

The Beginning After The End, Chapter 18: Family

It was a strange feeling being more nervous now, meeting my family, more than when I first appointed a king while in the midst of the most powerful people in the world.

“Whew~ let’s do this Sylvie.”

“Kyu” She responded, my excitement spreading to her.

The dull sound of metal clanging on metal rang surprisingly loudly.

Unexpectedly, I could hear the faint pitter-patter sounds followed by a childish voice.

“Coming~!”

A maid opened the door together with a little girl. Immediately upon seeing me, she hid behind the maid.

The maid looks at me curiously, evidently surprised to see an eight-year-old knocking on the door of a noble’s estate.

“Ahem, nice to meet you. My name is Arthur Leywin. I was informed that my family is currently residing in this manor. Do you mind if I speak to them?” I give a slight bow, Sylvie rocking on my head.

Before the confused maid could even respond, I heard an all too familiar sound in the background.

“Eleanor Leywin! There you are! You have got to stop running to the front door every time someone...” My mother stopped mid sentence and dropped a small bowl of what looked to be food for... my sister.

I look down to see the girl with dazzling brown eyes, looking at me with innocent curiosity. Her light ash brown hair shimmered with a much prettier quality than Father’s but I knew who she had gotten the color from. Her hair was tied into two pigtails on the side of her head above her ears.

I struggled to peel my eyes away from my little sister and turned to face my mother. My vision going blurry as tears filled my eyes, I said one thing I knew she was waiting to hear.

“H-hi Mom. I’m home.” I gestured a small, awkward wave, not knowing what to do if she couldn’t recognize me.

Fortunately, my fear didn’t come true and she raced towards me at a speed I swear was faster than Grandpa Virion’s, but that might’ve just been because of my blurry vision.

“Oh my baby! Arthur!!” She arrived in front of me and collapsed on her knees, her arms around my waist, gripping with all her strength, afraid that I might disappear again if she let go.

“You are alive! The Voice... I knew it was you! *sniff* You’re back now! Yes, you’re home now. Arthur, my baby!” That was all she managed to sputter out before breaking down into a bawl.

I couldn’t even manage a complete sentence before shut my lips tightly in order to hold back my s**s.

I couldn’t help but think while my head was buried in my mother’s shoulder: you could be an all powerful, immortal tyrant but when you were in front of your loved ones, the ability to control emotions betray you.

I kept repeating in half gurgled sentences that I was alive and that I was home, that I wasn’t leaving. My mother was a flurry of emotions. She was happy that I was back and alive, she was mad that I couldn’t come back sooner, she was sad that I had to be away from them and how hard it must have been for me all at the same time.

At one point, Eleanor walked to us and started patting Mother’s back. “Mama. There, there. Don’t cry.” But after unsuccessfully comforting her, she began crying as well.

“Arthur!” I turned my head, face still wet with tears to see outside the sprinting figure of my father drenched in sweat. I guess the maid had told him I was back.

He didn’t stop as he reached us and simply slid on his knee, hugging all of us as we all almost toppled over.

“Arthur! My son! Look how big you are. Oh my God! You’re back, you’re back!” My father was cupping my head in his hands to get a better look at my face. He broke down while placing his large hand on the back of my head, bringing my forehead to touch his.

Our little family reunion continued on. My mother sobbing uncontrollably, embracing me, and my oblivious little sister crying with her, as my father and I just looked at each other with tears in our eyes, all of us glad that we were finally together.

Eventually, we had all managed to settle down.

We were sitting on a couch, my mother right beside me with Eleanor on her lap. Father was sitting on a chair he pulled up, facing me, his elbows on his knee as he leaned forward. Mother was holding my hands and still tearing up every time she got a look at my face.

“Are you okay now? Did you at least eat three meals a day? You slept while dressing warmly everyday right? Oh my baby. Look how big you are now.” Tears escaped her eyes as she squinted and smiled.

She was stroking my hair as she planted a soft kiss on the crown of my head. “Thank God you’re back. I’m so happy,” she whispered, her voice still trembling.

Eleanor was looking curiously at both Sylvie and I while the baby dragon was sitting up next me attentively observing the three unfamiliar humans.

