to bear the crimes of a few, after all.”

I couldn’t discern what Windsom was thinking as he told me all of this. The inflection and tone of his voice didn’t match what he was saying, his words sounding almost sardonic.

“I see...” I continued walking, looking at my dirty boots crunching on fallen leaves and broken branches. “How were the Great Eight selected anyway?”

“The clans of the Great Eight have almost never changed. For example, even though the Dragon race has the fewest number of clans, the Indrath Clan, the clan of my master and Lady Sylvia, has been the part of the Great Eight since the beginning of our history. However, even to this day, the strength of the Great Clans are grades above the rest of the others. This is about the closest thing to an answer I can give you.”

We continued to rally back and forth as we made our way towards Elder Rinia’s hidden shelter, Windsom mostly quizzing me on the names I needed to know. I was able to process most of the information fairly quickly, but my sleep-deprived and starved state took a toll on my ability to retain information.

“Anyway, not to sound like a brat, but couldn’t you have brought us any closer? If you teleported us from an airborne castle in the middle of the Beast Glades to Elshire Forest, I’m sure you could’ve teleported us a few miles closer...”

“The home of the Diviner Elf that your family is currently taking refuge in is surrounded by a fairly large barrier that I did not wish to agitate. Teleporting through it might’ve caused a ripple in the barrier, which might give away the location of everyone inside.”

“Ah... my apologies then. I’m a little on edge in my current state,” I responded, scratching my head.

We had just gone through the waterfall that hid the entrance to Elder Rinia’s home when I spoke. “So let me get this straight. Agrona, current head of the Vritra Clan, led his race out of Epheotus to Alacrya, where he had been experimenting on the lesser races, and declared himself Eternal Ruler?”

“A rather tasteless title to give to oneself but, in essence, yes,” the asura confirmed.

“Then this treaty that you guys talked about earlier; if the Vritra Clan, along with the other clans of the Basilisk race, are asuras, shouldn’t they be forbidden to directly act in this upcoming war?” I asked, trying to keep track of how many turns we took in this maze of a tunnel.

“Yes, but that was never the problem”—Windsom stopped walking and turned back towards me—
“Arthur, didn’t you ever once wonder why the asura races didn’t just kill the Vritra Clan and the clans following them? There are seven other races after all.”

“Of course I have, but didn’t you say something about the consequences that would affect the lesser races that were living in Alacrya?”

“I did, but what I had not informed you of was that the treaty was not our first course of action. After Agrona and his follower’s escape, the Great Clans, excluding the Basilisk race, came together for the first time, regardless of factions, and formed an assembly of the leaders of each Great Clan. The leaders decided to send a small division with our elite asuras to quickly dispose of Agrona and his followers.” Windsom paused for a moment, and even with his stoic expression, it was obvious that he was deliberating on whether to express what was on his mind.

The asura eventually let out a small sigh and conjured a small barrier around us. “Arthur, what I’m about to disclose to you must stay with you; this information is known only by a few members of the Indrath Clan.”

I nodded, locking eyes with Windsom as I waited for him to continue.

“Everyone in Epheotus believe that Lady Sylvia was somehow captured and held prisoner somewhere, but it was actually Lady Sylvia who voluntarily went with the elite division tasked with killing Agrona Vritra and the clans that followed him.”

“What?” I exclaimed, my voice coming out a lot louder than I had meant it to. “How does that make sense? She went on a mission into enemy territory without knowing what to expect? That mission was basically suicidal. No way your master, Sylvia’s father, would’ve let her go.”

“Of course Lord Indrath didn’t allow her to go,” Windsom growled. “What I’m saying is Lady Sylvia concealed herself and followed after the elite division. By the time they were aware of Lady Sylvia’s presence, it was already too late to back out.”

There was a long pause before either of us spoke again.

“So what ended up happening to the asuras sent by the leaders of Epheetus?”

“What none of the leaders had expected” — Windsom’s face contorted in disgust as his hands formed a fist— “Agrona, that cunning snake, was waiting with an even larger army of Basilisks and lesser races that had the same innate magical abilities as them.”

It took only a moment for me to realize what his words implied. “The Vritra Clan was interbreeding with the lesser races of Alacrya,” I whispered.

The asura only nodded in return, before continuing. “Apparently, Agrona and his followers had been interbreeding for quite some time, seeing that there were well over tens of thousands of the mutts waiting for our battalion.”

“So the band of elite asuras you guys sent were outnumbered...”

“Tremendously outnumbered,” he stressed. “And the element of surprise that we thought our warriors would have had was rendered moot.”

“What befell them in the end?” I murmured, more so wondering myself than expecting an answer.

The asura shook his head in response. “Communication was lost soon after the battle started. While we are certain that their side took a considerable loss in numbers, we can only speculate that the brigade of our elite asuras, the pride of their respective clans and races, were either killed or captured.”

I was silent as thoughts on how Sylvia managed to escape filled my mind.

Windsom’s next words snapped me out of my daze. “Lord Indrath was furious after being told by Agrona himself that his only daughter had been killed in battle. If it had been up to him, my master would surely have waged war, ignoring the consequences. However, the rest of the Great Clans were against it and pushed for a treaty.” Windsom turned around and resumed walking again.

“The treaty was eventually formed between the two sides, forbidding the asuras to act directly because of the collateral damage it would cause if a full-scale war were to occur between the seven asura races of Epheetus and the Vritra Clan’s army of basilisks and lesser, half-breed mutts.” There was an obvious spite in his voice, but his expression had turned back to normal.

As I began thinking again, I realized how much of a disadvantage Dicathen was in. This treaty had been in place since generations ago, and even though it prohibited asuras and the half-breeds from directly participating in the battles, who knows how many of the so-called ‘lesser races’ of Alacrya had blood of asuras mixed in with theirs.

I wanted to ask why the other asura races didn’t do the same and interbreed with the lesser-races, but if it took centuries for the mad genius Agrona to come up with a way to interbreed an asura with a lesser race, then the other races probably haven’t found a way how. I doubt that, even if they could, most would be against breeding with the lower races because of their own morals and pride.

*** You are reading on <https://ReadFreeWebNovelonline.com> ***

“Wait. So the ancient six artifacts that you guys gave to the people of Dicathen...”

“Yes. It was our way of giving the people of this continent a sword and a shield. We knew that the powers and knowledge contained within those artifacts would ignite a revolution for your people. We were right, but we only found out through recent events that it hadn’t been nearly enough. It is Lord Indrath and the other Great Clans leaders’ wish that, with our direct intervention, we can equip the mages of this continent with enough strength to defend this continent from Agrona. We fear that if Agrona gets access to the inhabitants of this continent, the Vritra Clan will gain enough fighting power to overthrow Epheetus.”

“And this is where I come in. A stronger chess piece that the Great Clans can utilize to gain the upper hand in the upcoming war,” I sneered, crossing my arms.

“Well, I would think of it more as, us training you to defend your family and homeland,” Windsom countered, his lips curling upward ever-so-slightly.

“Meh, I prefer the mutual benefit over questionable acts of altruism anyhow,” I shrugged.

“I guess you still don’t trust us completely,” Windsom said, studying me with a curious eye before asking, “On a side note, how do you plan on informing your family of our... plans?”

“Don’t worry, Windsom. I thought a lot about how I should break it to my parents while I was in jail,” I winked, walking past the asura and toward the flickering fire-light coming from the end of the tunnel.

As we approached the end of the tunnel, I could see the shadows of a few people surrounding a fire. I couldn’t help but smile at the sight of my large warrior of a father scrubbing dishes near the underground stream as Elder Rinia, my sister and my mother were concentrated on a simmering pot over the fire.

“Something smells delicious! Did you make enough for me?” I yelled out, causing everyone to whip their heads in my direction.

Each of them had a different reaction as they realized who it was that spoke. My father dropped the dented pan he was scrubbing, my mother and sister simultaneously bolted up from the makeshift chair that they were sitting on, while Elder Rinia simply gave me a meaningful smile as she continued peeling the potato in her hand. The only one that I didn’t see was Tessia, but I wasn’t sure if she was even here or not.

In seconds, I was wrapped in the embrace of my family as my mother and father checked my body for any signs of injuries while my sister’s gaze went straight toward the sleeping Sylvie in my arms.

“Is Sylvie okay?” She asked, concern laced in her voice as she held my bond in her arms.

“Your brother just escaped from prison and you don’t even ask if I’m okay?” I croaked, pretending to be hurt.

“Mm... you always seem to come back alive anyway,” she shrugged, focusing her attention back to Sylvie. This caused a snort of laughter from my father as my mother did her best to chastise my sister while trying to hide her smile.

I felt a sharp pang in my chest at my sister’s callous words. Where was the sweet child that stuck to me like glue and shed tears whenever she couldn’t see me? Is she already at the rebellious stage?

It seemed that someone had already informed my family that I would be visiting them soon, and going by expressions, I would bet that it was Elder Rinia.

My parents were interrogating me on the full details of what exactly happened, but stopped dead in their tracks all of a sudden.

The soft footsteps that echoed through the tunnel stopped behind me, and I took no hesitation in introducing the person.

“Everyone, this is the person that helped me through everything while I was imprisoned... and also my prospective master.”

I waited for some sort of reaction, but my parents and sister were still silent, frozen in place as their eyes were still glued to the figure behind me.

“Ahem, tone it down.” I turned behind me to see Windsom look at me in confusion before his eyes widened a bit in understanding.

“My apologies,” he replied, and the air around us changed back to normal. I had gotten used to the pressure the asura normally gave off, but to a normal mage, it would be suffocating.

My mother and sister fell on her knees while my father stumbled, barely keeping himself on his feet.

Elder Rinia, who was a bit farther away, stood up and gave a deep bow toward Windsom. I’m not sure if she knew his identity, but she, at least, seemed to understand that the unknown person was not someone ordinary.

“Welcome to my humble abode. Please, make yourself comfortable.” The elderly elf spoke in a well-mannered, respectful tone that I’ve never heard her use before.

Windsom simply nodded in response, filling the tunnel with silence except for the crackling of the fire.

My father was the first to speak. “Firstly, th-thank you for helping my son. I know that he can be a handful.”

