

The Beginning After The End, Chapter 16: Next Step

“Hey, Art! Hurry up! We’re going to be late!”

“AAAGGHHHH!! Tess! Stop! I give! I GIVE!” I cried out.

Tess finally got off of me, letting go of the leg lock she had in a firm grip.

“Can’t there a gentler way of waking me up, Tess?” I grumbled, massaging the feeling back into my leg.

“It’s getting harder and harder to wake you up in the morning! I have to do something, right? Besides, you should be grateful such a pretty lady is waking you up every morning.” She fluttered her eyes at me.

“I find the maids here plenty pretty, thank you very much.” I muttered under my breath.

She must’ve heard because that earned me a firm squeeze to the side.

Where did the shy Tess that was too scared to sleep alone in the tent go; the sweet Tess that begged me not to go? Bring her back! I liked her better!

Something I realized in my three years of living in Elenoir was that elves awakened much earlier than humans did. Whereas the average age for a human is around thirteen years old, elves awoke around the age of ten.

Tess had awakened fast, even for an elf. It happened last year and boy did she awaken with a bang. It wasn’t as big as when I had first awakened but she had managed to destroy her room upstairs, fall down, and create a small crater from the implosion in the kitchen right below. Since then, she’s been joining me in training with Gramps. All I can say is, since awakening, she’s become a lot more confident and bold, in more bad ways than good. She knows how strong my body was so she had no hesitation in using me as her sandbag as she tried new spells that she learned from Grandpa Virion and other conjurer teachers. What she just didn’t seem to get after all of my cries was that I still felt pain dammit!

As for me, today was a very special day because, after three years, I was finally able to complete the assimilation of mana into my body. It was almost my birthday so while Tess had turned nine a couple months ago, I’ll be finally turning eight. During this time, I wasn’t allowed to absorb any mana from my surroundings and only allowed to use my innate mana formed from my mana core to spread it into my body. Today was the final step that took place once a beast tamer finished his assimilation.

I skipped showering and just changed into a more presentable robe, tucking the stone, into my robe before heading out into the courtyard with Tess.

“Finally awake now, eh Art? How did your wife wake you up today? Haha!” Grandpa Virion mused as he sipped his tea on the small table outside.

“Ugh, wife? Where? I didn’t know you could marry demons. You’re turning her into a monster, Gramps,” I groaned.

Luckily Tess wasn’t able to overhear as she came outside just moments after.

“She’s going to grow up into a fine woman, Art. Better sweep her off her feet before it’s too late,” He chuckled, lifting his teacup in a toast.

Tess just blushed at that and elbowed my side.

“AGGH!” Why? What did I do?

“Hahaha! Art! Are you ready? Today is finally the day. After this, you’ll be a true beast tamer, not like those lucky adventurers that just have a beast will,” He emphasized, arms crossed.

I gave him a firm nod while Tess headed to the table Gramps was sitting on to watch.

It wasn’t much of a ceremony. All it consisted of was Gramps exerting a large amount of mana into my core. This would trigger a large surge of mana that I would have to direct and spread into my body.

“Do you remember the basic phases of beast tamers, Art?” he quizzed.

I recited the basics that Grandpa Virion pounded into me these past years. “All beast tamers have a different number of forms that they can will their bodies into. The number of forms depends on the strength of the Beast’s will that is left in the mana core. The first phase, that all beast tamers have, is Acquire. In this phase, the Tamer can utilize a small portion of the inherent ability that their beast has. The second stage is Integrate, where the Tamer’s body wholly infuses with the Beast’s will, allowing a much better control over their beast’s inherent abilities.”

“Correct! The phases that the beast tamers are able to unlock simply shows how much they can utilize their beasts’ will. The stronger the beast, the harder it is, but at the same time, if the tamer can’t get insight, then it is also impossible to get past the first phase. One thing to note, however, is that, not always is the Integrate stage more powerful than the the Acquire. The Acquire phase is tapping into a specific inherent ability of your beast’s while Integrate is a much more all-encompassing power up using your beast’s will,” he reminded, his face deathly serious.