My father was looking at Sylvie with a curious expression but he didn’t mention her. Turning his gaze to me, his eyes softened and he kept shaking his head, repeating how big I was now. It must be a pretty fulfilling yet miserable feeling for a parent to see how big his son had gotten but not being there with him the whole time to witness it.

“Ellie, say hi to your big brother. He was away for awhile but he’ll live together with us from now on. Come on, say ‘hello’.” My mother gently urged my sister.

“Brother?” She tilted her head, reminding me of a confused Sylvie.

She cupped her hands over my mother’s ear and whispered something inaudible.

“Haha yes, that big brother. The one I always told stories about. He’s the one.”

My sister’s eyes started sparkling as she looked back to me. I couldn’t help but now wonder what stories Mother had told her.

“Hai Brother~!” She beamed, waving both of her little hands at me.

“Hello Eleanor. It’s nice to meet you... sister.” I laughed, patting her head in response.

Father spoke up now. “Arthur, we were devastated after that incident, and we barely believed it when you communicated to us through our heads. Tell me, how’d you survive the fall?”

It took awhile for me to explain everything from the beginning. I withheld some information that I thought might not be good to tell them just yet. I explained to them that I subconsciously wrapped myself in a protective layer of mana and I was lucky enough to hit a bunch of branches on the cliff before landing in a stream. From there on, I told them about meeting Tess and how she was almost kidnapped. After saving her, she led me to her Kingdom and I stayed there.

“You said something about an illness that kept you from coming back sooner. What was all that about? Are you cured now?” My mother chimes in, a look of concern on her face.

Shaking my head, I explain, "You don't need to worry about that anymore. I guess there was a sort of instability in my mana core that made it so I had episodes of pain. It was really bad at first but luckily there was an elder that knew how to cure it. The process was slow but he assured me it wasn't threatening if treated consistently."

Relief replaced the prior look of worry and she silently patted my head again.

"So what's the story with this little friend of yours?" My dad just chuckled, finally bringing Sylvie up.

"Haha, while I was travelling, I stumbled into a mana beast's den. It was only the mother and she was badly injured. A little bit after I was there, she died. While I was looking around, it seemed like she was guarding something so I picked it up thinking it was something valuable but I didn't know it was an egg. She hatched only a couple of months ago so she's still a baby. Say hi to Sylvie."

I picked her up, holding her body so her limbs dangled like a kitten's.

"Kyu~!" She purred, as if saying hi to everyone.

I didn't exactly tell my family a lie when I said this but I had already promised myself to tell them everything only when I was older and more capable.

I then asked them to update me on everything that happened to them after we had separated. The only thing I was able to tell from seeing them through the water divination the first time was that they lived here in Xyrus, but nothing more so I was exceptionally curious.

After Father explained what happened since then, my mother chimed in. "That's right! The Helstea family had gone on a trip but they should be arriving back today. They're going to be so surprised when they see you, Art!"

I turned to face my mother. She hadn't changed much since I last saw her. The only thing that I did notice was that she's lost a bit of weight and was slightly paler in complexion. My heart ached since I knew this was caused from stress and depression after losing me. Father's body was actually much more built now. Coupled with his beard, he looked a lot more rustic than he had before. I guess working as an instructor for the Helstea Auction House guards had gotten him in shape as well.

"Dad. What color is your mana core now?" I asked while Sylvie made her place back on the top of my head, tail swishing in content.

A confident grin emerged from his face as my father proudly replies, "Your old man broke through from the light red stage a couple years back and is a dark orange mage."

I raised my eyebrows in surprise. At the age of early thirties, my father was doing pretty well for himself. The average mage that didn't attend school usually stagnated at the light red stage, maybe dark orange if they were lucky. Of course it was different for the elites who had a much purer lineage and had access to better resources, but for a standard mage, my father was doing well.

He then asked me, leaning closer, "I bet you only asked me so you could brag yourself. Let's hear it, what stage are you at now?"

Scratching my cheek, I mumbled, "...light red."