The asura actually let out a faint smile at this before speaking. “It seems your child has caused you many worries.”

“And will continue to do so in the future,” my mother finished as my father helped her and my sister back up. “But Arthur, what did you mean by prospective master?”

“Alice, your son just came back from a long journey. There’s plenty of time for this topic after he’s gotten something inside his belly,” Rinia scolded, ushering everyone back around the fire.

Thankful for the chance to finally eat something, I sat down, impatiently blowing on the hot stew to cool it down.

Windsom declined on eating but sat down with us as he idly looked at the fire. Once everyone had finished their meal, my father began informing us what had ensued on their side.

Virion had apparently taken Tessia and Lilia somewhere else to properly mend their injuries. The Helstea family followed him to look after their daughter, which explained why only my family was here. Elder Rinia teased that I would be able to reunite with her in a few days, which caused everyone to crack a smile.

Eventually, everyone had run out of things to chatter about idly, leaving the cave silent once again. I could tell my parents were now expecting my reply to their previous question.

Turning my gaze over to Windsom, he stared back at me, expecting the same thing. Scratching my head in a motion, that I felt had become a habit during awkward circumstances since coming to this world, I spoke up.

“Elder Rinia. Is it alright for me to speak to my parents in private?”

“Of course,” the diviner gave me a warm smile.

“What about me?” My sister chirped, still cradling my bond in her arms.

“Sorry, Ellie.” I shook my head as I headed inside the tent first.

My parents came in after me, looking a bit confused.

“Isn’t your master going to join in?” my father asked, looking back outside before closing the flap.

“There is something the two of you need to know of first.” The timbre of my voice and expression on my face silenced them from asking any more questions as they sat down in front of me.

“Before we begin, there’s something I’ve thought long and hard about telling you ever since coming to this world.”

The Beginning After The End – Chapter 105

Chapter 105: When Ignorance Is Bliss

There was a lingering silence following my words as my parents tried to process what I had just said.

“Coming to this world? What do you mean, Honey? You were born here... I-I don’t understand,” my mother replied as she reached out to me. She held my hands tightly, as if she was afraid I would wisp away if she didn’t.

My father, on the other hand, stared at me silently, waiting for me to continue. Taking a deep breath, I squeezed my mother’s hand and spoke with a comforting smile.

“Of course I was born here, Mom; I’m yours and Dad’s very own flesh and blood. Trust me, I remember better than anyone else when I was born,” I chuckled, arousing another confused look from my parents.

"I was transported, reborn... I'm not quite sure exactly what, but something happened and I was taken from my world and brought into this one."

"Wai-wait a minute, Son... you're going to have to back up—"

"Art, what are you talking about? Another world? A-are you okay? Did your master tell you this? Where is this coming from?" my mother cut in as she scooted closer, examining my head... probably for signs of a concussion.

"No, Mom. My master doesn't know this; no one but you guys know any of this. I don't know the correct term for this 'phenomenon' either. I've thought about this for a while but my best guess is that it's something akin to a reincarnation," I explained.

"Arthur, did something happen to you after they took you away? Did they hurt you in some way? Come here, let me try and heal—"

"Honey, the boy is fine. Arthur, go on," my father encouraged, but my mother persisted.

"No, Rey, our son is not fine. He's spouting nonsense about another world and reincarnation. Art, let me—"

"Alice! Let the boy speak." My father snapped in a voice I've never heard before, stunning both my mother and I.

So I explained...

I described the world that I came from, the role that I played there, and the relationships that I had with an excruciating amount of details to make sure that they knew I couldn't have made this up.

Throughout it all, my parents stayed silent for the most part. My father would ask questions here and there, but his face remained expressionless. My mother, however, was obviously shaken up; her face pale, the trembling of her hands increased as my story progressed.

I couldn't tell how much time had passed, but by the fact that I felt mild pangs of hunger in my stomach, it seemed like I had been talking for several hours.

"King Grey..." my father mumbled, running his fingers through his hair as he leaned back in his chair.

"So the fighting, your talent in magic—"

"Yeah, the ki system in my old world worked similarly to certain aspects of mana in this world," I finished for him. "And as for the fighting... you get the idea."

"Then ever since you were born, you were able to understand what we were saying? You remember everything?" my father asked, letting out a deep sigh.

I simply nodded in response.

"Hehe..." my mother chuckled.

My father and I both turned our gaze to her. To our surprise, my mother started laughing. My father wrapped his arm around her, but she just glanced us delusionally.

"I-I get it. This is all a joke, right? Hehe... Oh, my son. Art, you almost got us there, right Rey?" she said, smiling. However, neither of us responded and her smile faded, her eyes searched for any cues that would confirm her belief. When she couldn't, she grabbed my hand as she stared at me with a look of desperation.

"This is a joke... right? Arthur Leywin, tell me this is a joke. You can't really be... some former king that died and was transported into the mind of my unborn child, right? RIGHT?"

"I... don't know exactly what happened, but I'm not joking," I replied, unable to look her in the eyes.

"No... No, no, no. This... No, this isn't happening. Rey, don't tell me you believe all of this? Our son is sick; something must've happened to him while he was gone — no, something definitely happened. Rey, say something! Say that our son is sick!" My mother grabbed onto my father's arm, pulling on his sleeve as tears started rolling down her pale face.

"Honey..." Wrapping his arm around her shoulder, my father held my mother close to his chest. He looked up at me and motioned me to leave the two of them alone.

I wanted to hug my mother, tell her that I was still her son, but I couldn't muster up the courage to do either. Opening the tent, I walked out without saying anything, leaving my parents alone.

Elder Rinia, Windsom and my sister all looked at me as I walked towards them, but the look on my face probably stopped them from asking anything. Even my pouting sister held her tongue as I sat down next to her and the slumbering Sylvie in front of the fire.

Time passed slowly, with my mind feeling like it was trying to swim through a particularly viscous syrup.

Was telling them the right decision? What did they think of me now? Did they still think of me as their son, or would they inevitably grow distant...

Noises blended together incoherently and everything besides the fire that I was staring at grew out of focus. Yet, my head immediately snapped back when the sound of the tent flap opening reached me.

My father came out of the tent, suddenly looking a lot older than before. I had expected my mother to come out right after, but my father shook his head.

"Ellie, can you stay with your mother inside the tent?" he asked, motioning for me to follow him.

"Here you go. Feel better, you p.o.o.p." My sister stuck her tongue out as she carefully handed me my bond. I couldn't help but feel a smile tug back on my lips as I watched her skip towards the tent.

*** You are reading on <https://ReadFreeWebNovelonline.com> ***

Placing Sylvie atop my head, I followed my father into the tunnel Windsom and I had arrived through. I concentrated on the sounds of our echoing footsteps until my father finally decided to speak.

"Your mother... she's sleeping right now," he announced with a sigh.

"Is she okay?" I kept a few steps distance from my father, watching as he idly kicked a pebble as he walked.

"She was... in quite shock, to say the least."

"So you guys believe me?"

"Unless you've suddenly developed a fond taste for sick gags, you have no reason to lie to us about this. Besides, it all makes sense now: the early awakening, your brilliance as a fighter and a mage... it all makes sense," he replied.

"Are you okay?" My eyes stayed glued to the pebble bouncing on the uneven ground.

"Of course I'm not!" my father exclaimed, turning around.

"This isn't easy news to swallow, Arthur. All of the memories we had as a family in the past, was that all a facade of how you thought the son we wanted would've been? How am I supposed to act around you now? You were once technically older than me, yet you're here as my thirteen-year-old son!" he continued, looking at me desperately for answers. "A-And your mother... your mother nursed you as an infant! She mothered a middle-aged man thinking he was her own son!"

I stood silent, unable to reply. Everything he said was true after all. My father's fists were clenched so tightly that blood was dripping between his fingers. His expression was ghastly; from the trembling frown on his face to his furrowed brows, his emotions were clearly visible on his face. Fear, anxiousness, frustration, and confusion... they were all there.

"I'm sorry, but are you really our son, Arthur? Or did you take over the unborn baby that would've been our son during your reincarnation, or whatever it is that happened to you!" He blurted. His eyes widened immediately as he covered his mouth with his hand.

"I-I didn't mean that," he stammered. Letting out a deep breath, he whispered, "I'm sorry, Arthur... I'm just very confused right now."

"Like I said earlier... the truth is, I really don't know. I don't know who or what brought me to this world, and why it did. You're right, Da... Reynolds. I could've killed the fetus inside... I don't know how this 'process' that brought me here works," I stated coolly, swallowing back something particularly hard in my throat.

He winced when I addressed him as Reynolds and was about to say something, but just closed his mouth.

"I didn't want to keep hiding this from you guys, but now I'm questioning whether I made the right choice," I murmured, letting out a dry laugh.

"This is what I wanted to tell you guys for so long, but never had the courage to. I wanted to say this before I left."

"Left? You're leaving?" my father responded.

"Yeah, and I think that under the current circumstances, it'll be good to spend some time apart," I went on, a certain aloof edge filling my voice involuntarily.

“...How long will you be gone?” My father asked.

“At least a few years.”

“That long, huh?” he replied as he stared down, no sign of him stopping me or forbidding me to go.

Turning around, my chest was aching and my head was throbbing with an intensity I had never experienced before. Humans... no matter how powerful we could potentially be, we were still so fragile.

“You know, I never had any memories of family in my old world. Growing up in an environment where no one truly loved me, and in turn, being calloused and distant to everyone made me an unrivaled fighter, but a c.r.a.ppy person. Ever since coming to this world, the two of you, and later Ellie, taught me something I had never known. I may not be the strongest fighter or mage in this world, but I’m h.e.l.l of better person now than I ever would’ve been in my previous life. I’m sorry for the hurt I caused. Thank you for making me a better man... and thank you for loving me as your son.” Still with my back facing my father, I headed back to where Windsom was. I simply walked on, hearing the m.u.f.fled s**s of my father as he stayed behind, I struggled to keep my own tears in as well.

