

## The Beginning After The End, Chapter 17: Companion

I jumped out of my bed and carefully rummaged through my robe to locate the gem that Sylvia entrusted me with.

“H-haha...Holy s\*\*t...” I breathed out as I fell back on my b\*\*t, staring at what used to be the rainbow-colored gem.

“Kyu~!”

The stone wasn’t a gem...

It was an egg!

And what used to be an egg was now something that I couldn’t put into one word.

The first thing that had come into mind was that it was a dragon. It looked sort of like a dragon to me, but at the same time, it didn’t. It was all black. It kind of reminded me of a small kitten but with scales. It was sitting on all fours, studying at me with its head tilted to one side. The sclera that would usually be white in the human’s eyes was black, like Grandpa Virion when he uses his second form, except its irises were a bright red instead of yellow. The pupils were sharp slits that would normally make it look menacing, but with the body of something akin to a small feline animal, it just looked adorable. The most noticeable difference between a dragon like Sylvia and this little... thing was that it had two horns on its head. The horns looked identical to the illusion that Sylvia had been before she revealed to me that she was a dragon. It curved outward around its head and then, sharpening into a point in the front.

Its head was shaped like a cat’s but the snout was a just a little bit more pointed, otherwise the same. The tail, though, looked exactly like Sylvia’s tail. It was a reptilian tail that had two red spikes at the end. Along the spine of this hatchling were also small red spikes that matched the color of its eyes. It didn’t have wings but where the wings should be located were, instead, two small bumps.

I could see that its belly didn’t have scales, though; it looked sort of leathery.

The newly hatched creature suddenly let out a toothless yawn, toppling on its back after losing balance.

And in response, I was flushed with the overwhelming urge to embrace this creature.

“Kyu?” It locked its sharp eyes at me with intelligence that didn’t match its appearance.

“H-hi there little fella, I’m Arthur.” I stretched my hand out towards it as if it were a dog that needed to know my scent.

“KYU!” It jumped off of the chair and onto my lap, gazing up at me.

I could feel my hands twitch as I suppressed the urge to squeeze it. Unlike the majesty and fearsomeness that Sylvia had, this creature was dangerous in a different sense.

Unable to hold in the urge, I carefully petted the adorable menace. The scales were surprisingly soft and the red spikes that ran down its back felt like rubber. I guess young animals, whether humans or monsters were all squishy and soft. It started purring, closing its eyes.

I could feel the tension on my face melt as I let out a soft laugh. “Hehe...”

It rolled onto its back, asking for a more thorough rub. The belly felt like a very soft leather, making it very smooth to rub. I took a closer look at its claws and found it interesting that it looked closer to paws than actual claws. The only thing that was hard were its horns, which were surprisingly sharp as well. I couldn’t help but compare it to the beak a bird would use to crack itself out of its shell.

“Aren’t you just a cute lil fella?” My smile widened while petting this adorable newborn, to the point where it seemed intoxicating.

After a little bit, I couldn’t help but think of what to name it, which made me realize I didn’t even know the gender of this mysterious creature.

“Kyu~!” Suddenly the newborn shot its tongue out and licked the underside of my left forearm.

“Ah!” I reflexively tried to move my arm back from the scorching sensation, but before I could, a glowing black light began enveloping my arm.

The prickling pain subsided fairly quickly so I just waited. The creature pulled its tongue back, revealing a black marking on my forearm.

It looked a lot like the tribal markings that covered Sylvia before she passed on her will to me but the shape of this pattern was that of a wing. Just one open wing, but it was made up of several dashes and sharp curves that branched out, making it look very intricate and mysterious.

I was only eight but I already had a tattoo. I’m such a rebel.

’...Mama~?’

The creature was looking up at me with its mouth closed.

What? I obviously heard a voice just now.

'Mama?' This time I heard it clearly in my head.

Was this...telepathy?

Shaking my head helplessly, I responded vocally, "I guess I'm your mother. But I'm a boy so you should call me papa."