My father had already been leaning forward on his chair, but after hearing that, he stumbled completely out of his chair. Even my mother let out a gasp in surprise.

"Holy s**t!" my father exclaimed.

"Shet!" Eleanor echoed, laughing at my father falling.

"Honey! What did I say about cursing in front of Ellie?" My mother reprimanded while blocking my sister's ears.

"Haha Sorry. Sorry! Ellie don't listen to what your father just said." He then turned back to me.

"My son is still the same genius he used to be. Come on. Have a quick spar with your old man." My father grinned menacingly while clasping my shoulders.

"Dear! He just got home! Let him rest." Mother pulled me back.

"It's fine Mom." I gently placed my hand on top of hers, giving her a reassuring smile.

"Men! Always trying to fight! Isn't that right, Ellie?" My mother shook her head helplessly.

"Papa and Brother are men!" Echoed Ellie, trying to mimic our mother's expression.

Both father and I laughed this time. It was really good to be back.

We all get up to move to the backyard when I hear the door open.

"Rey! I just heard your son was alive. What the hell is going on?" I see a thin proper man with glasses and parted hair in a suit sweating, with what I assumed to be his wife and daughter running behind him.

"Vincent, everyone! I would like you to meet my son, Arthur! He's back Vince, Haha!"

My father wrapped his arm around the man's shoulder.

"Arthur, this is Vincent, my old friend and the person I now work for. This is his house so introduce yourself before we start wrecking it," he grinned broadly.

Bowing to a ninety-degree angle, I introduced myself. "It is a pleasure to meet you. My name is Arthur Leywin. I'm not sure what my family has told you about me, but I was in contact with them for a while back. I was also the one that told them to not tell anyone until I get back, so I apologize for the confusion. Thank you for taking care of my family all of this time." This man was the one that housed my family in their toughest time. As far as I was concerned, I owed him and his family dearly.

"Y-yeah, It's really no problem. I'm glad that you're alive and safe." He adjusted his glasses as if making sure he was really speaking to an eight-year old. "Meet my wife, Tabitha, and my daughter, Lilia," he continued, pushing them forward so they were in front of him.

"It's a pleasure to meet you ma'am, Lilia" I bowed again, Sylvie introducing herself too with a "Kyu!"

Tabitha gave a kind smile in response. "Great to have you in our home, Arthur. Say hi, Lilia! Arthur is your age so don't be shy."

The girl named Lilia spoke up, pointing hesitantly at the creature on my head. "W-what's that! It's so cute."

"This is an infant mana beast that I'm bonded with. Her name is Sylvie. Sylvie, get down and say hello."

Sylvie leaped off my head and mewed at Lilia.

"Oh my gosh!" Lilia squealed.

"Rey, what did you mean by wrecking my house?" Vincent asked after peeling his eyes off of Sylvie.

"We were just on our way to the backyard. Arthur and I are going to have a little spar. Want to come?" He chuckles.

Vincent sputters incredulously, "W-what? Are you serious? Your son just got home and you want to fight him? Besides, your son can't be older than eight. What are you going to spar with him for?"

"Don't let my son's age fool you! He's already a light red stage augments!" my father harrumphed proudly, puffing his chest.

Vincent just shook his head. "Don't be ridiculous, Rey. Your eight-year-old son has already awakened, and he's gotten past three stages? Even the snobby genius brats that get admitted into Xyrus academy are barely at the dark red stage, and that's when they're eleven or twelve!"

My father just laughed louder in response before he added while leading us to the backyard, "You'll see. Besides, I have a little surprise as well."

We put proper distance between each other on the large grass lot outside.

"Ready when you are," I smiled, setting Sylvie off to the side next to the audience, which consisted of the rest of my family and the Helstea family.

"Be careful, Art! You may be a light red stage but your old man is still at a higher stage than you!" He pounded his two fists together, giving me a confident smirk.

I spotted Vince, who was still shaking his head in disbelief.

"Come!" My father taunted, getting in an offensive stance.

Let's see how much my training with Grandpa Virion had paid off.

My body, already strengthened through assimilation, responded to mana much more acutely than it had before. Before my father had the time to prepare, my fist was already in range of his body.