I got back to the main cave to see Windsom and Rinia discussing something. Elder Rinia was holding onto something wrapped in a blanket, and I could’ve sworn that it moved, but I chose to ignore it. Windsom had just taken his hand off whatever was bundled inside the blanket and noticed me approaching.

“I see you’ve wrapped things up. Are you ready?” Windsom’s glittering eyes studied my expression carefully as he got up.

“Yeah, let’s go.”

“Wait, aren’t you going to say goodbye to your family?” Rinia chimed, setting down the blanket carefully on her seat.

“No need. I’ve already sorted out everything I needed to here. I leave them in your care.” I gave her a curt bow and was about to follow after Windsom when Rinia grabbed me. Her eyes glowed with a mysterious hue as I silently waited for her to speak when she suddenly placed her hands on my cheeks.

“Arthur, please. Your expression is frightening, it is unbecoming of someone as kind hearted as you. I can only begin to understand the gravity of the upcoming battles that lay ahead of you, but do not fall back to your old ways. You know best that the deeper you go into that pit, the harder it will be to climb back out,” she said as her eyes faded back to normal. Slapping my cheeks gently, she turned me around and nudged me towards Windsom.

“Now go. I’ll take care of things here,” she said with a soft smile.

Windsom retrieved a disk-like object far too large to fit in his pocket and dropped it on the ground. Then, the asura p.r.i.c.ked his finger and let a drop of his blood fall on the disk. Immediately, it expanded and shot out a column of light that reached the ceiling.

My mind was still on what Rinia had just said when I turned around to Windsom and asked, “Was there something wrong with my expression?”

“Your expression reminded me of the Pantheon Asuras of Epheotus. They are a race of fine warriors that have learned to close off their emotions in order to fight with the most efficiency. A very useful technique indeed,” Windsom nodded in approval. “Now, let us go. Are you sure you have tied your loose ends here? I need your full concentration once we’re in Epheotus.”

I glanced at the cave one last time before taking a deep breath.

“I’m ready.”

Hugging Sylvie tighter in my arms, I accepted Windsom’s hand as we stepped into the column of golden light.

The Beginning After The End – Chapter 106

Chapter 106: Logic’s Biggest Foe

REYNOLDS LEYWIN’S POV:

I hated myself for what had happened. A part of me wished I had told Arthur that it was okay... that he was still family.

But a bigger part of me, the part that I hated, wished he would’ve just never told us.

I had known since early on in Arthur’s life that he was different. He had always been much more composed and mature for his age, and even when he acted his age, it seemed... rehearsed. Since early on, his actions always displayed a certain sense of foresight; there was always a reason he did something, a goal or plan of some kind.

Maybe due to that, I was so caught up on his reason for telling us this. Wouldn’t it have been better for everyone, even for himself, if he had kept it a secret? What was the reason? What was his goal?

Why was it so hard for me to accept this? Was it because it went against my own pride? My own selfish pride that maybe, just maybe, I had sired and raised a genius that only came once in a millennium?

The signs were always there. His strange behavior from an early age, his unexplainable prowess as a swordsman and talents as a mage.

Again... Did I subconsciously choose to ignore all of those signs so I can maintain my petty ego? Deciding just to accept the fact that that my own flesh and blood, my... son, could be so bloody impressive.

I couldn’t help but laugh at myself at how difficult it was to say ‘son’, such a simple term of endearment.

It took me a while to drag my sorry feet back to the cave. Looking around, the only one I could see was Elder Rinia, who was cradling something by the fire. I glanced at the tent my wife and daughter was in, but for some reason I couldn’t bring myself to go inside. Instead, I sat down next to our benefactor.

“He left, you know.” The aged elf’s eyes remained glued to the bundle of blankets she was cradling in her arms as she spoke.

"I figured," I sighed, feeling like a child being scolded.

"I was afraid of the day when he would tell you."

"Y-you knew, Elder Rinia?" I peeled my eyes off of the fire and turned to the elf seated next to me.

"I see many things, but only for that boy do I have to grind my old head to try and piece together what is in store for him." She met my gaze, her eyes dim with weariness.

"Heh, he's hardly a boy," I scoffed, leaning forward as I got lost in the flames dancing in front of me.

"Bah! He's still a child to me, much like how you're still a child as well," Elder Rinia chortled back. Leaning back carefully in her seat, she continued. "I always found it amusing... the preconceptions people have about age and intelligence: The older someone is, the more wisdom he or she should possess, and the more intelligent someone is, the more logical he or she should be. Pair those two traits up, and the intelligent senior should be some cold, calculating shrewd... don't you agree?"

Noticing my puzzled expression, she revealed a soft smile and gently set down the bundle she was holding and leaned closer to me.

"Do you see me as a cold, calculating shrewd?" The aged elf gave me a wink.

"No, of course not. But... I don't get what this has to do with Arthur," I stammered back, caught off guard.

"Weren't you wishing Arthur would've just kept his mouth shut? That you would feel better ignorant of who the boy really is? I bet you were also wondering why the boy told you in the first place, right?"

Before I had the opportunity to reply, the aged elf poked me softly in the chest... right where my heart was.

"The heart remains the brain's biggest foe. Well actually, for men, the brain's most formidable foe is probably..." Elder Rinia's gaze dropped below my waist. When I realized where she was referring to, my immediate instinct was to cross my legs, but I soon found myself laughing alongside the old elf.

Elder Rinia straightened up and continued. "As I was saying, emotion—the heart— constantly clashes against things like validity, efficiency, utility... anything logical. That's what gets us hurt or even killed, yet, we can't seem to help it. It makes us lesser as an individual, but greater as a group."

"So... Arthur was running more on emotion than logic when he told us this?"

"Bah! How could I know what he's thinking?" She shook her head, "I do know this, though. I've known the boy since he was a mere toddler in this world and he's come a long way since then. Much of that cold sh.e.l.l of his has slowly melted. Perhaps his 'coming out' was a large step he had to take to break out of that sh.e.l.l he once found safety and comfort in."

Elder Rinia got up and stretched painfully before handing me the bundle of sheets she had been cradling. "Hold on to this for me so that I can prepare some food for your wife. I suspect she won't have much of an appet.i.te but she still needs to care for her body."

"Thank you, Elder. What is this, anyway?" I bowed slightly before asking.

“Arthur’s master only told me it was a gift for the Leywin family.” There was a mysterious grin on her face causing me to be helplessly curious as to what it could be.

After carefully peeling away the layer of blankets, I couldn’t help but gape.

It was a mana beast, an infant mana beast to be more precise. The small bear-like creature was dark brown except for two dark spots above its eyes that made the beast look like it was scowling and a tuft of white fur on its chest.

“Awww! So cute! Papa, what is it? Can I keep it?” Ellie’s sudden exclamation startled me, nearly making me drop the mana beast.

“Honey, you scared me! And, I’m not sure if”—just then, the mana beast woke up and locked eyes with my daughter—“it’s a good idea...”

My voice trailed off as both my daughter and the beast’s eyes began glowing a faint gold. I sat still, witnessing what I could only assume to be the bonding process. I had yet to bond with a mana beast, but both Arthur and Ellie now have.

I sighed to myself, bitterly acknowledging the fact that it would be better for my daughter to have a bond to protect her as the image of me riding atop a mighty bear mana beast into battle slowly crumbled.

The glow subsided from both their eyes as a gold insignia imprinted itself onto my daughter’s right collar bone.

The bear-like mana beast stretched out its arms, as if wanting to be picked up by Ellie, and let out a soft whine.

“Hehe! I’ll name you Boo,” my daughter giggled as she picked up the mana beast.

“B-Boo?” I sputtered, imagining the ferocious mana beast it’ll grow up to be being called something so cute.

“Yup! Because the black spots make him look like he’s always mad! So, Boo!” she declared.

“Let’s go help out Grandma, Boo!” My daughter skipped off, just to stop and turn around. “Oh, right! Papa, Mama is awake.”

*** You are reading on <https://ReadFreeWebNovelonline.com> ***

I immediately got out of my seat and made my way to the tent. Elder Rinia’s tent was much larger inside than it appeared to be from the outside. Quietly stepping into our room that was separated by another flap, I smiled when I saw my wife sitting up.

“How are you feeling?” I gently asked, taking a seat next to her.

“How long have I been sleeping for?” she groaned, rubbing her temples.

“Only for a few hours.” I put my arm around her and pulled her close so she could rest her head on my shoulder.

“W-Where’s Arthur? Is he... gone?”

“Yeah.” I held her tightly as she began trembling.

“Am I a terrible person, Rey?” she sniffed.

“No, you’re not. Why would you ask that?”

“I-I called Arthur sick. I didn’t take him seriously when he told us his secret... I didn’t want to take it seriously!” She looked up at me, the corner of her eyes filled with tears.

“That’s normal. I wouldn’t trust anyone who could easily accept what Arthur had told us,” I consoled, gently running my fingers through her hair.

“Then am I a terrible person for doubting whether Arthur is our son?”

“...”

I wanted to tell her no, but how could I when I called myself terrible for thinking the exact same thing? The pain and hurt I’ve been feeling ever since learning the truth about Arthur was from the selfish desires and dreams I placed on the child I called my son. Alice was the one who actually birthed Arthur. She went through the stress, discomfort and pain of pregnancy for nine months before enduring the agony of labor. She nursed him, fed him, took care of him when he was sick and taught him the ways of this world. Now, everything she knew about the child turned out to be a lie...

I bit my quivering lip, trying to keep silent.

I needed to be the strong one...

I needed to be the one that my wife could rely on...

“I’m sorry,” my wife suddenly whispered. Her head was still leaning against my shoulder so I couldn’t tell what sort of expression she had.

“You did nothing to be sorry about, Honey. We... we just need time to sort out our feelings. Arthur knew this, which was why he told us before he had to leave.”

“How long will he be gone for?” she asked. I might’ve been hearing wrong, but my wife’s voice sounded somewhat brusque as she asked.

“He said a few years,” I replied, expecting Alice to be surprised. Instead, she gave me a slight nod as she muttered, “I see.”

“Alice, what’s wrong?” I pulled my wife an arms length away, trying to get a better look at her face. Her eyes were dull, almost lifeless, as she refused to make eye contact with me.

