

After The End 21

The Beginning After The End, Chapter 21: Everybody Wins

“No! Absolutely no way! Arthur! Do you know how dangerous it is to become an Adventurer? You’ve just gotten back after we all thought you were dead and now you’re saying you want to go get yourself killed out there? No way! Absolutely not.”

My mother was on the verge of tears while she said this. She had never been good at controlling her emotions. Eleanor was besides her, clutching onto her leg.

“Mama, don’t be angry. Bruhder not bad a person! Uuu... Mama, don’t cry.”

Director Goodsky had left the manor after my announcement. I could tell she still wanted to ask me a lot of questions but we excused ourselves to have a family talk. We were currently inside my parent’s room with my mother standing up in front of me, forbidding me to even think about doing anything remotely dangerous.

Father was a bit more rational. I could tell he didn’t like the idea as well, but he couldn’t really see any reason for me not to be an adventurer besides my age.

I wasn’t going to debate with my mother. She was saying all of this because she was worried and I could never blame her for that. It was something I had expected and I wanted to slowly ease her into the idea, but the meeting with Director Goodsky threw the timing off of everything .

After being silent the whole time, my father finally spoke up. “Honey, let’s hear Arthur out at least. I’m not saying I agree to him becoming an adventurer but don’t you think we should at least listen to what he has to say?”

“How can you still say that after what happened that day!” my mother yelled, breaking down into a fit of s\*\*s.

I looked to my father for answers, curious about what she was talking about, but he simply shook his head and comforted my mother.

It seemed like a good hour before she had calmed down enough for us to speak again.

I grabbed my mother’s hands. “Mom. I wasn’t planning on leaving tomorrow. I was looking forward to spending a few months at home with you guys.”

She was still silent, but her face softened a little at that and I just gave her a warm smile, Sylvie followed suit and began licking her hand.

“What I meant by becoming an adventurer was so that I can get some experience. After being in the Elf Kingdom for three years, I missed a lot about what I should know about this world of ours. I just thought that becoming an adventurer would be the best way to gain some practical experience,” I urged, not letting go of Mother’s hands.

"I understand where you're coming from, Arthur. Although I was a bit older, I was also itching to get some real life experience in fighting as soon as I awakened as a mage," he reminisced. "But your mother is also right in that it is dangerous, and unpredictable."

My mother nodded her head vigorously at this.

I stayed silent for a little bit as I pondered.

"Dad. Mom. What if I were to have some sort of guard or supervisor with me? Would that make you feel a bit more at ease with this whole idea?"

"..."

"Hmm... You know, that's not a bad idea." I could almost see the gears in my father's head wind as he began thinking of potential candidates.

"B-but... I still won't be able to see you for three years!" My mother began to protest again.

Shaking my head, I say to her. "Mom, I'm not going to go on long trips or go on dangerous missions to faraway places. I'll try to come back every few months, maybe even more frequently than that, depending on what I do."

"Bruhder, are you leaving?" My sister had an expression as if she had just been told that Santa didn't exist.

I started to panic. "Nono Ellie I'm staying here. You'll be seeing your brother a lot from now on, okay?"

Apparently, both my mother and father had told Eleanor a lot of stories about me and how strong and smart I was. One of Ellie's favorite bedtime stories was how I saved Mother from a bunch of bad guys on top of a cliff and that I got hurt so it'll take me some time to come back home. Eventually, I had become some sort of hero to my sister.

I look back at my mother. Her face was considerably more at ease after talking about this. I guess she had just assumed the worst-case scenario and thought I wanted to slay the world's strongest evil at the age of eight or something.

"Why did you want to be an Adventurer before even going to school anyways? Wasn't it usually the opposite?" my mother softly muttered.

"Dad's reason was a part of it; I want to test my skills out in real life situations. Also, Mom, I want to at least try to fit in with everyone when I go to school. It would be a lot harder to fit in if I began school at the age of eight. I don't think I'll be able to make much friends with such a big age difference."

It was a very pitiful excuse, but, for once, my mother gave me a look of understanding. I guess it was a mother's worst nightmare for her child to become a loner.

It wasn't a complete lie because I said it thinking of Sylvia's dying wish. She had wanted me to enjoy life and have a life not just of training. This was a promise that I planned on keeping no matter what.

"Besides, I'm going to be here for a couple of months anyway. Who know, maybe you'll get sick of me by then and throw me out before I even get the chance to leave," I winked at my mother.

That earned me a thump on the head but she chuckled as well. "You! You're just like your father at times like these. Thank God you at least have my intelligence." She gave me a big hug, leaving me with a warm feeling that I still wasn't used to.

"Hey! What about my intelligence! He was gifted with my adept abilities in fire too!" My father protested.

"Hmph! My son got his deviant powers from me." Mother just turned me away from my father and just stuck her tongue out at him.

"Ellie too! Bleh!" My sister copied my mother and stuck her tongue out at my devastated father.

"Sniff! No ones on my side." He just playfully cried, trying to hug his my daughter. This left us all in a fit of laughter.

The next day was a Sunday, leaving my father with the day off. Both the Leywin and Helstea family were dining together for breakfast. "So did you guys settle on what to do about Arthur?" Vincent asked, half chewing on his omelet.

Tabitha shook her head; "I swear. Sometimes, I have such a hard time believing you're a noble with your horrible dining habits, dear."

"Kukuku, don't worry. At least your husband's better than mine. Remember that one dinner party where Rey spit out his food from laughing so hard? I had to use Ellie as an excuse to leave the table because I was so embarrassed," My mother just sighed.

"Cough! Anyways! Yes, after talking about it yesterday night, we agreed to let him become an adventurer under some conditions, Vince." My father just lightly blushed as he tried to switch back the topic.

"Oh? What conditions?" responded the curious Tabitha as she was cutting the omelet into smaller pieces for Lilia.

"He's not going to become an adventurer until after his birthday, which is in three months. We also decided on having a guard with him on his missions. Besides that, I feel like he'll be smart enough to manage the rest on his own. Of course, the last condition is that he'll be visiting as often as possible," my father explained, working on the rest of his roast beef.

"Do you have anyone in mind for who his guard is going to be? Heck, is there even a guard that is capable of guarding him? I feel like Arthur would be the one protecting the guard!" He just chuckled at the ridiculousness of an eight year old protecting a grown, veteran adventurer.

My mother answered him, looking at my father, "We haven't really thought of a person that fits the criteria. Rey and I thought we could use one of the Helstea Auction guards, but we couldn't really come up with anyone."

"Can I have more omelet please?" My sister chimed in with her fork raised in the air.

"I got it!" My father stood up from his sudden revelation, making me almost choke on the piece of meat that was in my mouth.

“The Twin Horns will be coming back from an expedition in a dungeon soon. I received a letter from the Adventurer Guild Hall that says they should be back within two months! It’s perfect! Why did it take so long for me to think of this? We can just have one of the Twin Horns to look after you. Arthur! You still remember them right?” My father’s eyes shined in excitement.

“Hey! That’s not a bad idea!” My mother said from the kitchen, her voice implying the rarity in my father having a good idea.

Handing a piece of meat to Sylvie who was perched on my lap with her front two paws on the table, I responded too. “Of course I remember them. That sounds like a great idea Dad. Do they know I’m back?”

“No, unfortunately, I haven’t had the chance to send a mail to them yet. I was planning on doing that today.” My father sat back down, scratching his head.

Vincent chimed in on the conversation after finishing off his breakfast.

“Arthur, you said to Director Cynthia yesterday about not showing your powers to anyone until you enroll into Xyrus Academy, right? How were you planning on doing that while you’re an Adventurer?”

“Ah yes. I’ve been meaning to get to that,” I said while picking up a strawberry with my fork. “I planned on keeping my identity hidden as an adventurer. I’ve read that there were many members of the Adventurer’s Guild that went by aliases, not revealing their identities to the public.” Unfortunately, since there was no way of masking the appearance of Sylvie, I would just have to do a good job of hiding her. Thankfully, she was small enough to fit inside a cloak if the pocket was big enough.

“Mmm... I see.” Both Vincent and Tabitha nodded at this.

With that, breakfast ended and we all separated.

Father went to the Guild Hall to send a letter to his old party members while my mother and Tabitha went shopping, taking Ellie and Lilia along with them. They asked me to come as well but I politely declined the offer to endure the suffering they call a pastime event.

I washed up and headed towards the right wing of the manor, where Vincent’s office was.

\*Knock\* \*Knock\*

“Yes?”

“It’s Arthur,” I answered.

The door opened to reveal Vincent with a curious look on his face. “Ah come in! What brings you here Arthur? You’ve never really come into my office before.”

“Ah yes. There is a certain matter I wish to talk to you about today, which is why I visited,” I said while looking around at the piles of documents on the floor and on his desk.

VINCENT HELSTEA’S POV:

Was this child really only eight years old?

Shivers ran down my spine at the tone of his voice. Why was I so nervous at the mention of a 'certain matter' he wanted to talk to me about?

"What sort of matter is it?" I just asked, my face turning a bit more serious.

"I would like your help in obtaining a few items that might be hard to find elsewhere." Continuing, he sat down and said with his eyes looking straight at me. "I need a sturdy hooded cloak or robe and a mask that can cover my entire face. It's imperative that the mask has the function of changing my voice."

It wasn't hard to figure out why he wanted these items. As the owner of the Helstea Auction House that attracted even the highest of nobles and even the Royal Family, it shouldn't be too hard to get these items. The mask might be a little tricky because a sound elemental artificer would need to be the one to make this but it could be done.

Yet... why is there such a heavy feeling in this room?

I couldn't quite place my finger on it...

That's it!

Why was this eight-year-old child giving off the same pressure as the time I was next to the King of Sapin himself?