'Papa!' It suddenly jumped up and licked my nose.

I'm a rebel with a tattoo and a child.

After communicating with the creature for a bit, I had come to realize a few things. I guess after the mark had appeared on my forearm, a sort telepathic connection was established. The voice I heard in my head from the creature sounded like a girl's so I've decided to name her Sylvie after her real mother.

"Syeevy?" she responded with her head tilted.

Picking her up and bringing her close to my face, I smiled at her, "That's right! Your name is Sylvie."

She nuzzled her nose to mine while closing her sharp eyes.

Another thing I realized was that Sylvie had a pretty high intelligence for a newborn. She already seemed to have the mental capacity of a 2-3 year-old child. While we're communicating telepathically, I knew she's not necessarily talking to me in English but I just understood it as that. It was a very odd feeling, not knowing the words she's actually saying but knowing what she meant. Besides simple words like "papa", most of the thoughts she communicated with me come through as emotions. I was able to get the gist of what she meant by how she felt.

"Okay Sylvie! I need to wash now. Do you want to come with me?" I said while setting her down.

"Kyu?" She tilted her head again while she looked up at me. I felt like she was asking me what "wash" was so I just laughed and took her with me.

Getting into the shower, she seemed to cry out 'NOOOOOOO' as she wailed a shrill "KYUU!"

"I guess you don't like water that much, do you Sylvie?" I chuckled, setting her down out of the shower.

Sylvia shook herself off like a wet dog and plopped down on the floor next to the shower, her tail wagging, observing me as I finished washing up.

Her behavior sort of reminded me of a mix between a dog and a cat. Never would I imagine her lineage to be that of a mighty dragon. Of course, this was assuming that she actually Sylvia's child.

That got me thinking though.

Was Sylvie really a dragon? She sure looked kind of like a baby dragon...

Why was she completely black when Sylvia was pure white? What baffled me the most was the fact that Sylvie had horns eerily similar to that horned, demon king illusion that Sylvia was at first and also to the demon that confronted her.

I got out of the shower and dried myself off. No use thinking about all of this now; how was I going to explain this to Gramps and Tess, though?

As I got out of the bathroom, Sylvie toddled behind me, 'kyu'ing me to not leave her behind.

I gathered up the pieces of the shell that Sylvie came out from and set it aside. Then I wrapped the feather that was encasing the stone around my forearm to cover the marking that little had Sylvie left.

Four months. In four months, I would be able to see my parents. I wonder if they'd still recognize me.

Sylvie must've felt the longing emotion of my parents because she cuddled in close to my face and licked my cheeks.

"Thanks little Sylv." Petting her horned head, I fell asleep.

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"KYAAAAAAA!"

"What is it? What happened? Who's there?" I jumped up on my bed, using my pillow as a makeshift sword, bed hair ablaze.

"Omygosh! What is this? It's so CUTE! Kyaa!"

I turned my attention to Tess who was holding onto the squirming Sylvie.

"Kyu!!" It cried. 'Papa, help!'

Letting out a defeated breath, I fell back into bed.

Come back my beautiful sleep...

“Her name is Sylvie and she just hatched from her shell yesterday. You should let go of her, though. It looks like she doesn’t like being strangled,” I muffled through the pillow that I covered my head with.

It’s too early in the morning.

Sylvie had finally freed herself from Tessia’s grasp and was glaring at her while she hid herself behind me.

“Grrrrr...” Sylv let out a high-pitched growl.

“Don’t worry Sylv, she’s a friend,” I said while petting her head, giving up on going back to sleep.

“She’s adorable!” Tess was literally drooling over my cautious hatchling. I could see hearts come out of her eyes as she was inching herself closer to us, her hands twitching lewdly like a predator’s.

“Okay, now you just look scary, Tess. Get out of my room so I can change,” I instructed while pushing the perverted princess out of my room.

I changed into a loose robe and pants. As I was putting on my shoes, Sylvie jumped onto my head and nestled herself, hitching herself a ride.