“I wonder what our son would’ve been like if Arthur hadn’t taken over?” she mumbled looking at the ground.

“A-Alice... please don’t say that. Don’t ask something like that,” I said, my voice coming out in a sort of whimper.

“Would he have been courageous and outgoing like you? Or maybe he would’ve been a bit more careful and shy like me...” she continued, tears rolling down her cheeks.

“H-Honey, don’t. Just don’t...” Tears began rolling down my face despite doing all I could to steady my voice. “Arthur is... Arthur...”

“Arthur is what? Our son?” My wife met my eyes and I could see how desperate she was... how lost she was. “If you haven’t noticed, Rey, not once have we referred to Arthur as our son since we started talking!”

I specifically remembered opening my mouth, trying to refute, but no argument came out; no sound, no words... only silence.

I took a deep breath and wiped the tears off of my wife’s face before speaking. “Just as it is for you, it’s hard for me to confidently call Arthur our son. Hopefully, that’ll change the next time we see him, but Alice, it doesn’t change the fact that we have considered him family for over thirteen years now. We laughed, we fought, we celebrated, we shed tears together. Isn’t that what brought us close? Not the blood running through us, not who we once were in the past, but what we went through together?”

Embracing my wife tightly, I continued talking. “Remember when Arthur sacrificed his life for you in the mountains on our way to Xyrus? He did that expecting to die that day. You know very well he wouldn’t have done something like that if he didn’t consider you important. So don’t dwell on the ‘what ifs and let’s try to accept what’s happening around us.”

I could feel my wife trembling in my arms as she broke down and cried. I now remembered where I recognized that dull, lifeless look Alice had in her eyes. It was the same look she carried after we thought Arthur had died. It was her trying to escape reality.

We sat there for a while in each other’s arms until our tears ran dry and our s**s were reduced to soft whimpers.

“Alice, you’re not a horrible person. Believe me, I’ve thought worse than you. But it is going to take us time to wrap our heads around this...” My voice trailed off as I held my wife’s face and gazed deeply, studying every detail of the woman I loved.

“S-stop staring. I must look disgusting right now,” she croaked, her voice hoarse from crying.

“You’re beautiful,” I stated while staring at her puffy red eyes and runny nose.

My wife softly closed her eyes and leaned forward. I pressed my lips gently against hers when Ellie’s voice rang just outside the tent.

“Mama! Are you feeling better now? Let me show you Boo!”

“Now now, come play with Grandma. Your parents are... resting, yes resting!” Elder Rinia’s voice rang just outside the tent as well.

“Aww, okay. Come on, Boo. Let’s play with Grandma!”

Alice and I locked eyes in what felt like a long time and she finally smiled.

“What is this ‘Boo’ that Ellie is talking about?” my wife asked, raising a brow.

“I’ll tell you later.” Shooting her what I supposed to be a wink with my swollen eyes, I wiped another stray tear from her face and resumed where we had left off.

The Beginning After The End – Chapter 107: A Grudging Tolerance

ARTHUR LEYWIN’S POV:

I wasn’t sure what I was expecting out of a land inhabited by beings that were basically considered G.o.ds to us. For some reason, in my imagination, grand and fantastical lands were always constructed out of gold, diamonds or some other precious material.

In my old world, even the homes of the most influential figures were designed with the intention of practicality more than anything else. The most important figures were mostly warriors after all, and our tastes were rather simple. Things like furniture made from the hides of precious beasts were unnecessary and only sought after by the rich merchants and politicians whose sense of self-worth were directly proportional to their wealth.

Thus, exiting from the golden column of light and stepping into the realm of asuras could only leave me wide-eyed and breathless.

My mood was sour and I was still wallowing in regret over the recent decision I had made, but one glance at the land Sylvia and Windsom had come from was all it took for me to temporarily forget about my troubles and future hardships I would have to endure.

It felt as if I had been transported to a different planet; a planet where it wasn’t the inhabitants that had constructed the buildings and manors, but one where the earth and land forged itself to be worthy enough to be resided in.

The towering castle in front of us seemed to have been birthed from the earth itself as there were neither signs nor indications that it had been shaped or molded. Sophisticated designs and runes made from what looked like precious minerals covered the walls of the castle that stood high enough to be seen from kilometers away. The trees bent and tangled together in arches to create a corridor that led to the entrance atop a bridge, shimmering in an array of translucent colors.

Peeling my eyes off the castle itself took a great effort, the iridescent bridge was no easier, but I was finally able to at least collect myself enough to take in my surroundings.

Windsom had transported us on top of a mountain cluttered with trees that reminded me of cherry blossoms. The familiar trees were in full bloom, with shimmering pink petals that seemed to dance as they floated down to the ground. The vibrant bridge that stretched out in front of us led to another mountain of which the castle seemed to have been carved from. Evidently, the mountain was pretty high up as the clouds covered everything underneath the bridge, with two mountain peaks that stuck out like two islands in an ocean of hazy white.

“Welcome to Epheotus, or more specifically, the Indrath Clan’s castle.” Windsom walked towards the castle, stepping on the bridge of precious minerals that any mortal king would wage wars for, before glancing back and beckoning me to follow.

Taking a deep breath, I trailed behind the asura, carefully placing my right foot on top of the incandescent surface of the bridge. The bridge was semi-translucent like stained gla.s.s.. As I stepped on the structure, a deep feeling of fear washed over me, which was a surprise since I have never had a fear of heights. It might've been due to the fact that there were no supports holding up the bridge that easily spanned a couple hundred feet.

"Indrath Clan? You mean we're at the home of Sylvia's family?" I asked. I had decided to trust in the colorful bridge rather than imagine what would happen if it were to abruptly break. Walking alongside Windsom, we made our way towards the castle.

"Yes. Lord Indrath had commanded that I bring you and Lady Sylvie to him upon arrival," the asura replied. I found it amusing seeing the usually cool and aloof Windsom smoothing out the creases on his robe anxiously.

"Any last tips before meeting this almighty lord of lords?"

"Unfortunately, even I do not know what to expect; this situation is rather peculiar after all," he answered, tidying his hair.

Letting out a sigh, I glanced down at Sylvie sleeping in my arms. I was beginning to grow worried by how much she slept, the only thing comforting me being her rhythmic breathing.

The doors to the monstrous castle were just as proportionately terrifying. They were tall, not just to a thirteen-year-old boy, but tall enough to admit giants and... well... dragons.

"There aren't any guards or watchmen?" I asked, looking around the open doors.

"Of course there are. They were watching us while we were crossing over the bridge. Now come, we shouldn't keep Lord Indrath waiting."

As I stepped off the bridge and into the castle, the feeling of angst went away, instead I was drenched in cold sweat at the realization that it wasn't the height of the bridge that had scared me but whoever, or whatever, had been watching me as we crossed it.

The interior of the castle didn't disappoint as it was just as magnificently crafted as the outside. Ceilings were unnecessarily high with arches that looked to have been carved out of the mountain. The walls themselves were adorned with intricate detailing, as if they told a story. Yet, considering how large the castle was, it was eerily quiet.

"This way. The Indrath Clan is waiting for you." Windsom seemed to be on edge as he kept fixing some part of his attire while we walked.

"Wait, the entire clan is waiting for us?"

"Yes, now please, let us hurry," the asura sighed, as he went ahead of me into a particularly intimidating corridor.

Again, shivers ran down my spine, but this time, I was able to see the source. At the end of the corridor, were two figures guarding the door. I wasn't able to make out much of their appearance as they were shrouded in darkness from the shadows cast by the corridor's lights. However, my instincts had already kicked in, desperately trying to convince me to run as far away as possible from these two shadowed figures.

I was reminded of the time I was in front of the Elderwood Guardian, however, I had a feeling that in front of those guards, the S class mana beast that I almost died to would only be cannon fodder.

Windsom and I eventually approached them. Reaching the door, I was now able to discern the two guards' features. One was a female with an amiable expression on her face. She looked rather tomboyish with her green hair cut short to just underneath her ear, but the distinct curves noticeable below her light leather armor showed otherwise. The man next to her looked much fiercer, with sharp eyes and a scar that jaggedly cut across his cheek. The only visible weapon I noticed on either of them was a short dagger strapped to each of their waists.

"Elder Windsom. I see you finally brought the human boy," the female guard grinned. The male guard stared at Sylvie and looked up at me in a studying gaze. "Is it appropriate for a human child to be carrying the Princess?" he asked disapprovingly.

"Let it be, Signiz. They are bonded," Windsom dismissed. "Now... are you guys going to let us in or not?"

The two guards looked at each other briefly before giving Windsom a brief nod. As the two of them faced the door, the aura they emitted increased significantly, enough for it to be nearly palpable. Only a few seconds had passed but beads of cold sweat rolled down my face as my breathing became shallow and jagged.

*** You are reading on <https://ReadFreeWebNovelonline.com> ***

The two guards each held onto one of the door handles and pulled it open. I could only imagine how heavy it was since the two guards were struggling to pry it apart. Finally, with a loud clack, the towering door slid open, revealing what I assumed to be the Great Hall... and staring right at me, seated on a blazing white throne, was a man who looked to be no older than twenty.

Windsom immediately stepped past me into the room and kneeled.

"My Lord," the asura addressed, bowing his head. Lord Indrath wasn't what I had expected him to be like in the least. He had a cool, almost mellow feel to him, sporting a silvery cream-colored hair that was neither long nor short. He would be considered an attractive man by any means, but he wasn't exceptionally stunning either. I couldn't really tell what his build was underneath his white robe but he didn't look particularly robust. His eyes reminded me too much of Sylvia for my comfort, but while Sylvia's eyes were still compassionate, his were hard. Lord Indrath's eyes were purple as well, but even from here, I could see the colors change shades.

Realizing that I had been staring for far too long, I followed suit and kneeled as well. While my head was down, though, I couldn't help but peek around the room. Standing to the side of the great hall were figures of all ages and sizes staring at me, some disdainful like the prior male guard, while others with simple curiosity.