No. The atmosphere now was even heavier than when I was with the king.

He was clearly asking me for a favor. But it felt as though he is gauging me, almost as if he was trying to evaluate where to put me on his list of 'people to keep alive'.

I had never felt this from him, but that was probably because I had only ever seen him with his family.

I quickly replied, wanting to get it over with. "Sure, it shouldn't be a problem getting those things. The mask might take a bit of time but I'm sure we'll have it before you become an Adventurer."

His slight nod actually filled me with relief. I had nobles that waited in line to introduce themselves to me but this kid...

"Is there anything you would need my help in for in exchange? I would feel bad just asking for this without any compensation." He responded.

I felt a little sweat forming above my brows. "I-it's fine really. I owe your father a lot, actually. He may be working for me but the way he trains my guards have really lessened the number of problems that happen during the auctions."

This was the truth actually. Rey had become an irreplaceable part of the Helstea Auction Houses. His leadership and charisma amongst the guards he trains is first class. I owed him when he saved my life and I owe him and his family now. Even with the generous salary that is well above the average and letting his family stay in our house, I still felt that it was actually a bargain on my part. Both Tabitha and Lilia have been happier now than ever after Rey moved in with Alice and had Ellie. I had always been filled with guilt for not being able to spend as much time with my family as they wanted but things were a lot better now.

“Hmm, speaking of training, that actually gives me an idea,” He muttered while looking down.

I’ve noticed quite a while ago that, when Arthur started thinking, he had this look... this look where his gaze focused afar and his brows furrowed; the subtle crease near his lips and the slight twitch of his nose made him appear to be thinking of something above what normal human intelligence would be capable of. It was the look of a true intellectual. Sigh. It’s hard to believe that he was the same age as my little Lilia.

“Allow me to start training your daughter to become a mage.” He put down this landmine as if he was just talking about the weather.

ARTHUR LEYWIN’S POV:

“I had been meaning to start teaching my baby sister in mana manipulation soon. It wouldn’t be too much trouble to include Lilia in these lessons. I noticed that both you and Lady Tabitha are not mages so it might be impossible for her to awaken by herself, but if we start now, I think she’d be able to awaken around the average age,” I said.

My statement was met with silence. I looked up to see Vincent drop the stack of papers had been fumbling with nervously. His face was frozen in place as I could hear his heart beating faster.

“C-can I truly believe what you just said? Can you really allow my daughter to become a m-mage?” He asked after a seemingly long moment of silence.

“Sure. It’ll be a long process but it’s definitely possible. Er... I will have to ask you to keep the lessons on a low profile though. I would hate to be bombarded with doting parents asking to make their children into mages,” I just chuckled, trying to lighten up the tension.

He nodded furiously after failing to form a coherent sentence..

“Sincerely... there would be no greater happiness than seeing my daughter become a mage,” he managed to stammer out, tears on the verge falling down.

“Great! Then I’ll leave the items we discussed to you! Now, allow me to excuse myself out. Sorry for intruding in on your work.”

I walked myself out of the room, picking up the sleeping Sylvie from my lap.

I’m glad that worked out well.

The Beginning After The End – Chapter 22: For Them

LILIA HELSTEA’S POV:

I’m shopping with Mommy and Lady Alice and Ellie. Ellie seemed a little bit disappointed that her brother didn’t want to join us so I was holding her hand to comfort her.

“Hey Ellie. Do you like your big brother that much?”

“En! But he’s a meanie for not shopping with us. I wanted to dress him up more,” she pouted.

“Do you like me better or your big brother?”

After some time of thinking she just responded, "Umm...I like both!"

"Kukuku. Lilia, what are you asking Ellie?" My mom asked, pulling my other hand. "Lilia, what do you think of Arthur?"

"Uuu he's a little scary. How is he so strong, Mommy? I thought kids like us couldn't be mages until we're all grown up?" It wasn't fair. I've always dreamt of becoming a mage and making Mommy and Papa happy.

My mom looked at Lady Alice, "I guess it's because he's a very gifted child. But Alice, do you really have no problems with everything he told you? I don't mean to b\*\*t in on your parenting but doesn't it just seem a little too weird? How did he get so powerful during this time? You've told me that he was pretty good at fighting even before the bandit attack."

I saw Lady Alice shake her head. "Of course I know he's hiding a lot of things. He probably doesn't know but it's pretty obvious when he's lying. He tends to focus his gaze on one point and his voice turns monotone when he lies. It's pretty cute how he thinks he's being sneaky actually. 'Sigh', Tabitha, I know he's keeping things from us and so does Rey, but we agreed on giving him some space until he's comfortable enough to tell us himself. I guess that's just what it means to be a parent. I know he doesn't mean any harm so all we can do is just support him until he's ready."

"Lying is bad!" Little Ellie declared.

I agreed with her on that. "Yeah Ellie! Lying is bad!"

ARTHUR LEYWIN'S POV:

I start concentrating on my mana core, distracted by a series of unexplainable sneezes. I was getting too impatient with my training. I wanted to hurry up and get to the previous level in my past life but that wasn't happening as fast as I wanted it to.

The little fight with Director Goodsky made it all too real for me. I was too inexperienced and weak. It didn't really affect me until now, but I'm wasn't used to fighting the way mages fought in this world. The fact that there was nothing like conjurers in my previous world made fighting one a lot more difficult.

My concentration wavered while my mind flashed back to my past life. The scene on that foggy night when the orphanage's head caretaker, the closest thing to a mother figure I had, was shot. I was still young at that time, but if I think back now, that was probably the reason I had started training like a madman. Head Mother was the one that picked me off the streets, giving me a steamed bun. After that, she took care of me, taught me how to read and write, scolded me and taught me basic manners.

I didn't want to become a king; I just wanted vengeance. I just wanted to be strong enough to kill the ones responsible for the death of the person who had taken care of me... who had loved me. It was never as simple as that, though. It had turned out that the ones responsible for killing the orphanage head caretaker, along with other leader figures of the various orphanages, were the military from another country.

I realized then that no matter how powerful an individual was he was still just one person. I needed authority along with my power. Becoming a king then served its purpose. The first thing I did when I was appointed King was destroy that country. I bloodied my hands with the corpses of hundreds of

thousands of soldiers and millions all together. The cruel thing, though, was that no matter what kind of revenge is taken, it didn't change what had happened to her. She still had died an unjust death.

This life was going to be different. I wasn't going to let the ones I treasured suffer.

Sylvie nudged her wet nose at me, a concerned gaze fixed on my eyes. 'I'm here, feel better' was what she seemed to say to me.

Petting her head, I stirred myself out of my unpleasant memories.

I washed myself off, laughing at the crying Sylvie who still hated getting wet. I was glad I had her by my side. It wasn't healthy for me to be alone thinking by myself for too long.

Just on time, the girls got back from their shopping trip by the time I had finished dressing up. I hopped down the stairs to greet them.

"Hmph! Brother is a meanie!" My sister just puckered her lower lip with her arms crossed.

"Is it because I didn't go shopping with you, Ellie? I'm sorry." I patted her turned head, which made her tense her face as she forced herself to keep from smiling.

"How was shopping Mom, Lady Tabitha? Did you guys buy a lot of stuff?" I asked, my hand still on my sister's head.

"We didn't buy much, just a couple of new outfits for Ellie and Lilia," my mother responded.

At this time, I heard a storm of footsteps coming toward us. Vincent arrived beside us with an excited look on his face. His eyes were a little red and he had an uncontrollable smile on his face.

"You guys are finally here!" He said picking up his daughter and kissing her cheek.

"Honey, why are you so flustered? Have you been crying? "What is going on?" Tabitha had a bewildered look on her face from confusion and worry. Vince did look a little crazy right now.

"You didn't tell them yet, Arthur?" He faced me, the goofy smile still pasted on his face.

Shaking my head, I chuckled, "I just got down as well. I was about to tell them."

"Tell us what, baby?" My mother had a look of concern as well. Mothers never liked not knowing what was going on.

"I discussed with Mr. Vincent about teaching Ellie and Lilia mana manipulation starting today. Of course, only if Lady Tabitha was okay with it."

"..."

Tabitha just shook her head, looking at her husband. "W-wait, hold on. Is this some sort of prank? If it is, it's not funny."

"No ma'am. I know both you and Sir Vincent aren't mages but it is possible for Lilia to become one." I gave her a sincere look.



“N-no way. I’ve never heard of a method for teaching someone mana manipulation. I’ve been taught that it’s up to the child’s innate talent to awaken by herself. Why haven’t I heard anyone else teaching kids then?”

Tabitha had a lot harder time believing that Lilia could become a mage than her husband. I didn’t blame her though. Vincent didn’t even question me, which was surprising. The biggest worry for a mother from a noble family was the future of her children and in a society where mages are the elites, the Helstea’s lineage, no matter how rich they were, would get more than a few looks of pity.

“I’ve never heard of anything like teaching a child mana manipulation either, Art. How do you plan on doing this?” my mother quizzed.

“Mom, you guys all know how I awakened at the age of 3 right? I still remember what happened and why it did. I’m going to do what I did on myself to them. I’ll have to test them before I can even start but for Ellie, I’m 100% sure she’ll be able to awaken and for Lilia, around 70%,” I answered. The probability was higher than what I said for Lilia but I didn’t want to get their hopes up too much. There was still a chance she wouldn’t be able to awaken.

“Heavens. T-this is. Give me a minute. I need to sit down.” I noticed Tabitha’s knees were wobbling as she made her way to the couch.

“This isn’t going to be an instant thing. It’ll take a few years for them to awaken on their own after I teach them.”

The Helstea parents just nodded at this and I turned to face the confused Lilia and Ellie.