“While I didn’t tell you earlier, now that you are about to become a true beast tamer, you should know is the differences in how a beast tamer’s will is acquired. If the beast is killed and his mana core is extracted with its will still intact, a mage can absorb the will

and try to gain insights. That mage would be considered a forged tamer. While it is a lot easier and straightforward to be a forged tamer, the probability of gaining insight is very rare and limited. One of the reasons it took me so long for me to be able to break into the second phase was because I am a forged tamer. I consider myself lucky to even be able to break into the second stage though. Arthur, you are one of the extremely rare legacy tamers; where the beast willingly imparted its will onto you.”

Continuing on, he explained, “Art, my first phase doesn’t really make me that much faster, but I’m able to erase a bit of my presence and blend myself into the shadows. You haven’t seen my second phase, right? Watch carefully. It took me over ten years for me to make a breakthrough into this phase.”

Feeling a powerful surge of mana surrounding his body, I couldn’t help but involuntarily cringe. All of a sudden, the mana around his body seeped back into him and my eyes widened.

Grandpa’s skin turns pitch black. Even the whites of his eyes became black while his irises turned sharp and glow yellow. His tied white hair became unbound and was also a shiny black color. The aura that surrounded him makes me shudder and take a step back.

“This is the Integrate phase. I’m going to sneak up behind you. Pay attention,” He growled, his voice much raspier than before.

Was it really sneaking up if he tells me... was what I was thinking when he disappeared from my vision. I couldn’t feel his presence at all but I when looked behind me as I had been told to do, his finger was already pressed against my jugular as he looked down at me with his glowing yellow eyes.

Fast. It seemed like instant teleportation but I knew it wasn’t by the skid mark from his initial position. It was speed that even I couldn’t keep up with. Not even close. No. The scary part wasn’t even his insane speed. It was his lack of presence. Even directly behind me, I couldn’t sense where he was.

He turned back to normal, his face slightly flushed as Tessia began clapping as if this was a show.

“Whew! Using that form always takes a toll on me. After training with it for a couple decades, I’m able to keep the form on for a bit less than an hour. During my Acquire phase, I am simply channeling a small portion of my beast will and I’m able to borrow the the speed and stealth of the shadow panther. However, with my Integrate phase, not only did my speed and stealth rise, so did my senses to keep up.”

I nodded in agreement.

“Good! Let’s begin the ceremony,” he replied, clasping his hands together.

We stood face to face, only an arm's length apart. Tess was now leaning forward in excitement, as we were about to start.

“Just let your mana come out freely. Don't try to control anything. I'll restrain you if necessary so it's crucial that you keep a relaxed state of mind and rouse the particles of mana you assimilated all these years,” he instructed.

After a nod in response, he then began exerting mana into my core, flooding my core with his mana along with mine.

Instantly, I began feeling a warm sensation, like a hot gust of air was flowing in and out of my pores.

As I felt my body reaching its limit, a loud explosion startles me out of my concentration, only for me to see Gramps getting thrown back and Tess falling back on her chair and rolling back as well.

An unbearable pain immediately surges from my body, as if my very skeleton was trying to crawl out of my skin. Without even the strength to scream my vision darkens. I welcomed the darkness because I knew it would relieve me of my pain.

Waking up back in my bed, I sat up feeling surprisingly refreshed. Sitting to my side, laying her head down on my legs was Tess. Looking at her sleeping like this, it reminded me of when I had escorted her back home after saving her from the slave traders.

Grandpa walked in soon after and he sat down on the other side of the bed, not bothering to wake up his slumbering granddaughter.

“How do you feel brat?” His lips curl up into a half grin.

“I should be asking you that, Gramps. I saw you getting sent flying; even Tess was knocked back.”

He just let out an embarrassed chuckle. “I have to admit I wasn't expecting that great of a force. I know you probably have a good reason for not even telling me what kind of beast gave you its will but I'll ask just one more time. What sort of beast gave you its will?”