Each of the figures that were standing around Windsom and I emanated auras that would make even the most powerful mages in Dicathen faint and froth in the mouth, yet, the man seated on the throne that burned in a shimmering white fire emitted none. Even after trying to consciously sense him, I couldn't even feel his presence. Even with the fact that I was able to see him, I had trouble believing he actually existed if my eyes weren't directly focused on him.

"Stand." His voice soft and silvery, yet sharp like a knife in a way that it was both gentle and imposing. Rising to our feet, we walked towards the throne, with Sylvie still in my arms. I could feel the eyes of everyone following me, judging my every movement. I was reminded of when I was still an orphan fetching groceries for our house at a nearby market. It felt much like how the adults looked at me then, the glares and blatant disgust as if I was some sort of disease that they needed to avoid.

Seconds slowly ticked by as we waited for the man on the throne to speak, yet he only stared wordlessly at me and Sylvie with an expression I couldn't interpret.

My eyes hadn't left Lord Indrath as he had been studying me so when I felt Sylvie in my arms suddenly disappear and reappear in his arms, my immediate reaction was a clumsy and baffled astonishment.

"What the?!" I spouted. I reflexively tried to reach out for my bond until Windsom placed his hand on my shoulder.

"What. Am I not allowed to hold my own granddaughter?" Lord Indrath retorted, holding Sylvie in one hand. Lifting her up so he was eye-level, Lord Indrath turned her around while inspecting every angle of my sleeping bond.

"I see you have done nothing to train her. Her mana levels are insultingly low, and by how she's in a hibernating state right now, it seemed that you had strained her." Lord Indrath's eyes narrowed and pierced through me, only my pride keeping me from taking a step back.

"My apologies, My Lord. I should have trained Lady Sylvie while I was in Dicathen. If it is to your liking, I can start her training now as well." To my surprise, Windsom had defended me, bowing once again in front of the creamy-haired man on the throne.

"No need. I will personally look after... Sylvie," Lord Indrath dismissed, shaking his head. With that, a wave of surprised gasps and soft murmurs filled the great hall as the other members of the Indrath Clan whispered to one another excitedly.

Placing a finger gently between Sylvie's eyes, Lord Indrath mouthed something inaudibly. His eyes glowed, and suddenly Sylvie jolted awake, her eyes glimmering in the same shade of purple as her grandfather's.

"Kyu?" 'Papa? Where am I?'

The nostalgic voice that I hadn't heard in days filled my head. Sylvie was obviously confused by the unfamiliar scene and by the fact that a man she had never seen was holding her so intimately.

'We've come a bit far away, Sylv. How are you feeling?' I transmitted back, a smile forming on my face.

'Sleepy~ Can I go back to sleep, Papa?' I could see Sylvie's eyes struggling to stay open as she blinked wearily before fully closing.

“Lord Indrath. Win... Elder Windsom had already explained to me what is needed of me, but he has yet to fill me in on why exactly I was to be brought here. If it is simply for training purposes, isn't some remote dungeon in Dicathen a suitable place?” I asked, impatiently waiting for him to hand me back my bond.

“I have deemed you a necessary piece that will help us against Agrona and his army. I take it that you have already understood the mutual benefit in winning the approaching war, yes? Having said that, it will be the most beneficial to have several specialists to help Windsom in training you during your stay here. Think of it as an honor since only the most talented of the younger generations would get the training that you will get.”

“How will you know when the war will be approaching? How much time do we even have?” There were way too many uncertainties for me to be able to comfortably train.

“That is for me to worry about. Focus on your training and I will notify Windsom when it is time for you to go back to your homeland. That is all,” Lord Indrath replied, signaling to Windsom to take me away.

“Wait, what about Sylvie?”

“She will stay with me until her training is over,” he said matter-of-factly.

“What? How long will that take? I won't be able to see her until then?”

Lord Indrath's brow twitched impatiently as he simply shooed us away with his hand. Before I could respond, Windsom squeezed my arm tightly, dragging me out of the great hall.

After passing the two guards I angrily shook my hand out of Windsom's grasp. “What was even the point of that meeting? I went in there to have Sylvie snatched away and be looked down on by all of the Indrath Clan? That was humiliating!”

Letting out a sigh, Windsom replied, “The relationship between you and the asuras is very peculiar and could only be summed up as... let's say... a grudging tolerance. The very fact that we have no choice but to rely on a lesser being is a wound on our pride. Do not worry, both you and Lady Sylvie will not be mistreated. Like Lord Indrath had mentioned, you are important to us.”

“I'm pretty sure he said 'necessary piece',” I scoffed, stepping back onto the bridge we previously crossed.

Windsom's lips curled into a faint smile. “Come, there are some people I want you to meet.”

The Beginning After The End – Chapter 108: Ones Closest To Gods

“No! I said left foot out at a forty-degree angle. Your center of gravity should be aligned with your right heel since that is your pivot foot, do you understand, stray?” The instructor had just cracked his whip to get me in proper position as he went around the class.

Gritting my teeth, I silently obeyed, adjusting my left foot to comply with my instructor's flawed technique. If I hadn't, it would only mean a delay in whatever scraps of dinner we were given since we weren't to be fed until everyone had perfectly gone through the stances and forms from the day's lessons.

Days at this “inst.i.tution” had consisted of eight hour combat training, which I found somewhat flawed, then meditation to nurture our ki centers for around ten hours after. The remaining six hours were split amongst eating, washing and sleeping. Students whose centers had developed enough to learn ki techniques were separated from the rest of the group and placed into specialty cla.s.s.es depending on their apt.i.tudes.

Those that were not able to awaken their ki centers were to be “relocated”, of which I had later realised that it really meant ‘to be disposed of’. For me, I had followed the instructor’s training regimen to the bone for the allotted eight hours. During the time given for meditation, I would sleep for the remaining two hours after actually only meditating for the first eight, using the time we were given to sleep to unlearn all of the garbage that the instructors had regarded as martial art and train in my own techniques.

The only useful information that the instructors had taught us were the vital spots in a human; the weak points. Their techniques were a brutish, senseless way of trying inflict damage to those points without any regard to how the opponent might react. They taught in a way where, as long as one follows the proper steps, the user will reach their target and inflict pain on him or her. Like I said... senseless.

I hid the fact that my ki center had been cultivated enough to learn ki techniques for as long as possible since I knew that once I advanced to the higher level cla.s.s.es, it would give me less time for me to train on my own. My one stroke of luck at that time, I admit, had been stumbling upon a ki technique book for hiding the user’s presence. I had engulfed the words in that book like it was fresh water in a barren desert. The technique manual was a low grade one, but I had practiced the technique to such a degree that it provided me with the ability to sneak into the library where they held all of the ki techniques.

Now that I think back, I probably wasn’t that tall in my previous life due to the fact that I had only slept for eight to ten hours a week because of how much time I had spent reading and practicing the techniques. I knew it would’ve been useless for me to try and learn all of the techniques, so I had narrowed it down and studied only the ki arts that would most benefit me in the long run.

I’ve realized that, while the library had been secured, it wasn’t really heavily guarded; the reason being that, even if a student were to have trespa.s.s.ed inside, they wouldn’t have been able to figure out on their own how to learn the techniques. Much like the manual I had stumbled upon for hiding the user’s presence, the other ki technique manuals had been filled with terms and jargon that no orphaned child or teenager would’ve known.

That means, all I had to go off on to learn the techniques were the crudely drawn pictures that showed the necessary steps in learning and using the ki art.

It didn’t strike me then, but reflecting back on it now, it would’ve been easy to discern that I was nothing short of being a prodigy. Just by studying the pictures of the man (I’ll name the man Joe.) demonstrating the steps for the ki art, I was able to grasp how the ki was supposed to flow inside my body to properly execute the technique.

The first ki art I had learned after breaking into the library was a series of ki enhanced footwork techniques that I had practiced until the soles of my feet almost showed my bones. The technique looked like a tap dance sequence without proper ki flow, but once I had managed to input the proper

flow of ki into the appropriate appendages at the appropriate time, I was able to evade, reposition, sneak behind, basically teleport within a limited range.

I still remember using that ki art, the technique I mastered and fine-tuned to make it even better, to defeat the same instructor that had whipped me so many times for no good reason.

The look on his face when I had my wooden sword pressed against his sweating neck, I can still vividly recall. His wide, astonished eyes shaking as his mouth hung agape trying to string together words to form a petty and convenient excuse that would allow him to save some face.

Even as I was on the road to become King, the foot technique that I had mastered and made my own left me with nicknames like Untouchable, G.o.dSpeed, Mirage, etc.