“Ellie, Lilia, can you guys sit down on the floor over by the fireplace?” I instructed, guiding them into the living room. “I want you guys to sit in your most comfortable position, back to back. Leave some space so I can sit in between.”

Ellie was still a little clueless as to what was going on, but Lilia had gotten the gist of what was happening and I could see the determined look on her face. Ellie sat down with her legs stuck out in front of her while Lilia sat in a more ladylike position with both her legs tucked in to her left side.

“Okay. Before I do anything, I want you guys to close your eyes and concentrate. If you try really hard, you’ll be able to see some spots of light. Do you see it?” I placed myself between them now as Tabitha, Vincent, and my mother were all staring intently.

“...”

“N-no... I don’t really see anything,” I heard a murmur from Lilia. I expected much but I turned to see everyone having looks of panic on them. Ignoring them, I turned to face my sister and asked her the same thing. I was less afraid of her seeing the light, but not recognizing what to actually spot.

Thankfully, she responded, “Bruhder, I think I see a small pretty light!”

The next step involved doing something that only I was capable of doing. I had to will mana of all four elemental attributes at once into their bodies. Doing this, they would be able to see a lot more clearly the specks of mana that were scattered in their body.

“Okay I’m going to start now. You guys will feel a little feverish but I want you guys to endure it and just focus on the specks of light.” As soon as I said that, I willed my quadra elemental mana into them.

The reason that all four elements had to be exerted unto them was because the mana that had yet to gather and form a mana core was at its purest form, meaning that all four elements needed to be exerted at the same power into their bodies to trigger any sort of responses from the dormant mana inside them.

“Eep!” “Hng!” Lilia and Ellie yelped out a little in surprise.

“I-I think I see some of the lights! They’re so pretty!” exclaimed Lilia.

“Wow! So many!” Echoed my little sister.

“Okay, this part is important, I’m going to help you guys with this part but your job is to try and connect all of the little lights okay? Do you get that Ellie? Pretend that all of the little lights are friends and they need to meet together. Can you do that for me, Ellie?” This was the trickiest and longest part and I had to make sure that they understood what to do.

“O-okay! I think I get it!” “The lights are friends? Okay!”

I remained in my position for over an hour to trigger the dormant mana in their body, at least to the point that they would be visible enough for them to manipulate and gather.

Taking a deep breath, I removed my hands from their back, instructing them to continue gathering the little lights until the lights disappear.

“How is it? D-do you think Lilia will be able to become a mage?” Both the Helstea parents are a mess. They had anxious looks on their faces while Vincent was nervously chewing on a fingernail. I looked at my mother and even she had a hint of uneasiness in her eyes.

I responded with a wide smile. “Don’t worry, both Lilia and my little sister should awaken as a mage within a few years. My plan was to do this with them every day for the few months that I’ll be home. By then, they should be capable of training on their own to form a mana cor...”

Tabitha didn’t even let me finish as picked me up into a big hug. “Oh thank you thank you thank you. My baby will be able to learn magic! Oh my goodness I was so worried what her future would be since both of us aren’t mages. \*Sniff\* Uuu... thank you so much, Arthur.”

Vincent’s face was streaming tears as he kept his gaze on his daughter meditating. My mother patted my head silently, giving me a proud smile.

It wasn’t as big of a deal for Ellie to become a mage since our whole family could use magic. The chances of her never awakening would have been slim to none even if I didn’t do anything; I was just speeding up the process. I had figured the faster she learns magic, the faster she would be able to protect herself.

The two girls lasted a couple of hours before the mana I exerted dispersed out of their body. Surprisingly, Lilia actually lasted longer than Ellie. She definitely had more willpower than my four-year-old sister.

My father came a bit after from the Guild Hall and was ecstatic for the Helstea family that they were going to have their first mage in the family.

Picking up Eleanor and rubbing his beard on her cheek, my father just cooed, "Aww, my little baby is going to be strong like her older brother! Promise me you won't be stronger than father, okay? Or he'll be very sad."

My mother just laughed at this while my sister just giggled, pushing Father's face away. "Papa! Your beard tickles! St~op, hehe!"

We had a great dinner party that night. Vincent and Tabitha went all out on the delicacies leaving my mouth watering and Sylv drooling right next to me. We ended the night with everyone merry, Vincent going around offering drinks to even the maids and butlers.

The following days had consisted of condensing my mana core and my elemental skills along with my dragon will's powers. This was a mind-numbingly slow process and I felt myself stagnating because of the lack of stimulation.

I spent a few days out of the week sparring with Father but I could tell he was afraid of hurting me, always holding back even when it was unnecessary.

Besides my training, I spent a couple of hours everyday watching over my sister and Lilia while they continued their journey to form their cores. It was a strenuous process and I could see my sister being a bit more impatient with the training but I did my best to help her through it by making games out of it.

During this time, I got to talk to my mother about her abilities as an Emitter. I asked how she was able to learn it and train it when there were so few Emitters and she smiled at me mysteriously, saying how a woman needed to have a few secrets of her own.

I guess I would have to ask her again when she was feeling less secretive.

Two weeks before my birthday and the start of my career as an Adventurer, I was startled by loud, obnoxious knocks on the front door. Opening the door, the faces of the all too familiar group made my lips curl up.

The Beginning After The End – Chapter 23: Royalty

REYNOLDS LEYWIN'S POV:

As I absentmindedly took a sip from my cup of coffee, a scalding sensation startled me out of my daze. Vince and I were seated around the small table on the outside patio as we discussed some business plans on the Helstea Auction House. The topic had shifted towards the security parameters and how we were currently approaching the stages where it was necessary to completely restructure and enhance the guard teams.

Alongside capable nonmage adventurers, we had recently managed to recruit a few long range augmenters, making up an extremely powerful addition to the security. While it was still widely prevalent for augmenters to go the melee route due to functionality and ease, ranged augmenters, like archers and crossbowmen, continued to be a much more powerful asset in defensive settings. Vince poked at me a few times whether conjurers should be employed for the upcoming event.

“Hmmm...I know how beneficial it'd be to have conjurers that could set up barriers and help support the augmenters, but I'm against it.” I took another, more careful sip from my cup.

“You mind elaborating? You just said how helpful it'd be to have them,” he rebutted as he rhythmically stirred his tea.

Setting down my cup, I replied, “If we're just talking about firepower, I'd be all for it, but you know it's not as simple as that, Vince. It would affect team morale having even a few conjurers in a team of augmenters. You know yourself how snobby most conjurers can get. I swear they think they're angel incarnates; most of them think of augmenters as some sort of primitive beasts for using their hands to fight. Even if we do manage to find a few that aren't so rotten, the team would start thinking we're hiring conjurers because I don't trust them.”

Vince's gaze was focused blankly on a stained smudge on the table; it was obvious what he was thinking. “You have a point. I left you completely in charge of the security aspects, so we'll go with what you say, but we need to be absolutely sure the 10th Anniversary Helstea Auction goes well. Even the Royal Family will be there this time. We can't let any commotions get too big.”

I simply nodded in agreement, giving my friend an appreciative smile.

“Oh right! We need to take your son with us to the Tenth Anniversary Auction. He had mentioned he wanted a sword, right? I didn't know you had taught him how to use the sword. I expected the boy to take after you on the infighting style you're so good at with your gauntlets.”

“Sigh. I never taught him how to use the sword, Vince. He's already had a grasp of sword fighting since he was four years old,” I let out, disbelieving the words that came out of my own mouth.

“You can't be serious... Lilia was still scared to go down the stairs by herself when she was four,” a bewildered Vince sputtered.

I continued, “He apparently learned by watching me train and reading books on swords. Vince, that's not even the part I care about. It's when we spar, though. His gaze when we practice, his reactions and fighting style. I don't feel like I'm sparring with my eight-year-old son. It feels like I'm fighting some veteran sword master. The only reason I can handle him right now is because his body is still immature, but the way he reacts to my moves...it's something that only comes with decades of experience in life-or-death fighting.”

“Mmm...I can't say I don't know what you're talking about. I sometimes find myself wondering if your son is actually only eight. Are you scared of him, Rey?” he asked seriously.

“No. That's one thing I've become more and more sure of. No matter what, he's still my son. I know he cares deeply about his family, too and that's all I could ask for as his father.”

ARTHUR LEYWIN'S POV:

During these past two months, it was evident that there had been progress in Lilia's and my sister's mana manipulation. It was no longer necessary to infuse my mana into them anymore, so they were able to train by themselves now. Of course, it would still take a few years for them to form a mana core—especially Ellie and her short attention span—but I did drill into the both of them the importance of keeping their training a secret.

I didn't need to remind my parents and the Helstea family that keeping this a secret was important, but it was blatantly obvious that the four of them were excited for the day Lilia and Ellie would awaken.

Sylvie had been sleeping much more these past two months, but there were changes that became noticeable. For one, her intelligence was rapidly increasing. Her thoughts to me were more intricate and contained complicated emotions that went past just 'hungry' or 'sleepy.' In the few short months after she was born, it felt like she had gained years of emotional intelligence.

One major change had happened recently; she learned how to transform.

Okay, it wasn't really something as drastic as transformation, but she was able to manipulate her body a little. It felt like it happened so suddenly. I had been pondering how to hide her appearance in the days to come when she grows larger. She had been beside me when she started whining and scratching herself as if uncomfortable. The next thing I knew, her red spikes began retracting while her horns got smaller. It was a mind-blowing surprise. Now, most of the time, Sylvie just kept her spikes and horns retracted, making her look more like a cute, black scaled fox with little horns.

Throughout this time, both Vincent and Tabitha had insisted on giving me more gifts as thanks. Even if I wasn't able to acquire the cloak or mask, I had been planning on training Lilia. After all, she's part of the family that helped my family, so as far as I was concerned, there was nothing to lose in helping them. After numerous refusals, we had finally settled on something they could get me: a sword.