“Kyu!” She sure sounded happy.

I walked downstairs, saying good morning to the confused and shocked maids that couldn’t take their eyes off the top of my head.

They all ended up having the same expression as Tess, though. I ended up having to pick up my pace as I started fearing for our safety.

“Gramps! We’re here!” I shouted at Grandpa Virion sipping tea while reading something.

Turning his head, he smiled, “Ah! Art you’re here! Why was Tess fussing about some sort of pet that ...”

His cup drops when he noticed the horned black lump sitting on my head.

“T-that’s...” He continues to stutter something incomprehensible.

“What is that?” He finally managed to ask, his eyes never leaving the top of my head.

“Er... I think she’s something like a dragon, although I’m not entirely sure myself,” I responded unconfidently.

“Kyu?” I could tell Sylvie was cautious about Virion through our mental link.

Tess came through the door into the courtyard practically bouncing up and down.

“You said it’s a dragon? But it’s so cute! Art! Can I hold her? Can I? Can I?” she begged, eyes sparkling.

“Grrr~” Sylvie started hissing at her mortal enemy as her claws started stabbing into my scalp.

“AH ow ow OWOW! Sylvie your claws!” I tried peeling her off my head but she wouldn’t budge.

Grandpa Virion, who was half dazed, still trying to make sense out of the creature on my head, finally spoke up. “If that really is a dragon, how did you come across an egg? How did you get it to hatch?”

“The dragon that left me her will entrusted me with a stone that I thought was just a valuable gem. I didn’t even realize what it actually was until it hatched. What do you mean by get it to hatch?” I was confused now as well.

“Supposedly, dragon’s eggs, assuming it really is one, aren’t just able to hatch just through the passage of time. It is said that the dragon inside must feel that something capable of protecting and loving it was close by in order for it to hatch. Even then, there must be a very close bond between them,” he explained.

Trying to think of what might have triggered the hatching, I almost immediately came to the conclusion.

“Activating the will, Gramps! I think that’s what made her come out!” I exclaimed.

He scratched his chin, slowly nodding. “That is a viable explanation. The draconic races haven’t been seen for hundreds of years, with only limited records of them so I can’t say for sure. No use thinking about it now, though! Just be sure to keep the hatchling close by at all times. While it does look very like a creature of the draconic races, I would be the one of the only few that would be able to make that connection. Most people wouldn’t know that creature was a dragon, so it should be fine by just feigning it off as a sort of rare mana beast.”

After that matter was settled, I placed Sylv on the ground beside me while I began training. The next step in my training for the next four months would be learning to utilize the power of Sylvia’s will that she left me, as well as condensing my mana core into the next stages.

“Accessing the first phase is simple, yet may take a lifetime if comprehension of your beast will does not come naturally. While your mana core is only dark red, your body

right now should already be beyond that of a dark orange stage mage. After the ceremony, you should feel a small area inside of your mana core that holds the will's power. That is where your beast's will is stored. Accessing the Acquire stage should occur through your own learning, not through being taught. Through my experience, the best way to trigger your beast will is to continuously be in combat.

"Makes sense to me," I replied, already stretching my body.

"Good! Let's fight!" he instructed with a confident smirk on his face.

The days went by quickly for me as I was completely immersed in training. I was able to access my first phase but I wouldn't be able to use it in an actual fight until I gained more control over it. Virion also taught me how to conceal my beast will so other mages can't notice. After the assimilation, the speed of my mana cultivation went through leaps and bounds.

During this time, there didn't seem to be any changes in Sylvie except that she had gotten a little more intelligent. Her vocabulary was still limited but it was a lot easier for us to understand each other. I went out together with Tess a lot. She had dragged me out with her every free time we had, trying to make as many memories as possible before I left. Like that, the four months that seemed so far away had now passed.

Dressed in a simple olive-green long sleeve and black pants with the feather wrapped around my forearm, I came out of my room.