However, when I had come to this world, there was little use for it once my mana core advanced enough. I was hardly within range to use the technique that I had once relied so heavily on and it seemed so much simpler to just conjure a wall to block whatever projectile was hurled towards me. With mana being so abundant and all, I had never needed to regulate and control my mana output.

~~~~~ Present

It's amusing how the human brain recalls moments of the past. All the memories that the person wishes to forget is somehow ingrained even deeper into the hippocampus.

This seemingly ancient memory of my previous childhood times had been suddenly evoked as if my life flashed before my eyes just as a simple low sweep from my opponent's kick shattered both of my legs simultaneously. As I collapsed onto the ground, I failed to dodge another sharp jab that dislocated my right shoulder. I was all but defenseless as I shifted glances between the man who had overwhelmed me to such an enormous degree and my severed left arm that he had in his hand.

Windsom had told me that the pain felt in this domain was greatly diminished. If that was truly the case, how much more agonizing would these wounds be if it actually happened to me?

The one responsible for my current mortal injuries approached me with a mixed expression, giving me a terse nod as he snapped his fingers. "Enough," he said as the world faded into black. And, like that, I was awake again with all of my limbs attached and unbroken.

I immediately crumpled to all fours and hurled the remainder of my last meal as I heaved for breath. My vomit immediately dissipated in the small sapphire pond I had been meditating in. I wasn't sure if I was wet because of the magical liquid that I was surrounded in or because of the profuse amount of sweat and grime that I had discharged from the stress.

"No, let me continue," I managed to choke out in between gasps.

"The human boy has admirable willpower. How much time has pa.s.sed, Windsom?" the same deep and controlled voice as the one that had broken most of the 206 bones in my body asked calmly.

"About five minutes have pa.s.sed out here," Windsom said tersely.



“So roughly an hour has passed for us in there.” The lean man with a shaved head remarked in a way that was neither disappointed nor proud, just matter-of-factly. I regarded the two asuras’ conversation with a weary curiosity while wiping vomit off of my lips.

“Again,” I demanded desperately, sitting back up in the meditative posture Windsom had taught me in the middle of this sacred pool.

The shaved-headed asura nodded approvingly and sat down facing me in the exact same position as I was in and traded glances with Windsom, signaling him to start.

Once again, the glowing sapphire liquid rose up around us and enveloped the asura in front of me and myself. I was soon engulfed in the familiar scorching sensation that had overwhelmed me the last few dozen times we did this, and again, my vision had darkened as I waited anxiously for myself and the asura to reappear in the h.e.l.l that is the mental training facility where I had just been killed

My thoughts slowly trailed back a few hours before all of this, when we had just left the Indrath Clan’s castle.

\*\*\* You are reading on <https://ReadFreeWebNovelonline.com> \*\*\*

Upset would be a mild way of describing my state of mind after Lord Indrath had decided that I wasn’t fit to see or even communicate with my own bond during the period of our stay. He made it explicitly clear that my presence would hinder the progress of Sylvie’s recovery and training.

It was an odd feeling being separated so entirely from Sylvie. Usually, even when my bond was sleeping, I would still feel her presence. Suddenly having that yanked away again just like that time in the Widow’s Crypt dungeon made me feel empty, almost as if a limb had been pulled off.

“Come, there are some people I want you to meet,” the asura paused and then went on. “Well, just one person specifically I want you to meet, for now.”

Even after crossing the bridge, Windsom did little to explain the location of our training grounds, keeping mostly silent as we scaled down the steep mountain. As we climbed down, the atmosphere drastically changed. Color was lost as we were surrounded by a dreary canvas of grey stones and rotten woods. The sea of clouds that seemed so far down was now just above us, and it seemed that the layer of haze was the border between heaven and what felt like purgatory.

We must’ve intentionally trekked down the steepest side of the mountain since we were vertically climbing down most of the time. Windsom had vaguely explained to me how the use of mana arts to venture down was forbidden; something to do with tradition and being worthy. Because of this tradition, the journey that would have taken us minutes elongated into hours.

“We’re here,” Windsom announced evenly with no sign of fatigue inside this zone of increased pressure and low air density. He was staring intently at a dead root that jutted out of the crevice between two stones.

“We’re going to train here?” I muttered in between breaths, staring at the insignificant root that Windsom seemed so fixated on.

“Hold on to my hand,” he replied, ignoring my question as he reached out towards me.

As soon as I had a grip on his hand, the asura yanked me towards him, swinging me towards where the root was stuck. Before I even had the time to yell out in surprise, however, the scene changed and I was in some sort of small cave, the same cave that I was in now.

Windsom appeared behind me shortly after, and took the lead, heading towards the glowing pool that I had been staring at.

“It’s good to see you again, Kordri,” Windsom suddenly greeted to no one in particular.

“It is nice seeing you as well, Elder Windsom. And you must be the human, Arthur Leywin, correct?” Just then, a figure that I could swear was not there before was suddenly right in front of us. It was the same shaven and lean asura that had sat down in front of me just now.

This man was by no means distinguishable or remarkable in any way. He reminded me much of a monk; someone who had chosen to let go of the worldly ways, except he wasn’t dressed in a robe but a light, tight-fitting tunic. The only unique feature he had was his four hazel eyes, but even that fact seemed to be somehow plain. Every one of his four eyes exuded a calm wisdom that differed from Lord Indrath’s silently terrifying gaze.

“Yes, nice to meet you,” I replied after quickly regaining my composure.

“Arthur, this is my close friend, Kordri. He is of the Thyestes Clan of the Pantheon asura race just like Aldir, who you met back at the floating castle in Dicathen,” Windsom introduced. He had taught me about the eight asura races and the affiliated Great Clans. The Pantheon race was the only race of asura that was versed in what I coined as neutral-type mana art.

The Basilisk race, the race that the Vritra clan was from, was the only race that was capable of decay-type mana art. The remaining six asura races, including the Dragon race that Lord Indrath, Sylvia, and Windsom are a part of, hold distinct creation-type mana art.

While the Dragon race are feared for the aether mana art that is so unique and mysterious, it is still considered creation-type. Of course the asuras’ terms for creation, neutral, and decay type mana arts differ for each race but I just standardized it for my own sanity.

There was no time for us to go over what the special qualities each race held since that was when we had arrived to Elder Rinia’s home, but I had a feeling that I would be learning it later on.

“Has Lord Indrath truly granted you the aether orb?” Kordri’s even voice snapped me out of my train of thought as he looked anxiously at Windsom.

“Yes, it is right here.” Windsom then took out a sphere shaped object the size of his palm, revealing it to Kordri.

“Lord Indrath is truly investing much into this human,” he sighed, admiring the orb.

Windsom looked back to meet my eyes, giving me a “I told you so” gaze before turning back.

“Arthur, come and sit here with us. I’ll explain to you how your training will begin.” Kordri motioned for me with his hand as he sat down.

“Windsom speculated that it would be best for your training to start with me instead of of him because of a few reasons. First, your body and mana core are not nearly strong enough to handle the sort of training that even young asuras are capable of. If resources were not readily available at our disposal, it would take you at least a few decades in order for you to physically absorb anything taught by us.” The asura named Kordri looked at the orb in Windsom’s hand before continuing. “Fortunately, we have the aether orb.”

“What exactly is this aether orb?” I knew he was expecting me to ask this.

“Arthur, you may not know this, but the Dragon race is regarded as the asura race deemed closest to being G.o.ds. Yes, actual G.o.ds. The reason being is the fact that we hold the ability to manipulate aether. Aether is a material, that flows throughout the entire universe. As you know from receiving Lady Sylvia’s will, aether contains the power to manipulate even time and s.p.a.ce itself, as you recently experienced from Lord Indrath. Much of the possibilities of aether remain incomprehensible to even the Indrath Clan, but one artifact that has remained in our possession since the beginning of our clan history is the aether orb. The aether orb is a treasure that had allowed our clan to gain glimpses of the power that aether holds. One being the ability to separate the body from the soul.” Windsom regarded the orb with an almost reverence as he tenderly held onto it.

“The orb also has the power to manipulate time. With these two abilities that the aether orb holds, it will be possible to train you at a rate and efficiency that should be impossible otherwise. Because of the close relationship that the Thyestes Clan and Indrath Clan has, Lord Indrath had at one point gifted us with the temporary usage of this treasure,” Kordri continued for Windsom.

“Remember me telling you that Lord Indrath has placed a significant amount of resources into making sure you will be ready for the upcoming battles? Along with the orb, Lord Indrath has allowed us to use his exclusive training grounds. The aether-rich liquid inside that pond will help accelerate your training and heal wounds that you will incur throughout this process. Kordri here is a talented and highly respected teacher in the Thyestes Clan. He will be responsible for the first portion of the training.” Windsom gave Kordri a stern nod as the two of them stood back up.

“So what exactly will we be doing for the first portion of the training?” I asked, almost timidly.

Windsom replied, his voice sounding almost devious. “You will be fighting against Kordri in a soul state, and you will be dying. Over and over again.”

The Beginning After The End – Chapter 109: Snail’s Pace

“Trust in your body, Arthur. As long as you are able, your body will be the only thing that will not fail you.” As Kordri’s words rang softly in my ears, a piercing pain had forced my eyes open as I looked down to see Kordri’s hand jutted out of my chest, unbloodied.

“Dammit.” As the word left my tongue, the all too familiar sensation of being sucked out of the soul realm, once again, overwhelmed me.

As soon as I awoke back in the cave, my hands shot to my chest, prodding for a hole that wasn’t there.

I fell to my back in the shallow pool. “How long this time, Windsom?”

“Two minutes,” he replied. “Arthur, the more you are forced out of the soul realm, the more time is wasted in your training. Even if an hour out here equates to about roughly twelve in there, it will not be enough if you are expelled every few minutes.”

“Don’t blame me, blame your friend that is killing me once every those few minutes,” I groaned. It was impossible to get used to the sensation of dying. Even if my physical body wasn’t getting injured, the trauma-inducing stress on my mind would be enough to make even veteran fighters go insane.

I’m not exactly sure what the two asuras were thinking, putting a teen through this sort of nightmarish training.

“I am doing only what you are able to handle,” Kordri responded, almost as if reading my mind. “The child is resilient, though. It makes me curious why that is. Even young asuras who don’t die nearly as often as you do have a hard time coping with the stress.”

If I had to guess, it was probably due to the fact that my mental strength was a combination of two lives, but even with that, this training was beginning to take a toll on me.

Windsom nodded in acknowledgment. “Even I grew worried at first by the number of times Arthur had been expelled from the soul realm due to deaths.”

“Well, time to get training again. Are you ready, Kordri?” I gave my body one last stretch before sitting back up.

Letting out an amused chuckle, he gave me a nod. “I will always be ready, Greenhorn.”