My body had finally grown big enough to properly handle a small sword without awkwardly toppling over at the slightest mishap. It wouldn't be bigger than an adult-sized dagger, but it finally allowed me to train my swordsmanship with something other than a wooden stick. We had decided to make it a family event and have both my family and Vincent's family go visit the Tenth Anniversary Helstea Auction.

Waiting in the living room downstairs for my father and Vince to get ready, I heard an obnoxious knock from the front door.

Sheesh, knocking once is plenty.

I let out a slightly annoyed shout that I'd get it since I was close by, anyway. No need to trouble the maids when I was right next to door.

"Who's ther—OOF!"

I was hit with the nostalgic sensation of getting smothered by a pair of foam pillows. A classic way of assassination, but shouldn't it be used while I'm sleeping?

"Oh my goodness! You were alive! Look how big you've gotten! I'm so sorry, Art! I wasn't able to protect you! I'm so glad!" the lady sniffled.

"Mmfph! Mmmfph!"

"Angela, I don't think he can breathe..." A comforting voice pointed out.

"Eep! S-Sorry!" Angela squealed.

Peeling my face away, I smiled at the sight of my companions. "It's so good seeing you guys again!"

My giant guardian angel, Durden, patted my head and I saw his narrow eyes getting watery, triggering a tear from me as well.

Adam smacked me on the b\*\*t. "Little brat! You know how devastated everyone was because of what happened? It's good to see you again, hehe."

"You've gotten better-looking, Arthur." I turned to see the charismatic Helen Shard with her signature bow still strapped to her back squat down in front of me. She lightly pinched my cheek and gave me a sympathetic smile before standing back up.

Suddenly, I'm embraced again, but this time, I was thoroughly surprised. "Sniff."

It was Jasmine. That cold, aloof Jasmine. She kept mute as she just tightened her arms around me, letting out soft sniffles.

I couldn't resist the urge to pet her head when she suddenly peeled herself away from me, her face scarlet. Quickly standing up and trying to regain composure, she shot me an embarrassed nod and turned away.

At this time, Sylvie woke up from her nap on the couch and trotted towards us.

"Woah! What is that?" Adam exclaimed. The rest of the Twin Horns had the same expression of surprise as even Jasmine turned back to look at the mysterious mana beast.

"She's my contracted beast, Sylvie," I announced while my bond hopped on top of my head.

"Holy c\*\*p! You already have a contracted beast? Do you know how valuable it is to have a bond? Oh man, I've been trying to look for a beast to tame these past few years but with no luck. The ones that they sell are way too expensive, too, lucky brat!" Adam was practically pulling his hair out in jealousy.

"Bonds," or "contracted beasts" for the official term, were highly sought after by both types of mages. It was a bit more advantageous for conjurers since, while the master prepared spells, the bond would be able to protect them. However, it was also very useful for augmenters as well, who often sought after beasts to contract them as mounts or a partner to have their back.

"What's with all the commotion down...Ah! You guys are here!" My father, wearing his uniform, leaped down the flight of stairs and rushed toward his ex-party members.

He was giving all of them a hug as my mother and sister came down soon after.

"Everyone! It's so good seeing you guys again!" my mother exclaimed. She didn't have the chance to say anything more as the girls all threw themselves at her and start drooling over my baby sister, both of whom were dressed very nicely for the event. My parents hadn't seen the Twin Horns for almost as long as me, so everyone was just as excited.

"Oh my goodness! Alice, Ellie looks just like you! She's going to grow up to be so pretty!"

"...Cute."

"Rey is going to have his hands full soon with potential candidates kukuku. Can you tell me how old you are?"

“Four!”

The girls were a jumble of excitement and estrogen as they ogled Ellie.

Vincent came down soon after with Tabitha and Lilia. The mother and father duo were matching in a black suit and dress while Lilia was sporting a flowery dress under a warm cloak. After everyone introduced each other, it was decided that the Twin Horns would come with us to the Helstea Auction House for the Tenth Anniversary event. On the way there, I filled them in on what had happened after the fall. My dad explained to them the basics in his letter, but they were dying to know the details. They were quite shocked when they learned I was in the Kingdom of Elenoir for over four years.

The ride was pretty short, so I wasn't able to finish telling them everything before we got off.

The first thought that had come to mind upon arrival was that Vincent really put in a lot of work into this. The Helstea Auction House was breathtaking. It was rather misleading to even call it a house as it towered high above any of the other buildings nearby. I've been to many national and historical monuments that were created by the most famous architects, but this was on a different level. I suspected that they had a lot of help from Conjurers from how large it was. The Auction House was a magnificent theatre with intricate designs all over. The main doors were over 4 meters in height and were made from petrified wood with carved designs on it. Compared to the naturalistic and elegant designs that I saw in the Elf Kingdom, this was more complicated and grand. It was in the shape of a half-cylinder with detailed stone sculptures of different weapons as supports.

We arrived early, so only the workers and guards were present, preparing for the event. The inside was equally, if not more stunning. The front door opened to a path that stretched out to a stage on the other end. To our left and right, there were rows of escalating seats made from a rather luxurious burgundy leather that could fit over ten thousand people comfortably. Upon looking up, I noticed that there were incased booths at the very top of the rows of seats and even higher, there was a single room attached to the ceiling and back wall with glass surrounding it, giving a clear view of the stage. It was easy to guess that those booths, as well as the single room, was for the VIP.

Turns out, that VIP room on the ceiling was the room we'd be seated in. Father and the Twin Horns, who had decided to help my father and the guards to prepare for any unwanted commotions or outbreaks, were the first to separate from us. Vincent separated from us after as he barked out orders at the workers and readied the hosts to greet the more important guests.

Tabitha led us to the room, making us comfortable inside the carefully-designed and furnished area that was meant for only the most distinguished and wealthy guests. There was a wine rack and a few reclining seats and tables with closer seats by the window. I made myself comfortable on a seat closest to the window.

The auction house was soon a panorama of cheerful and excited noise, as more and more people, who were no doubt people of some sort of influence, began filling the lower seats. There were some groups that seemed more distinguished than the rest who were personally escorted by the hosts to their booths. No doubt, they were some of the more affluent nobles in the Kingdom.

Growing bored of the hordes of overdressed nobles chatting eagerly amongst themselves, I shifted my attention to Lilia as she was teaching some sort of clapping game to Ellie. I couldn't help but smile

myself as the both of them broke into a fit of giggles when either of them messed up and were flicked gently in the ear as punishment.

Time passed by rather slowly until Vincent came back, leading a group of unfamiliar people inside.

The first to come in behind Vincent was an elderly man with long, deep-red hair that was aged with streaks of grey. His back was ramrod straight with broad shoulders that took off years in his appearance. The man's eyes were stern with harsh, sword-shaped eyebrows, giving him an undeniably eye-catching presence. He was wearing a red robe lined with white fur around the collar and had a cane that shined brighter than any silver I had previously seen. Trailing closely behind him was a lady that looked a few years older than my mother. While my mother had a lovely, sweet, friendly ambience, this lady's facial features reminded me of an ice sculpture; refined, elegant, noble and of no flaws, but also cold and devoid of emotion. She was wearing a shimmering silvery-white dress that complimented her dark blue hair that draped over her shoulders like a well-kept tapestry.

Behind the lady of whom I assumed was the man's wife were two younger kids that could only be their kin. The older child, a boy that looked to be about the age of thirteen or so, took more after his father. With his serious brown eyes, straight brows, and his short mahogany hair that had a shiny luster just like his father's, it was apparent as to what he would look like a few decades down the road. Despite his fierce looks, however, there was a sort of unrefined charisma that was different from his father's. It was the sort of charisma that would make him the center of any group.

The younger one, a girl that looked to be about my age, surveyed the room carefully before locking eyes with me.

It would still be a couple of years until she started maturing, but needless to say, the potential was there. I couldn't help comparing her to Tess. They would both grow to be captivating to the men around them, but in very different ways. Tess was the lovely girl next door, with her comforting almond-shaped eyes that glowed a bright teal. Her peaches and cream complexion and rosy cheeks. Her unique, gunmetal hair complimented her eyes, giving her a mysterious, yet approachable aura.

No, this girl was the complete opposite. Her porcelain white complexion was a canvas for her meticulously carved facial features. Her penetratingly sharp eyes that seemed much too mature for her age was a dark brown shade that appeared larger because of her long, thick lashes. Her hair was a glaring black, which she got from her mother. Compared to her dark hair and eyes, however, her small lips were covered in a soft pink shade that gave life to her doll-like appearance.

It was hard not to wonder how they would grow up to be; whether mother nature would make them bloom or wither.

Peeling my eyes off of the girl in front of me, I focused on the three guards that followed after the picturesque family.

"I didn't know we would be in here with guests, Vincent," the man said, neither harshly nor kindly.

"I apologize, Your Majesty! I assumed you wouldn't mind having a few other people with you. You remember my wife, Tabitha, right? Well, these are our close family friends," he introduced, waving his arm in our direction.



After regarding us for a moment, his lips curled up into a smile. "If they are your friends, Vincent, then they are mine as well."

"It's a pleasure to meet you. At least we'll have some company besides these guards," the lady giggled.

I raised an eyebrow in surprise at the sharp contrast in the woman's personality to her appearance. She seemed much more welcoming, despite her intimidating looks, than her husband.

"Everyone, as you all may know, I'd like you all to meet the King and Queen of Sapin. Introduce yourselves to King Blaine Glayder and Queen Priscilla Glayder and their children, Curtis and Kathyln."