Even my hearing was more sensitive now as I could hear Vincent mutter faintly, "What in the..." along with several gasps by the others.

My father responded immediately as I could sense mana spreading throughout his body.

Feigning a punch, I twist my torso and go for a high kick, but was promptly blocked by my father's left arm.

It was obvious he didn't expect my kick to be so powerful because his arm flung back from the blow, opening his guard. However, before I was able to make use of that opening, he used the momentum to chop his right hand at my body.

It was obvious that I was now in a disadvantageous position, but with a full previous lifetime of fighting had already prepared me on how to counter him.

I took his chop with my left forearm and right palm to soften the blow, and also to create enough space for me to slip inside.

My body wasn't big enough for me to shoulder-toss him so instead, I grabbed his right arm and kicked the back side of his right knee.

Losing balance, he fell forward as I used my mana-imbued body to throw him. Unfortunately, he regained balance too quickly and I had no choice but to put some distance between us before he got a hold of me.

"Well I'd have to say you're better than all of the mages I've trained! Your old man's going to get serious now, though! Be careful." He put on a more serious face. It was apparent to both of us that we had both been holding back.

The mysterious fact about mana formed inside the core during the earlier stages was that it differed depending on how augmenters and conjurers used it.

While expensive, many parents choose to have their newly awakened child tested to see what element that they were most adept at by using a special device. A conjurer's attribute became very noticeable depending on what type of elements they had an easier time casting.

For augmenters, however, it was a lot less obvious because most of their attacks were focused on using mana to enhance their bodies. However, even augmenters had differentiations in how adept they were in certain types of elements. One quick example was culmination of gathering mana into a single point and releasing it in an explosive attack. While no visible flames were involved, an augments who had an easier time utilizing mana in that manner would typically be considered a fire-attribute mage.

That was only applied in the beginning.

While it differed per person, after a certain threshold in one's mana core and comprehension of the element, he or she could be utilize mana in a way to actually pertain to the user's attribute. For conjurers, this meant that they could start slowly progress away from the training wheels of chanting and start shortening their verses or even completely foregoing it in the element that they were adept at.

For augmenters, it would become much more noticeable because they could begin manifesting their elemental attribute instead of manipulating mana in a manner corresponding to their elemental attribute.

For example, before breaking through, a fire attribute augmenters attack would simply carry a more powerful explosive burst, while wind attribute augmenters would find it easier to manipulate mana into faster and sharper attacks.

However, upon sufficient comprehension, the augmenters' element attribute would actually influences their attacks physically. Earth-attribute augmenters could learn to produce a gauntlet of earth and can even learn to create small seismic shocks by stomping their foot, while wind-attribute augmenters could be taught to release small

blades of wind and create a vacuum effect in their punches, and so on. All of these were essentially techniques that mages could utilize upon sufficient comprehension of their respective element.

Of course, conjurers still had the major advantage of being able to influence a lot more of their surroundings. Their range was also a lot farther, but their weakness was still the vulnerability that they had the process of chanting as well as their bodies that weren't naturally protected by mana.

Because of these differences, both types of mages that could break the threshold are much stronger than mages that couldn't, and ultimately determined the talent and future accomplishments they could achieve.

While conjurers could innately control elements because of how proficient they were at absorbing nature's mana with their mana veins, augmenters are different.

For every one attribute augments there was, there were ten that wasn't. There were cases of attribute augmenters that never break the threshold and become fully-fledged elemental attribute augmenters. This was where proper schooling came into play; with enough guidance from early on, mages would more likely be able to be led to comprehension of their elemental attribute.

His two fists ignited, bursting into fiery gloves of scarlet. This control over his fire element was novice, apparent from the steam coming from his body. This meant that there was unnecessary mana being spread out throughout his body.

I had learned early on that my father was a fire attribute mage, but after reaching a bottleneck for years while being busy as a father, he was able to reach the orange stage and, more impressively, was able to break through in his comprehension in fire. He could now be considered as an official elemental augments, or elemental for short.

I shot him a proud grin, before readying myself as well.

"Impressive, Dad... but now it's my turn."

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