"Arthur! Remember to take care! We'll find some way to contact you somehow and update you. Take this with you so you can navigate through the Forest of Elshire if you're ever in the area. Or maybe you can just find another princess to lead you back." He winked while handing me a small silver oval compass.

"Uuu... Grandpa!!!"

"OUCH! Little one! It was a joke!" Grandpa Virion yelped while rubbing his side.

"While Alduin and Merial will be going in a separate carriage as the heads of this kingdom, Tess and I won't be going. This will be the last time we'll see each other for now. Until next time, Arthur!" He grabbed me in a strong hug, almost knocking Sylvie off of my head.

"I'll miss you Art! Remember to come visit again! Uu~ don't go chasing after human girls okay? Promise me, okay?" She sniffled, tears lining her eyes.

I hugged my dear friend and patted her head as well. "We'll see each other again! You better be stronger than me the next time we meet Tess! With Gramps teaching you, you have no excuse!"

She gave me a feeble nod, unable to form words because of her constant sniffing.

I waved goodbye to the both of them and followed behind Merial and Alduin after they gave me a sympathetic smile. I hadn't really gotten the chance to spend much time with the King and Queen but we were more comfortable with each other now. I hoped that next time, I would be able to grow closer to them.

I got into the carriage that the elf representatives were taking, while the king and queen were escorted into a separate carriage.

"Well look who it is! If it isn't the human brat! Did the royal family finally kick you out of the Kingdom?" An elf boy dressed in a very decorated purple robe smirked.

"Uh... I'm sorry but do I know you?" I felt like I knew who this elf was, but I couldn't quite place my finger on where we had met. Meanwhile, Sylvie was growling, pointing her horns in his direction.

"I'm the noble you mercilessly attacked while defying the customs of the duel!" He bolted up angrily, pointing an accusing finger at me.

It suddenly clicked. "You're the bug I sent tumbling!" I yelled out in realization, a bit louder than I had meant to.

"Y-you dare...!?" His face turned bright pink as his ears twitched profusely in anger while a few elves behind desperately tried to cover their snickering.

"Aha sorry, sorry! I didn't mean to say that. I never did learn your name though," I chuckled, extending a hand to him.

Face still red, trying to preserve as much of the little dignity he had left, he rejected my handshake and declared in a pompous tone, "My name is Feyrith Ivsaar III, descendent of the noble Ivsaar family! You may have won while we were both children, but were we to duel again, I would win easily."

A young elf girl that looked a few years older than Feyrith piped in, saying, "You can just call him Feyfey like we do."

"D-don't tell him that!" Face turning an even darker shade of red, Feyfey turned his head away from me and took a seat.

I sat down next to Feyfey and gave him a sympathetic pat on his shoulders that were slumped in defeat.

As we our carriage went into the teleportation gate we were greeted by the now familiar sensation of being in the middle of a fast-forwarding film.



“We have arrived in Xyrus!” The driver announced.

Taking a quick peek out, I noticed we were surrounded by a parade of people all politely clapping at our entrance. This tournament was supposed to be one of the biggest turning points throughout the continent. It wasn't just gathering all of the gifted youths together, but also building a future where they could also learn under one roof. It was exciting venture that the leaders of the continent were taking, but also a scary one that would also, in no doubt, be filled with dispute and hostility.

The driver pulled the carriage close to a small gap between two buildings after passing through the crowd and signaled to me in the back that this would be the best time to leave without being noticed.

I say bye to Feyfey and the rest of the representatives and wish them luck. Feyfey merely whipped his head away but also made a slight waving gesture. Jumping off the carriage with Sylvie still on my head, I made my way through the alleyway as I tried remembering the home my parents were staying in.

After around an hour of making my way around going around, I finally managed to find the huge manor that my parents were supposed to be residing in.

“We're home Sylv. We're finally home,” I muttered shakily under my breath.

“Kyu?” she said as if saying, 'I thought we were at home before.'

I took careful steps walking up the flight of stairs and took one deep breath. Dusting off my shirt and pants I knocked on the giant double doors.

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