At this, my mother—who was holding my sister—Tabitha, and even Lilia, dropped down, genuflecting. I caught on and lowered myself a moment later as well.

Giving us a nod, the King gestured for us to stand. "No more of this, now. No need to be stiff, we're just here for the auction, after all."

As I got back up, Sylvie peeked her head out from under my robe where she was sleeping, surveying curiously the new faces.

"Kuu?" she chirped, tilting her head.

I thought I heard a gasp from one of the guards in the rear, but I wasn't able to tell since their faces were covered.

"Oh my! What a cute little mana beast!" Queen Priscilla's face brightened up at the sight as she made her way towards me.

The King and the two children's eyes looked towards my direction as well.

The guards took a step forward as well, making sure they were close enough to react in case something happened to the Queen.

"She just hatched a few months ago. Her name is Sylvie. Come out and say hello," I responded.

"Kyu~!" she cooed while hopping out of my robe and stretching her body like a cat.

"I assume this little mana beast is your bond, young man?" The King came closer, kneeling down to get a closer view of Sylvie.

I just gave a wordless nod. It should be fine with Sylv's appearance the way it is. "How fortunate you are to have a mana beast. Even infant ones are not easy to tame, yet she looks to be very obedient."

"Well we're able to communicate mentally, so it's more like a mutual agreement rather than obedience," I simply shrugged.

"What? You mean to say that you are under an Equals Contract?"

We all turned our heads to face the source of the voice. It was one of the hooded guards behind the children.

D\*\*n, did I say something I wasn't supposed to?

“Umm, I’m not sure what that is, but she was the one that initiated the contract, so I think so?” I shrugged, hoping to switch topic.

Was it that big of a deal who formed the contract?

“Let me take a closer look at your bond!” the hooded guard exclaimed, creeping closer to us.

Before I could decline, the King stepped in.

“This isn’t the time nor place to study someone else’s pet. You’re being rude, Sebastian.” His gaze turned harsh as he rebuked him.

“My apologies...” he said, hoping I’d complete the sentence.

“Arthur. Arthur Leywin,” I finished, giving a curt bow. As he and his wife gave me a small smile, we took our seats in time to hear the clear voice declaring that the auction would start soon.

A cold shiver made me turn back just to see Sebastian, who had taken off his hood, staring intently at Sylvie, who was nestled on my lap.

The Beginning After The End – Chapter 24: Auction

“Ladies and Gentlemen! May I say that it is of the highest honor for me to be here tonight? All of you are gathered here today for one reason and one reason only, I presume? It is to have the chance to obtain rare and valuable items in this auction!”

Applause thundered in enthusiasm at the old gentleman’s ardent introduction.

“If everyone in the audience would now kindly turn to face the back room at the very top, we have a few exceedingly important figures that have decided to bless us with their presence. Please join me in welcoming the King and Queen of Sapin!” The auctioneer was the first to flick out the tail of his suit and genuflect. The audience immediately followed suit, lowering themselves respectfully in a bow since they couldn’t kneel in their seats.

The King and Queen, in response, stepped out towards the window in front of me and waved their arms slowly in a practiced motion.

“Next, the one that made this whole event possible. Please give a big round of applause for Vincent Helstea!”

The auctioneer’s introduction was followed by another round of applause as Vincent stepped up next to the King and Queen, giving a deep bow in return.

I remained seated, looking down below at the crowds of people who were supposed to be of much higher class than me, but I couldn’t help but look at them as if they were...

No... I shouldn’t think like that. I’m not a king anymore. Hell, I haven’t even gone through puberty yet. No point in acting like someone who didn’t exist anymore.

I turned my gaze toward the King and Queen, studying them. Despite the stoic expression the King always carried, he didn’t have a domineering demeanor. He had a charismatic and strong presence, making it easy to believe that a majority of the citizens of Sapin would respect him, but that was it. He

didn't earn his seat; his father had given it to him. The Glayder family had been the Royal Family since the founding of Sapin. I wasn't surprised to see that King Glayder's mana core was only at the red stage.

Turning my gaze over to the Queen, something caught my eyes that I didn't really notice at first. Strapped to the backside of her dress was a white wand. I couldn't sense her mana, which meant she was either carrying an artifact that could hide it or she was at a level high enough where I couldn't sense it.

Queen Priscilla caught me observing her and gave me a discerning smile, revealing her pearl white teeth. Her smile threw me off-guard, making me flinch and quickly turn away. I could feel how hot my face was, making it all the more embarrassing. The word beautiful wouldn't do justice as a means of describing her. However, one thing I had noticed ever since coming to this world was the fact that I lacked any sort of sexual attraction towards these older women. At first, I had thought that it might've been due of the lack of necessary hormones currently in this prepubescent body, but the more I thought about it, I felt like it boiled down to the fact that my mother was just a bit younger than I had been before being reborn into this world.

I had never really been interested in human psychology but it was interesting noticing that women associated with the same age group as my parental guardian made them unappealing sexually. Maybe that was just me; no way to tell.

Of course, that also didn't mean I'd go for children my age like Tess, Lilia, or even this ice princess here. They could be the very personification of beauty itself, but it didn't change the fact that their mental level was that of a child. This was the reason I wasn't able to see Tess as anything other than a friend or a sister to me, even when she was so obvious in showing her attraction towards me. Maybe when she's older and more mature, I would start thinking about it.

Sigh. Being popular sure was a hassle.

"...kuu." I looked down to see Sylvie staring at me cynically, her eye half-open, judging eye seeming to say 'are you serious?'

"Haha..." I couldn't help but laugh in embarrassment as I pushed Sylvie's face in a different direction to redirect her hurtful stare with my hands to block her hurtful gaze.

A large hand lightly squeezed my shoulder. "Arthur, a sword is up for auction right now. Tell me if you want it so I can put in my bid. Don't worry about the price either! Perks of being the owner of this place," Vincent whispered.

"Thank you." I turned my attention to the item being auctioned off.

"This short sword was forged by a master smith who is also a fire artificer, ensuring that the quality during the forging process is top class. The core of this weapon is made from the core of a Thunder Hawk mana beast. Reinforcing this sword with just a little mana will produce currents of electricity around the edge of the blade, enhancing its cutting power and even having a mild paralyzing effect! The bid will start at fifty gold!"

Excited cries erupted immediately as nearly every noble boy who sought to become a mage tugged at their parent's sleeves, begging them to bid. I remained motionless, my head propped up on my arm as I

inadvertently let out a yawn. There was a large screen that magnified the items so the audience in the back was able to see. However, while the little shock ability could be handy, it was obvious that the sword itself was subpar at best compared to the blade I had wielded in my previous life.

Vincent had been constantly shifting his gaze between me and the weapon, hoping I would at least be interested in the weapon that most people would kill over.

I shook my head in response.

“No worries! That was just the start! Let me know when you find something you like. Oh! I almost forgot. I have the items you wanted in the back. I’ll have one of the workers deliver it to me after this event is over,” he whispered, leaning closely to so only I could hear.

My ears perked up as I abruptly turned to him. “You managed to find a voice-altering mask as well?”

“It took a bit longer than I expected but I finally managed to find one. I also got you a coat made from a nightmare fox that should make it harder for the wearer to be registered to the unsuspecting eye. I thought it would be something you would want so I snatched that too while I could,” Vincent replied softly, shooting me a wink.

“That’s more than what I had hoped for.” The mask was essential for me to become an adventurer, but the coat would no doubt be useful as well.

“Don’t worry about it and just stay safe. I’m the one that has to deal with your family if something happens to you, you know,” he chuckled.

I just smiled wryly at this fact. No. I wasn’t going to give my family a reason to grieve again like I had done to them before.

There were a few interesting items along the way. There were several beast cores, most of which were B-class or lower. The prices for those were astronomical. Even a C-class core was around fifty gold, and each class multiplied this figure exponentially. There were a few more artifacts and cores but none of those were things I wanted.

The King himself bid on a few of them, winning an A-class beast core. It wasn’t until a mage actually absorbed the core that they would find whether a beast core still contained a will or not. Chances were slim to find a core that still had its will still intact; even if it did contain the will, it had to be compatible with the user. Most beasts, however, had already passed it on to one of its offspring or instinctively chose to disperse their will before dying.

I guess the King was hoping to get lucky. The Queen, on the other hand, bid on a mana absorption ring and a couple other items useful for conjurers.

As we approached the latter half of the auction, the items began increasing in value. As more and more items were sold off, my interest started to deplete until a large, square container, covered by a sheet, was rolled out onto the stage by a few workers.

I couldn’t help but grow agitated as the auctioneer removed the sheet, revealing a cage full of females chained together with only a dirty sack to cover their private areas.

It disgusted me as so many noblemen frantically began bidding on the young female slaves that were soon stripped to show their assets like animals. I realized that being born in a small town with people who disagreed with the idea of having slaves had made me almost forget the fact that slaves actually existed in this world.

My world abolished slavery hundreds of years ago, so the idea of owning a slave was something that I just couldn't get used to.

Memories of killing the slave traders that had abducted Tessia came back to mind. If I hadn't been there to rescue her, what would've happened? A shiver ran down my spine at the thought of Tessia being abused by a corrupt aristocrat. Now that I think about it, didn't I inadvertently prevent a war from happening between the humans and elves?

The taste of metal in my mouth brought me back to reality. Realizing that I had bit down too hard on my lower lip, I quickly wiped the blood off of my lips with my finger.

Tabitha and my mother had solemn faces at the sight of the slaves, but they simply shook their heads and focused their attention on Ellie and Lilia instead. Even though the Helstea family was a very prominent noble house, they opposed the idea of keeping slaves and opted to simply hire maids and butlers.

Vincent's face flashed with guilt but he quickly regained composure. I'm sure he was against this, but it couldn't be helped that the popularity and demand of slaves were too high.