Scenes of my time with Sylvia ran through my mind, one of them being her telling me never to tell anyone I had met her. However, Virion was probably only the few people I could actually trust, and he had the right to know. If it wasn't for him, I probably wouldn't be alive.

“...Well, using her own wolds, it was what we called a dragon that had passed her will to me.”

A thick silence had filled the room as Virion's face was frozen in the same stricken expression he had when I told him. He began mumbling to himself, the only words I could make out being 'possible' and 'never happened'.

"D-dragon..." he managed to wheeze out, his eyes staring blankly at me.

"Dear lord... a D-dragon Tamer. In my life, I've never thought I'd be able to see the birth of a Dragon Tamer...I-I'm even the one that trained him! HAHAHA! A Dragon Tamer!"

Tess woke up from the now senile Virion and looked at him, confused.

He suddenly grabbed both my shoulders and looked at me intently. "You did right in keeping this a secret. Do not tell anyone else. This power of yours has to be kept a secret until you have the strength to protect yourself and those around you."

"I'm beginning to believe that more and more, Gramps," I responded seriously.

"Good! Although I would like to know the whole story, but I am more than satisfied with what you've told me for now." He smiled back.

"What is it Gramps? What did Art tell you? Uu...not fair, keeping secrets from me." Tess started pouting at this point.

"Hahaha, you'll know when the time is right little one. Arthur! I have good news. The teleportation gate that is supposed to open in two years will be opening early. There is a tournament that will be held in the city of Xyrus in four months. This tournament will be a very important event for the future because both the dwarves and elves are sending youths as representatives for both the tournament and as a preliminary student to your human academy. During the tournament, we can sneak you back into Sapin without the humans knowing at that time," Gramps exclaimed with a smile on his sharp face.

"Really Gramps? I can go home soon?" I shot out of bed.

I would finally be able to see my parents again! I had been sending messages to my parents every once in awhile through Elder Rinia but after seeing them through the water divination technique, I wasn't able to see them again.

"Y-you're going to be leaving soon, Art?" Tessia asked, her face crestfallen.

"Yeah. I have to meet my family soon. Don't worry though! I'll visit you again! And maybe you can come visit me in Sapin!" I said, hoping to cheer her up.

"We still have four months, Arthur! Until the day the teleportation gates open, I expect you to train harder than before, brat! Your mana core hasn't developed at all these past three years from the assimilation you had to do. Don't focus on only training your beast's will. That should only be used as a trump card. Understood?"

He was right. Although I have yet to activate even the Acquire phase of my dragon will, I knew that using it would only bring unwanted attention. I shouldn't use my beast's will if possible.

Continuing, Grandpa slapped my back and said, "Now! Take a bath and then rest. You reek of something rotten, brat. Little one, let's leave Arthur alone so he can recuperate."

I noticed Tess still looking depressed by the sudden news of my leaving. Growing up and living with her for three years had given us a bond that was as close to siblings and while she was only nine years old, the fact that she was already showing signs of blossoming into a beautiful woman did make me feel a twinge of regret that I wouldn't be here with her as she grew up.

"Tess! Cheer up okay? I'll still be around for a few more months and even after I leave, it's not going to be permanent. I hope you can someday come and meet my parents too." I gave her a sincere hug.

"Eeep! W-what are you?" I can almost see the steam coming out of her head as she turned bright red. Suddenly, she pushed me away and ran out.

"Ah! Youth! Haha, sleep well, brat!" he chuckled, shaking his head while closing the door behind him.

Was Tess going through puberty already?

I hopped back into bed, feeling too lazy to take a shower right now.

"I'll just lay down for a little and then take shower." I muttered aloud.

Rustle *Rustle*

I wonder if it's windy tonight. I usually didn't hear the rustling of leaves.

Crack

Okay... that was an unusual sound

I sat up to look around, trying to locate where the sound is coming from.

Crack *Crack*

I turned my gaze towards where I had left my robe on the chair.

"Kyu~" "Kyu~"

Kyu?

My robe was making “kyu~” sounds? My brows furrowed as I tried to assess what’s going on.

*Crack! * “Kyu~!”

The stone!

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