“Remember, Arthur, while you are training in the soul realm, your physical body will also be refining your mana core. The longer you are able to last in the soul realm, the faster your cultivation will go. Don’t overexert yourself; it has only been a week into your training. We still have some leeway, but not if you take on more than you can handle,” Windsom cautioned as he activated the Aether Orb.

Kordri and I were, once again, in the same gra.s.sy field that expanded endlessly into the horizon. It’s been eight days since I had started this tortu—training. Since one hour outside equates to twelve in here, that means a full twenty-four hours out there translates to twelve days in here. Even counting the time spent out in the physical realm eating, sleeping and resting after dying too many times in the soul realm, I have spent over a few months in this gra.s.sland training with the even-tempered and patient monk, Kordri.

“I can tell you are well-versed in physical combat, Arthur, but you have become overly reliant on the usage of mana arts, or what you lesser races call magic. By my guess, you are much more accustomed to shorter battles and duels. Proper conservation and distribution of mana was never a priority, right?” Kordri speculated.

“More or less. I’m only thirteen, remember?” I countered innocently.

“Sure.” The asura shrugged, shooting me a look that told me he didn’t buy it. “You are only human, meaning you are bound by the limitations that follow. You are a long way from reaching white-core

stage let alone the integration stage. Because of that, my job is to train your body. After all, the less mana you expend on protecting yourself, the more leeway you have in other areas of use. Now let us begin, I've wasted enough time with my rambling."

"Yes sir," I answered, getting into a defensive stance. Kordri's figure vanished and reappeared arms length in front of me.

The first time I had come to the soul realm for training, I was killed in the first blow, unable to even react. Even when I wasn't killed, I jolted awake at the slightest blow because my soul wasn't used to taking on injuries. The second, third, fourth, all the way up to the twenty-eighth time, I had been thrown out of the soul realm in the first hit. But on the twenty-ninth time, I was able to dodge, just barely... well... enough to persist until the second hit. Residing and training in the soul realm was difficult, to say the least. Only after a few weeks of dying in the soul realm was I able to last long enough to actually call it training.

Kordri followed up his left jab to my neck with a right elbow to my sternum. It was only when we fought that I was reminded of how terrifying Kordri was. His meek temperament disappeared, replaced by a cold, ruthless warrior capable of killing me over a hundred times in the span of a few seconds.

The asura's limbs seemingly vanished due to the high speed in which they were moving. The only reason I was able to dodge was because Kordri's attack pattern was always the same. Of course this was done on purpose; the asura had explicitly told me the choreography of his strikes, never once deviating from that since the beginning of our training. It was pathetic that I was barely able to dodge an attack that I already knew was coming, but that was the difference between us.

Beads of sweat flew off my face and body as I was scantily able to keep up with Kordri's onslaught. Seconds melded together increasingly slower to form minutes as my sense of time dulled. Desperation was evident as I progressively made more mistakes the longer we fought. I had yet to land a single blow on him since the beginning of the training. In the months I spent fighting Kordri, all my strikes had met with thin air.

"Good! you are keeping up longer than usual. Do not get sloppy, Arthur. Remain patient and bide for time if you do not see an opening," the asura shouted as he simultaneously continued striking and easily dodging all of my feeble attempts to land a hit.

I made a blunder at that moment. Kordri's sequence of attacks were strategically placed so that if I didn't dodge it by just a hair's breadth, I wouldn't be able to avoid the next attack.

While I did dodge his spinning elbow, my movement had been too large. I was instantly met with a low sweep that I couldn't avoid due to leaning too far back to dodge his previous blow.

I chose to give up my left foot in response, knowing I wouldn't be able to completely dodge the sweep. As expected, the crunching blow shattered my left ankle but I continued dodging.

\*\*\* You are reading on <https://ReadFreeWebNovelonline.com> \*\*\*

Even in here, where I knew it wasn't real, I didn't want to die.

"Sloppy, but nice follow up. Do not grow desperate and stay levelheaded," he repeated, executing his next blow.

Even with my broken ankle, I was able to somehow dodge more of Kordri's restrained attacks until he did something he hadn't done before.

I was expecting a forward knee to my stomach like he had always done after a right strike, but instead, he shifted his body to perform a roundhouse kick.

I wasn't able to dodge his left leg but I was able to keep myself from dying instantly. Instead of his kick snapping my neck, it had connected squarely with my jaw.

The world tumbled around me as I felt myself skipping like a flat rock on a lake's surface before tumbling to a painful stop on a bed of particularly tall grass.

I wasn't able to talk due to the bottom half of my face being completely mutilated and it took most of my mental capacity to suppress the excruciating pain, but that didn't stop me from good-naturedly extending a middle finger at my mentor.

Responding with a smirk, he helped me up. "You managed to not get yourself killed," he said, seemingly impressed. "Rest until your soul state is healed."

Even as he said this, I could already feel my body, or my soul state, recovering. The broken fragments of my bones fused together as torn muscle fibers, tendons, and ligaments reattached themselves. While people who haven't experienced such a sensation might think that the act of healing so fast would be comforting or soothing, it was actually just as painful, if not more, than the injury caused.

I kept telling myself that experiencing agony like this will be useful later on, hoping it would get me through this torture every time we trained, but I was on the verge of breaking.

It had barely been over a week, yet, because of the time distortion in this world, to me, months have passed. My progress as a mage had always been unrivaled, so training here like this, where my biggest achievement in these past few months had been staying alive for longer than five minutes against someone purposely restraining himself, I couldn't help but become frustrated and impatient.

"We should take a break from combat training for a while." Kordri's sudden statement took me by surprise. Seeing as he specialized in hand-to-hand combat, I wasn't sure what else he would be teaching me.

"What do you mean? Am I not learning fast enough?"

"No, it's not that. Actually, your ability to grasp and comprehend is frightening, coupled with your stubbornness, it is no wonder that your potential as a mage is beyond anyone else's. However, because of that stubbornness of yours, I'm afraid you are going to unwittingly break down if we keep going at the current pace," my trainer answered as he sat down.

"Break? I thought the realm inside the Aether Orb wouldn't allow me to die? And besides, with the regeneration speed of my soul state, as long as you don't kill me instantly, I should be okay, right?"

The four-eyed asura lifted his gaze and regarded me sternly. "I'm not talking about damaging your body, Arthur. I'm talking about injuring you here," he said, tapping his head.

“So hurting me psychologically?” Perhaps it was the same stubbornness that Kordri had just talked about or a layer of pride that had made me ignorant of this possibility, but I couldn’t bring myself to agree with him.

“Arthur. You are constantly experiencing death while training here with me on a daily basis. More so than that, death has no longer become the endpoint but the precursor for a level of pain that even asuras can find daunting.” Kordri got up from the ground as he explained. “Even if it won’t damage your body, that kind of trauma will start to get in the way of producing the sort of fighter I am trying to train you to become. When we’re talking about this level of pain, too much of it and your body will instinctively try to save itself, regardless of whether you want it to or not. Just enough pain, and it will be your most reliable sword and shield.”

I thought about my trainer’s words for a moment and understood where he was coming from. However, I thought of myself as an exception, having lived through two lives. Call it arrogant, but I felt like I could take it. “Honestly, Kordri, I’m fine, we don’t n—”

I didn’t even have time to consciously process what had happened. One moment, we were talking, the next moment, an overwhelming sense of dread crashed down on me like a tsunami. The next thing I knew, I was several meters away from the asura with Dragon’s Ballad, my sword, held tightly in my grasp. My eyes focused back on Kordri, only to see the asura with a flower in his hand.

He didn’t say anything... he didn’t need to.

Just as I let my guard down, Kordri’s figure flickered and vanished, and without even a trace of presence or intent, a searing pain made me look down.

My mentor’s hand had, once again, pierced straight through my chest. As I tried to pull myself away from him, I fell down.

The asura withdrew his hand and kneeled down to be level with me. Giving me a gentle smile, he continued, “Even the G.o.ds may not know what sort of life you had truly led, but it is because of your past experiences that this could happen. You trust too deeply in your instinct, Arthur, and while it is a useful tool, it should not be relied on wholeheartedly. Small steps, Arthur. You have much to be taught, but much to unlearn as well.”

As he ruffled my hair, I thought again of the time I was in the inst.i.tution during my past life as an orphan; the times I had to teach myself from little useful information and tools I could gather. I realized that, for the first time in both lives, I have finally gained an actual mentor. A mentor wise and powerful enough that I can, even with my unique past and monstrous potential, be a student hungry to learn.

“Do you understand, Arthur?” Kordri asked as he got up and extended his hand.

“You bet.” I accepted his hand and pulled myself back to my feet. My body still trembled, but whether it was from the lethal wound in my chest, the excitement of my future prospects or the antic.i.p.ation from being under skilled mentors; I had a feeling it was a mixture of all three...

The Beginning After The End – Chapter 110: The Lost Art

He was a monster... a true predator.

That was the only thing that came to mind when he released the shackles he put on himself for my safety; when he released that petrifying pressure.

The paralyzing fear slowly spread through my body like a snake's deadly venom. I clenched my sweaty hands, tightening the hold on my sword. The soft blades of grass rippled, swaying leisurely because of my trembling feet. The muscles in my legs continuously twitched, fighting the impulse to whirl around and sprint away. Salty blood filled my mouth as I bit down on my bottom lip. Holding my blade up, I approached the thickening aura emitting from my teacher.

A burning fire in the form of sweat stung my azure eyes, but I dared not to blink. Slowly, painfully, my brain sent signals, picking up my feet, and moving them in a cautious, but steady gait as I walked into the manifestation of fear itself.

"I'm coming, Arthur. Prepare yourself!" the voice rang clearly within the cloud of menacing air.

I forced my tightened jaw to relax and let out a barbaric roar despite already lacking the air to breathe, dispelling some of the chilling fear gripping my insides. "d.a.m.n it all!"

The teal blade in my hands dulled as I drew near Kordri, as if even my sword was afraid. But I kept walking, each step feeling as if I was trying to wade across a pool of undried cement.

Finally within range of my blade, I cleaved down, hoping to end this in one strike. Of course, it didn't. Kordri parried Dawn's Ballad like it was a foam stick, creating an arc with his blade as well. Just as my sword was about to hit the ground, I used the momentum to spin myself, whirling my blade back around at Kordri's knees.

Another failed attempt.

Kordri's short sword easily blocked mine, stopping it just short of his leg. Knocking Dawn's Ballad away, my teacher threw a swift kick at my face. I could hear the sharp whistle of air as I dodged in time to bring my sword back up to an upward swipe.

Kordri turned his face to the side so my blade whizzed harmlessly by his ear.