Turning my head, I spotted the prince murmuring something to the little princess, but I couldn't guess what from her expressionless face.

This was becoming tedious. I was beginning to think that it would be better to hold off on getting a decent sword for now and just settle for a decent practice sword until my body matured a bit.

Getting up from my seat, I leaned back, stretching my stiff body when I spotted the hooded guard named Sebastian eyeing Sylvie with a disturbing twinkle in his eyes.

The beady-eyed, bony conjurer underneath that hood continued impatiently fiddling with his metal staff as his eyes stayed greedily fixated on my bond.

After a few moments, he noticed that I was glaring back at him. Letting out a stifled cough in response, he straightened his robe as he spread out his normally hunched shoulders to make himself look bigger. Staring down at me, he had the audacity to let out a smug grin, as if he had every right to do what he was going to do.

This foolish plebeian has the audacity to...

VINCENT HELSTEA'S POV:

It was a pity Arthur wasn't able to find a suitable sword.

No matter. There are enough swords in storage; I'm sure he will take a liking to at least one of them.

"Your Majesty, I hope you're finding it worthwhile to visit this humble auction house of ours," I assured, lowering myself.

“This place and event was anything but humble, Vincent. And yes, I’m not sure how you managed to secure an A-class beast core from a silvercoat bear, but you’ve managed to build quite the network. Let’s just hope that the beast will is still intact.” He clasped my back excitedly with his hand.

“Don’t get your hopes up too much, Dear. You know how rare it is,” I could hear the Queen mutter quietly in response.

The Queen turned back to resume her conversation with Alice and my wife. They seemed to be discussing something about the kids.

His Majesty and I turned our attention back to the main stage when, all of a sudden, a terrifyingly oppressive presence filled the room, constricting my body.

I tried my hardest to move, to try and find the source of this domineering bloodlust, but my body refused to obey.

What the hell was going on? This was the most secure area in the entire building with the King’s guard inside, as well as my own, securing the outside of the room.

My breathing turned shallow as the overbearing pressure continued gripping at my insides.

I could feel beads of cold sweat slowly rolling down my face as if they, too, were afraid.

With much effort, my body relented a little and I was able to turn my gaze slightly to see if they knew what was going on.

While they were at least able to move their bodies, it was clear that they were just as confused as I was.

I had no idea what to expect next. I had assumed that I would live for quite a bit longer, yet here I was, at death’s door, trying to struggle out of his icy grasp.

What in Hell’s name was happening?

ARTHUR LEYWIN’S POV:

D\*\*n it. I lost control.

I quickly turned away from the pale-faced Sebastian currently shaking on the floor, hoping no one had noticed.

I had only meant to give Sebastian a little scare, not to terrify every person in the room.

Taking a quick peek around, I let out a small sigh of relief after seeing that my mother and sister were okay. My sister was startled and crying, but they were both far away enough to not get directly affected.

I didn’t think it would be this bad with this body of mine.

This was the first time letting my killing intent loose. Even when I was up against the slave traders, I had chosen not to emit any kind of intent in order to catch them by surprise.

The King’s augments guards had their weapons unsheathed and positioned to defend around the royal family by the time I had withdrawn the pressure I had exerted onto the room.

“Who’s there? You dare try and attack the royal family?” the King roared as he pushed his wife and children behind him. Queen Priscilla had her wand out and was silently muttering a spell as she herded her frightened children, as well as my mother and my sister, Ellie, behind her husband and the guards.

Vincent used an artifact in his hands to call for more guards inside and had the others scout the area for any assassins that may be, or had been, nearby.

Time ticked slowly for me as everyone in the room was in a state of panic and tension. My mother had grabbed me, holding firmly onto me and my sister as guards ran around with weapons held close.

My father had stopped by, but, after making sure that we were okay, left to try and search for the mysterious attacker.

It wasn’t until they confirmed killing an intruder on the roof of the auction house that everyone had calmed down.

I let out sigh of relief, but unlike everyone else, my relief wasn’t for the fact that the intruder had been killed, but the fact that I had been provided with a convenient scapegoat.

Thank you, intruder on the roof. Your sacrifice was not in vain.

“Oy Sebastian. How could a royal guard fall on his a\*\*e by a little intimidation from an intruder? You’re going to die early like this.” A hooded augmenter holding a spear shook his head, trying to sound tough in front of his comrades.

“I merely slipped!” Sebastian snarled, slapping away the hand that one of the guards held out.

He regarded me suspiciously for a moment but said nothing else as he turned away in disdain.

“Now! For the final item we have up for the lucky individual fortunate enough to acquire this!” The auctioneer’s dramatic voice echoed from below as another cage covered by a silky cloth was dragged onstage.

Everyone in the room was still noticeably tense from the initial shock of an intruder, but their attention was now focused back onto the stage after Vincent announced he had been killed.

After a dramatic pause, the tarp covering the cage was removed, revealing a small feline animal the size of a large dog.

The auctioneer bellowed at that exact moment, “An infant world lion! For those who are ignorant of this magnificent mana beast, an adult world lion has the capability to at least become a B-class mana beast. I dare say that if taken care of well, this infant world lion could even become an A-class mana beast! Do you know what this means? Taking care of and treasuring this fine beast will allow its master to become a legendary beast tamer!”

The audience below us erupted into a frenzy as hands shot into the air, bidding without even waiting for the auctioneer. To my surprise, King Glayder smacked the glass with his hand as his eyes stayed glued to the mana beast.

Having never traversed to the Beast Glades, I was intrigued by cub as well.

Sebastian walked over to the edge of the room as well to get a better view of the mana beast currently on display. However, he merely let out a dissatisfied snort before walking back, getting another greedy eyeful of Sylvie.

I normally wouldn't have minded someone becoming jealous of the fact that I had a bond, but it was obvious that Sebastian had intentions to try and take my bond away from me. Needless to say, my patience with his borderline perverted leering was growing increasingly thin.

"Now, now! I won't be able to start the bidding until everyone gets settled!" The auctioneer shook his fingers with a satisfied grin plastered on his face as he waited for the crowd to sedate.

As the bidders all reluctantly settled, the auctioneer finally announced the starting bid. "We will start at one hundred gold!"

Back in Ashber, ten silver coins were more than enough to feed a family of four for a year. Of course, there were obviously luxury foods that totaled astronomical amounts, but simply by going off of that standard, one hundred silver coins, which amounted to a single gold coin, would be more than enough to feed a family of four for ten years.

Growing up in the humble outpost of a town, I had never realized how much money was truly spent by the affluent class.

Immediately, the price for the world lion soared. Soon, it passed four hundred gold and the bidders had no intention of stopping.

"500 gold!"

"550!"

"600!"

"700!"

"1000 gold coins!" the King bellowed into a voice-amplifying artifact.

Simply by hearing their king's voice, the crowd's incessant bidding stopped. It was obvious that, while there were plenty who could afford to bid higher, they were more debating on whether it was worth bidding against their own king.

It didn't seem fair once the King stepped in, but he at least had the decency to put up a high enough price.

After the auctioneer counted off, the price was eventually settled at a thousand gold coins or one white-gold tablet; something I'd only seen in books and pictures.

Vincent walked up to the King with his hand held out. "Seems like no one wants to bid against you, King Glayder," he congratulated.

"One white-gold tablet shouldn't be too unfair, right?" the King joked as he peered back down onto the stage, obviously excited.



“Thank you for the consideration,” Vincent chuckled in defeat. “What are your plans with the new royal pet? Will you use it for yourself, or perhaps give it to your son?”

“While tempting it is for me to acquire a bond, I’m thinking of giving it to Curtis...” he said casually. “Of course, that all depends on how he does,” he finished, patting his son’s head.

“D-Dad!” Prince Curtis, whose face had visibly brightened at his father’s first remark, stuttered out in worry.

Queen Priscilla, adding fuel to the fire, added, “Curtis, I remember you’ve been slacking off on your sword lessons.”

“Ah! Mom! That was supposed to be a secret!” The fierce-looking prince tugged on his mother’s sleeve as his eyes switched between his mother and father.

“Mama, can I have a pet?” Ellie asked.

“Haha! I don’t know. Mana beasts only want to be pets for nice ladies,” my mom teased.

“Ellie is nice! Right, Brother?” She pulled on my sleeve, sending me out to battle on her behalf.

“Hmm? Who knows.” Shooting her an evil smile, I placed Sylvie on my sister’s lap before she started crying.

The Tenth Anniversary event ended without any further commotion besides the one that I caused, and the guards escorted all of us back downstairs.

Upon reaching the storage room behind the stage, Vincent handed me a package wrapped in a black cloth. The items that the King purchased were being hauled to the carriage by some of the workers.

“Thank you.” I accepted it graciously.

“For everything you and your family has done for us, this is hardly enough,” Vincent replied. “Arthur, we have some swords in the back if you want to take a look while you’re here. They might not be anything special, but I’m sure you’ll be able to find a solid sword to last you until your body finishes growing.”

“Oh! Are you planning on taking lessons with the sword?” The King inquired, putting a hand on his son’s shoulder. “My boy has just started learning as well. Maybe you two can spar one day.”

“Swords are merely a hobby for me, Your Majesty. I would never hope to amount to the same level as your son,” I replied, turning back to redeem Vincent’s offer.

“Your Majesty, Prince Curtis would only become infected with bad habits if he began sparring with mere commoners,” Sebastian’s hissy voice rang.

As I turned back to retort, my father and the Twin Horns came into view.

“Ah, you guys are here! How did you enjoy the Auction?” my father exclaimed, picking up Ellie after showing his respects to the King and Queen.

My father pulled Vincent aside as he and the Twin Horns began debriefing about the event.

“Your Majesty. If I may have a word with you,” I heard Sebastian say as he leaned closely to the King’s ear.

After a few moments, King Glayder shot his royal guard an irritated glance, but let out a sigh.

As the two walked towards me, it was obvious what they had just discussed by the way Sebastian wasn’t even looking at me, but instead, at my bond.

However, instead of talking to me, the King called upon my father.

The King smiled at him, but his eyes remained stern. “I never did catch your name. You must be this young boy’s father, correct?” he affirmed rather than asked.

“My name is Reynolds Leywin and yes, that is the case. What might be the matter, Your Majesty?” my father replied, lowering himself slightly.

“Sebastian, here, has been a royal guard for a while now and has helped our family an uncountable amount of times.”

His voice stayed relaxed he spoke to my father, but the condescension in his tone was still apparent. “For the exemplary services he has provided me, and therefore the country, I do feel the need to reward him at times. You see; he has taken a fancy to your son’s bond. I know it’s not easy to sever a contract and I’m sure the boy has grown close to his little pet, but I would be more than willing hire a mage to take care of the contract and compensate you and your family for the troubles.”

“Y-Your Majesty,” my father stuttered, caught by surprise by the severe request. Taking a glance at me, he turned back to the King. “I must apologize, Your Majesty. Neither I nor my wife had anything to do to with my son’s bond. He had acquired it himself, so I cannot speak on my son’s behalf on matters of his bond.”

“Hmm,” the King turned his attention to my direction, regarding me loftily, and I suddenly realized that I was returning his gaze. He realized, then, that for the entirety of their conversation, I had been staring icily at him and his guard.

“Boy. Didn’t your father teach you to lower your gaze when speaking to someone of your superior?” Sebastian snarled in disdain as he slammed the end of his metal staff to the ground.

“Sebastian, silence!” The King held up his hand. Besides the royal family and their guards, the King’s request had caught the attention of the rest of my family as well as Vincent’s.

“Hello, child.” The King approached, standing an arm’s length away from me. “I’m sure you’ve just heard me speak to your father so I won’t repeat myself. How about it? My royal armory would certainly have a sword befitting that of any aspiring knight.”

Not wanting to make a big commotion, I swallowed back the profanity that was itching to spew out of my mouth. “Thank you, Your Majesty, for your gracious offer, but I must refuse. A simple sword could never replace Sylvie.”

“How dare—”

“Sebastian!” King Glayder roared. Turning back to me, he spoke again with a much more impatient tone. “How about a trade then? The world lion cub that I just purchased for your bond?”

“Father!” Curtis scurried over to his father, pulling on his sleeve. “I thought the mana beast was mine?”

Ignoring his son, the King waited for my response.

“Perhaps I didn’t make myself clear. I do not wish to give, sell or trade my bond,” I reiterated, failing to mask the annoyed expression on my face.

“I have asked you twice, child, for a favor. Twice,” he emphasized, his tone growing grave. “I will ask you once more; will you give me your bond?”

The air was tense as everyone’s attention was directed at me. Sebastian gave me a menacing look from bloodshot eyes, just waiting to be released. The rest of the royal guards were on standby near the two, carefully observing the situation.

“Then let me ask you a question in response, Your Majesty. How much are you willing to sell your children to me?” I asked coolly, never batting an eye.

Thrown off-guard, the King wasn’t able to respond to the seemingly random question. “You have asked me twice and I have rejected you both times, yet it seems your pride won’t allow you to accept my refusal. You don’t seem to be aware of what you were asking me, so I hoped to clarify using my question instead. How much money should I give you in return for your son or your daughter, King Glayder?” I rephrased, without wavering.

I heard the sharp whistle of a sword leaving its scabbard. “Insolent peasant! You dare insult the King and his family?” a guard roared as he charged at me before anyone had the chance to respond.

The Beginning After The End – Chapter 25: Aftermath

As the sword arced towards me, I noticed that it had a faint glow of mana surrounding it. Augmenting his sword to attack an eight-year-old... this guy really showed no tact. The hood covering the guard’s face was blown back as he charged towards me, revealing a rugged veteran’s furious expression.

Faces of horror could be seen clearly from those around us. The Twin Horns desperately tried to make their way towards the guard when they saw him attack me, to stop him from cleaving me in two. Even the King looked surprised at the unprecedented action of his guard, while the Queen had already frantically started reaching for her wand.

My eyes stayed focused on the guard that was about to swing down, but I was quite relaxed. Whether or not it was because he was angry, or because the training the royal guards received was mediocre, his attack was rushed and full of openings. I didn’t even need to will mana into my body to deal with him. I took a step forward with my right foot as his sword swung down towards me, then reached up and grabbed the space on the grip of his sword between the cross-guard and his hand.

I proceeded to pivot on my right foot, using the momentum of his swing, while my body was parallel to the guard’s. His reinforced sword whistled harmlessly through the empty space where I’d just been, creating a small fissure in the ground, and conversely embedding his sword in it. In one smooth movement, I quickly struck him in the jaw, which he hadn’t bothered to guard with mana. The force of

my upward punch, combined with his downward movement from his swing, created an impact much stronger than I'd expected. The guard only managed to let out a low grunt before he crumpled to the ground.

My attention immediately focused, then, to Sebastian. As I had expected, the dense fool was silently muttering a spell as his beady eyes locked intently with mine.

SEBASTIAN'S POV:

'That impudent brat! He needs to learn his place! When the King asks for something, it isn't a request; it's an order! How dare he not only refuse, but also reprimand our noble King! That brat doesn't deserve his equals contract! I personally come from a family of pure conjurers; elite mages capable of bending nature to their will. I don't have a contract with a beast at all! Yet, that brat has a beast that was capable enough to form an equals contract at such a young age! That means that the beast's level is least A class!' I couldn't help but grind my teeth in frustration.

'I'm the one that deserves the magnificent steed that that beast will grow to become! And yet, he refused me? He refused the King?'

"Insolent peasant! You dare insult the King and his family?" Harry let out a roar as he charged towards the brat, his sword brandished high up in the air.

'Yes! Kill that brat! I guess augmenters do have their uses at times. Hahaha! After that brat's dead, that black mana beast will rightfully be mine!'

Yet, before I could even start cheering for him, he'd been knocked out.

"..."

'What the hell? How did that useless, half-witted fool manage to knock himself out? Ugh... I guess I'll have to handle this brat by myself.' As I began taking out my staff, I noticed the brat walking towards me.

I had to hold back a laugh. 'He's actually come towards me? Is he asking to die?' Well, I didn't really care at this point. That non-mage 'Vincent' was a close friend of the King, but I'll probably just get off with a light punishment for killing an insignificant brat.

Whatever bothersome punishment he served me would be well worth it after getting my hands on the brat's mana beast.

As I began silently chanting a spell, I couldn't help but grow irritated as he continued to approach me. Was he such a fool that he couldn't tell that he was about to die?

However, a twinge of unease began forming at the pit of my stomach. This boy, no background or power to save him, had such confidence. Why did I feel like this brat, who's only half my height, was somehow looking down at me; as if he was the one that was superior.

However, much stronger than my unease was harsh contempt for having something that I had been searching so hard for. 'You're just trying to make me want to kill you more, aren't you, brat?'

He arrived in front of me just as I was about to finish my Fire Spark spell.

All of a sudden, a piercing crunch sounded from beneath me before I dropped to my knees.

“...”

‘That’s weird. Why did I suddenly lose balance?’

I glanced down, only to see someone’s knee bent inwards, along with the bones, tendons still attached, sticking out of the skin.

‘T-t-that’s my leg!’

“GAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHH!”

“M-MY LEG! MY LEG!! AHHHHHHHH!”

IT HURTS! IT HURTS IT HURTS IT HURTS IT HURTS IT HURTS IT HURTS IT HURTS! I’ve never felt such excruciating pain in my life! Why should a noble conjurer like myself need to feel pain?

‘W-Why is no-one helping me?’ As I frantically looked around, it was apparent that everyone was somehow frozen. They weren’t just surprised, but actually frozen in place.

It was then that I noticed that the colors of my surrounding had been flipped, or reversed. ‘Have my eyes been clouded from the pain?’

“This space won’t last long, so I’ll make it quick. I’ll tell you right now that it would be best for both of us if you stopped your hopeless pursuit of my bond. I don’t wish to make an enemy of this Kingdom’s leader, thus I’m giving you one last chance.”

The boy was speaking in a manner that made me completely forget his age. The tone of his words, coupled with the way he articulated them, carried both power and dignity, caused a terrifying sensation that I had felt before.

‘It was him back in the room!’ As I thought this, the pressure bore down on me, forcing me to fearfully comply.

He turned his back to me as he walked away, taking a few steps forward, before suddenly glancing back at me.

He looked at me with an emotionless face, his eyes seeming to pierce straight into my brain like a hot needle, actually making me wince in pain.

‘No... No, no, no... I can’t breathe! I-I’m scared!’ The torturous pain had been somewhat numbed. Instead, I could feel a warm sensation between my legs as my body accepted its fate of death.

His eyes continued to bore down at me in blatant disgust as I tried to stop my body from shivering.

He looked at me as if I was simply an insect, and slowly mouthed,

“Know. Your. Place.”

KING GLAYDER’S POV:

While the implication of his message towards the King of a country was provoking, this eight-year-old's reasoning and argument fascinated me.

Even though Sebastian was a loyal guard that had served us for decades, it was beneath me to make this kid give up his pet. And yet, I still promised him beforehand that I would. Who would I be if I were to go back on my word?

Then, everything went south. 'Do the Royal Knight Guards only amount to this much...? To rush in simply because of an eight-year-old's provocation?'