"Your movements are getting better, even with my aura's suppression," my instructor commended. I knew he was just complimenting me, but seeing him have the leisure to talk while dodging came off as annoyingly smug.

It was becoming harder to breathe as I realized I was almost at my limit. One more desperate lunge toward Kordri was all I could manage before Dawn's Ballad fell to the ground, my hands unable to hold onto it any longer. I fell to my knees, my legs giving out soon after, and I was left choking for air inside the confines of this hellish aura.

"Not bad." As Kordri's voice reached my ears the pressure disappeared. Without the suffocating aura affecting me, my body desperately sucked in air.

Over a month had passed in the outside world which meant about a year has passed in here. A year of continuous, torturous training with Kordri's short lectures being the only breaks I had.



Over the course of the month that had actually pa.s.sed, I have had no contact with Sylvie. The number of times I have been dying and forced out of the soul realm have drastically reduced. The liquid that surrounded my body and Kordri's put us into a mock comatose state, even supplying us with the nutrients needed to stay healthy.

The last time we had left the soul realm was about four months in here, which translated to a little short of two weeks outside.

Kordri had kept me busy, but even then, I couldn't help but long for my family and friends. There were so many matters that I felt like I had put off, continuously filling me with regret upon recollection. Elijah had been taken away to who-knows-where and I wasn't even sure if he was still alive. I also don't know whether Tessia had awoken, moreover, had left my family on such bad terms...

I knew that training right now was the best thing to do, but it ate away at me whenever I thought about it. It didn't help that, during the year I was in here for, the only thing I had to show for it was being able to endure Kordri's killing intent, or "King's Force" as he called it, long enough to have a short exchange before plopping to the ground like a dead fish.

"H-How... How long... did I last?" I breathed out, finally able to form words as I rolled onto my back.

"You're improving," he replied, dodging my question.

I sat up, turning around to face him as I continued to catch my breath. "Not long enough, right?"

"Don't dwell on the seconds. We are not seeking a specific duration, understand?" He said sternly, more a statement than a question.

"Now, again, but this time, no weapons."

"Again?" I let out a sigh, picking up my trusted blade and sheathing it.

Kordri tossed his own sword onto the gra.s.s before explaining, "I know you prefer swordfighting, and I have to say that your blade, Dawn's Ballad, is a fine partner to have, but as a mage, hand-to-hand combat continues to be the most versatile and adaptive form of fighting. If you have the patience to learn, that is."

"Once I have drawn out the maximum potential of your human body, my role as your teacher will be complete. For the sake of the coming war, I will mold your bones, develop your muscles, and train your mind to its limits so that you will be the knight that protects your continent and your loved ones," Kordri continued, putting some distance between us. "It is obvious that you have had training in melee combat, much more than a normal child. However, like I have said before, your fighting style is more suited for dueling against a single opponent."

I nodded in agreement. In my previous life, a majority of my fights were in the form of duels since that was the custom there. Wars were rarely held, and even if they were, Kings were not to directly partake in them. After all, our lives were too valuable to risk.

"Since asuras are not allowed to partake in this war, their descendents, the mixed-bloods, will be their strongest forces. Your primary duty in this upcoming war will be to take care of those mutts that the Vritra Clan will send as generals or as special teams. You are incredibly strong, Arthur, but so are they,

and do not think that they'll line up and take turns fighting you. Expect to be put in a situation where you will be surrounded by enemies with asura blood coursing through them," Kordri affirmed as he calmly circled around me with his hands behind his back. "Of course, unlike now, you will not have the restriction of mana usage placed on you so you would be free to wreak havoc. However, you will also have to take into account that there might be ally soldiers or even civilians nearby. What will you do then? When it comes down to it, physical combat, laced with proper and precise mana usage, will be the most efficient and dependable way of disposing enemies. Especially if they are on a much higher caliber than the mages you are familiar with."

"I understand." I got into an offensive stance with my leading hand relaxed and my right hand curled into a fist by my jawline.

\*\*\* You are reading on <https://ReadFreeWebNovelonline.com> \*\*\*

"The first lesson I had taught you was how to stay alive. More specifically, you were to get a grasp of fighting at higher speeds while trying to dodge a set routine of attacks. While I won't tell you how much I have restricted myself when fighting you, I would say that your agility has improved to a level that I deem adequate. Your lesson, after that, was fighting under conditions of substantial pressure. Combat under the effects of my King's Force, or killing intent as you call it, has strengthened your tolerance a considerable amount these past few months. There is room for improvement in both areas, but for now, it is time for the third segment..." Kordri's voice trailed off as he came to stop in front of me.

"Your field of vision is too narrow, too focused." Kordri's voice resounded in my ears as if he was right behind me as I watched the figure of Kordri I had been concentrating on wisp away.

Realizing that it had been an afterimage, I whipped my head back but I was too late. A clean blow to my back sent me tumbling forward, causing me to take in a mouthful of gra.s.s. It was at nonsensical times like these that I couldn't help but admire how realistic the soul realm was. The chunks of gra.s.s and dirt in my mouth tasted exactly like how I had imagined they would.

I stood back up, groaning as I stretched my back. "I thought we weren't allowed to use mana," I said, spitting out the gra.s.s in my mouth.

"I didn't use mana. Remember, my physiology is fundamentally different from yours. I will restrain myself but it is inevitable that I will be naturally faster, quicker, and stronger than you. Now come," he instructed, beckoning me with his hand.

I immediately propelled myself towards my instructor, putting professional short distance sprinters to shame as I got within range to attack. I could definitely feel that the mechanics of my body had improved while training with Kordri. My rear foot rotated as I spun my hips to create as much momentum as possible into my strike. Unleashing my right fist, I could feel all of my muscles, tendons, ligaments and bones working in harmony, like a well-oiled machine. Without even relying on mana, I was able to generate enough power in my punch to surprise Kordri.

As he dodged my blow in the last second, I could see a Kordri's lips curl up slightly as he unexpectedly ducked underneath my right arm.

Never had I been thrown so swiftly, so helplessly, and so painfully as that moment. As I coughed from having the wind knocked out of me, Kordri held his hand against my neck as if it were the edge of a sword. Squeezing my own ribs in fear that it would crumble apart if I didn't, I heard my mentor's voice.

"I have to say. That was a very nice punch, Arthur. How much strength do you suppose you used releasing a strike of that power? Do you think you can do that for two days, three days straight? Can you do that for hours on end without pause and little sustenance in your body to give you that energy?" Kordri knelt down to assess the damage on my body. "How much energy do you think I spent tossing you? I have to say, because of how powerful your strike was, the less energy I had to expend."

Gritting my teeth to bear the pain, I sprung back up to my feet and took a stance.

"Energetic today, aren't we? Good," he replied, beckoning me once more.

Heeding his gesture, I approached and took a posture as if I would launch the same punch as I had done just before. Instead, I used the punch as a feint and jumped up, launching my right knee to his jaw.

Again, Kordri's movements were different from before. I had been used to exchanging strikes with the asura, but this time, Kordri used his left hand to gently shift the direction of my launched knee, pushing himself to my right side simultaneously. In a quick, fluid motion, my mentor grabbed the collar of my shirt behind my head and executed a drop throw, propelling me to the ground, head first.

The world turned black for a moment and my ears rang fiercely when I woke up. Carefully, I stretched and massaged my neck, surprised that it hadn't snapped cleanly in half from the force of his toss.

Maybe it was because of the blow to my head, but I suddenly recalled this type of combat art. Aiki...do, yes, it was similar to aikido. It was an ancient form of combat that was lost due to a decline in traditional martial arts after contemporary forms of combat became more widely used. After becoming a king in my previous world, I had access to numerous archives pertaining to martial arts and the art of dueling. I had glanced briefly through a book on the art of throws but took little interest in it besides the concept of capitalizing on the momentum of one's opponent. Of course, I made much use of that knowledge, but did little to learn the art of throwing; it seemed too inefficient at the time.

"We had talked about proper conservation and distribution of mana when in prolonged battles, correct? Well, it goes without saying that it should be the same for your body as well. No matter how much mana you have flowing within you, it cannot act as a battery to power up your body. Mana, just like a sword, is a tool to control and utilize. Your body is the centerpiece that brings the tools together to create a true warrior. Now, you are healed, yes? Come," Kordri commanded.

Wordlessly, I got back to my feet and dashed once more towards my mentor.

"Your body holds the capabilities of being all kinds of weapons," Kordri explained, getting into an offensive stance. "For example, your fist can become a hammer or bludgeon, powerful enough to destroy walls," he said, throwing a simple punch.

Dodging his first strike, I lowered my center of gravity and released a punch towards his solar plexus.

In a smooth, liquid motion, Kordri pivoted himself, wrapping his own arm around the arm I had just attacked with and redirecting my fist with the flick of his wrist. "It can also become a whip that locks and deflects the opponent's attack."

“Your hands can be blades, your legs, axes, all depending on the user,” Kordri said as he whirled around and placed his palm on my back. “And it can also be a cannon, capable of blasting your foes to pieces. Defend yourself with mana, Arthur. I will allow it,” he instructed.

I wrapped my body tightly in a coat of mana, focusing more on the area where Kordri’s palm was placed.

The deafening blast of the sound barrier being broken almost distracted me from the pain that spread throughout my body as I hurled through the air like a bullet. It was impossible to tell how many bones I had broken, how many organs had collapsed as my vision darkened and I felt my body being sucked out of the soul realm.

When I opened my eyes, I was in the familiar cave again, drenched in the mysterious liquid as well as my own sweat and probably my tears. A wave of nausea then hit me as if Kordri had actually just punched a hole through my sternum as I buckled forward and heaved out whatever was in my stomach.

“Ugh,” I moaned, trying to collect myself. Kordri was still in front of me, giving me an expression of what I guessed was sympathy, but shifted his gaze behind me.

“Ah, you’re here,” he said, standing up.

Turning around, my vision passed the sight of Windsom and focused on the figure of someone I didn’t recognize. A boy, standing over five feet tall, looked to be about seven at most, took a step toward us and bowed respectfully in my direction. His head was also shaven like Kordri’s, but he only had two, nut-brown eyes. He was skinny but not sickly so, with a nice, toned body that didn’t match his childish face.

“I’m sorry for my lateness, Master,” the boy said, lifting his head, before tilting it as he regarded me. I could see his eyes giving me the once over and, when he locked eyes with me once more, shot me a look of haughty derision.

It seemed beneath me to get angry at a kid who was younger than my sister, so I just raised a brow and turned back to face Kordri.

“Who’s the kid?” I asked unassumingly.

“Arthur, I’d like you to meet Taci... your new training partner.”