I didn't bring my personal Templar Knights, thinking that there wouldn't be any trouble, but I couldn't have guessed that these fresh trainees would cause this much trouble...

Although it surprised me, I quickly composed myself. What's done is done. If a royal guard was to kill this child, the public might pity him and his family for a couple of days, but ultimately the fault would lie in the child's parents for getting in my way.

It was a pity that this kid's family was friends with Vincent. Cutting ties with the auction house owner may turn out to be... a bit inconvenient, in the future.

Yet, outside of all expectations, the eight-year-old displayed a series of movements that couldn't be more impeccably executed even if a Tempar Knight had done it. So deftly did the boy knock out my Royal Guardsman.

'Harry, you fool. How inexperienced do you have to be that you even forgot to reinforce your body?! The only thing you're doing is give a bad name to the Royal Knights of Sapin!'

"KYAAAAAAAAAAAA!" I instantly turned my head in the direction of the shrill scream.

My wife was staring wide-eyed at something behind me, causing me to turn around to get a better look.

'How is Sebastian, who was fine just a second ago, now on the ground clutching his left leg like that? His leg has several shards of bone sticking out, yet he's just glaring daggers at the boy?'

The conjurer fumbled for his staff on the ground and as soon as he grabbed it, pointed it at the boy while starting to mumble a spell.

"Enough, Sebastian!" I roared at him. Did this ignorant fool not know that all of this stemmed from his greed for a child's bond?

I grabbed his staff and snapped it in half. Sebastian just looked at me in shock—as if I'd betrayed him.

This pathetic ingrate...

"Stand down! This matter is over," I growled menacingly at him as we locked eyes.

'He is in the presence of a King! No matter how much he has gotten used to it, it's best that I remind him that I can end his life on a whim.'

As soon as I finished this thought, the boy fainted. His family and, what I can only assume were his friends, immediately rushed towards him. I sighed. 'Settling this incident will be rather tiring.'

I could see that the boy's family and friends were struggling not to lash out at me.

'How wise of them to know their place in front of their King.'

Thinking about the trouble this had caused, and what it will take to deal with it, I let out a deep breath.

"I imagine that that boy needs to be treated; please excuse yourselves so that we can settle this matter another time," I announced as I guided my wife and children outside, leaving the two pathetic clowns that I'd been foolish enough to once call Royal Knights to be picked up by his teammates.

ARTHUR LEYWIN'S POV:

'Gah! My head!'

I pried open my eyes, curious as to where I was, but everything was blurry. As my vision slowly cleared, I carefully turned my head to the right and to the left.

It was my room.

"Kyu!" Sylvie woke up almost immediately and began licking my face. 'You're awake! You're awake!' she chirped, her tail wagging fiercely.

"Mmm...? Oh, you're finally awake!" My mom had her head in her arms as she leaned on my bed.

"The doctor said that you probably fell unconscious from shock, and that you'd wake up soon. However, I didn't think 'soon' would be eight hours." She ran her fingers gently through my hair, giving me a soft smile.

It was evident from her red eyes that she'd been crying for a while. A bitter taste filled my mouth in regret from making her worry again

"What happened after I passed out?" I willed myself to sit up, placing the excited Sylvie on my lap.

"We all left shortly after you fell unconscious. No one was in their right state of mind, thus the King excused himself first. Your father is downstairs with the King's representative. They're in the living room discussing what happened." Her eyes quivered in worry.

I simply nodded in response and got out of bed. My body still felt heavy from using the first phase of Sylvia's Draconic Will, so I limped slowly downstairs with Mother after she checked in on Ellie, who was asleep in her room.

As we made our way downstairs, I could hear my father, along with an elderly man's hoarse voice.

Upon seeing me, the representative suddenly stood up, giving me a slight bow, a bit of a relieved look on his weathered face. My father's back was facing me, so he only turned to look when he saw the old man start to get up.

"My son! You're awake!" He hurled himself over the couch and wrapped me in a bear hug, his hand cupping the back of my head.

"Yeah Dad, I'm fine. What're you guys talking about?"

“This representative came by with a few gold coins as a ‘token of apology’ from the King. ‘For the small incident,’” my father answered through clenched teeth.

“The Royal King has also ordered me to inform the Leywin family that both guards that attacked Arthur Leywin have been stripped of nobility,” the representative added, his voice cracking.

“For almost killing my son, the King just gave them a slap on the wrist, and then waved them goodbye?” My father couldn’t help but be livid from the frustration.

“Father, it’s all right! Look, I wasn’t hurt. Let’s just end this matter.” I squeezed my father’s hand, giving him a reassuring look.

The King seemed like a decent enough character, but in times like this, I guess his priorities lie elsewhere.

The representative just looked at us matter-of-factly—as if it was a given that whatever the King had done was the right thing.

Letting out a sigh, I took a seat. ‘I’m too tired for this c\*\*p.’

Casting aside the issue, I asked about Sebastian, in case he’d said anything. “What happened to that Conjuror? The one who had his knee broken?”

The representative just shook his head a little. “We don’t know. Our experts hypothesized that it was due to the mana that the Knight attacked you with ricocheting and hitting his knee.”

I just shrugged at this. Looks like the matter was settled more easily than I had expected.

After the elderly representative left—mainly because my father had grown impatient with his attitude—he turned around and gave me a grin.

“Good job knocking out that Augmenter. That’s my son!” He put his fist out in front of him, which I promptly pounded with my own fist, smiling.

“Where are the Twin Horns anyway? I thought they’d be here.”

My mother answered me while chuckling, “We had to keep them away from this, otherwise they might’ve really turned into wanted criminals.”

I laughed at this, but I could tell that it was something they were genuinely worried about by the helpless look on my father’s face.

According to my mother, the Twin Horns were waiting at a nearby Inn. My father told me that we’d head out there tomorrow for breakfast, and would discuss me being an adventurer with them. I nodded at this and went back into my room. My birthday was in less than two weeks. I’d finally be able to make my first mark here in this world.

As I sunk back down in my bed, I stared at the palms of my hands, idly thinking about the events from earlier. This was the first time I’d used Sylvia’s Draconic Will. These past years that I had spent studying Sylvie’s will, before assimilating it into my body and practicing it for four months, had caused me to sigh in wonder at just how powerful Sylvia was.



I was just tapping into the ocean that was Sylvia's powers. Unlike Grandpa Virion, who could only get a speed boost and blend into his surroundings, being a legacy tamer allowed me to access a lot more of Sylvia's powers at stage one.

What I had used on Sebastian was something that I decided to name 'Distortion'. I could basically separate myself from time and space for a brief moment. Although I couldn't alter anything around me, it did give me time to assess my situation. Earlier today, I'd exceeded my limits by using Distortion on another person as well. This had allowed me to get by unnoticed from the King—for now. I wasn't strong enough to act against him yet.

My current limit with Distortion, before I received any backlash, was two seconds. However today, I had used it on another person, as well as had prolonged it to five seconds. I'd done all that just to scare that bug named Sebastian. I'd used up all of my mana and passed out for half a day—just to terrify a bug. Maybe it would've been better to kill him.

No, I couldn't think like that anymore. Causing meaningless deaths just for my convenience wasn't something that I should do in this world. I needed to be different in this world.

I shook my head. I had a lot of time. Since I had so much time, I needed to be patient.

I unwrapped the package that Vincent had left beside my bed, only to see a completely white mask that was able to cover my entire face. It was a simple mask, with two sharp eye slits that curved upwards; it reminded me of a fox's eyes. There was no nose or mouth hole; just a singular blue streak that ran straight down the left side of the mask, through the left eye slit.

I tried the mask on, which somehow stuck to my face without the need of a strap. I also tried on the midnight blue coat, which turned out to be a little long. After strapping on the coat, it suddenly shrunk to fit my body perfectly.

I couldn't help but be embarrassed; I felt like some sort of wannabe assassin or vigilante.

"Ahh, ahh. Testing. Testing." The tone of my voice surprised me. It sounded completely different. My immature, high-pitched voice had become a rich, baritone.

"Kuu?" Sylvie just looked at me curiously, causing me to laugh and take off my getup.

"Aren't you excited? Don't you want to get a little bit of action as well, Sylv?" I patted her head, as my head swam with images of being an adventurer.

The Beginning After The End – Chapter 26: Partners In Crime

"So... who's it going to be?" My father took a sip of his coffee, setting it down on the round wooden table we were all seated around.

We had been currently just finished eating breakfast with the Twin Horns party., who The group had chosen a rather modest inn full of lively chatter. As they conversed while eating breakfast, while my Mother was currently busy wiping off the remains of food chunks bits of food that had managed to escape my sister's mouth off of her.

“Kuu!” Sylvie hopped up onto the table, with her head held high. Even without her mentally transmitting, everyone was able to make out that, ‘I’m enough to protect Papa!’, everyone was able to tell that that’s what she was thinking.

“Sylvie! Come here~!” My sister wagged a piece of meat in front of Sylvie, tempting my legendary dragon bond, who instantly began to drooling like a starving puppy, right before she leapt into my sister’s arms.

When I saw this, I couldn’t help but chuckle at the thought of Sylvie wagging her tail at a bandit smart enough to simply lure her away with a piece of meat.

Apparently my father’s ex-party members had just finished a dungeon exploration with several other parties, so they had some free time before their next mission or quest. Thus, it wasn’t really a matter of if they had the time, but rather if any of them wanted to.

Adam, who spoke up first while polishing the tip of his spear, was the first to speak up., “Babysitting doesn’t really fit my style, so I’ll pass on this. Besides, I feel like, with my personality, Arthur might kill me in my sleep one day.”

Despite the joke, my father responded with a solemn nod. He knew what kind of temperament Adam had, and in-turn knew that they weren’t likely to get along with each other.

“I was hoping that Durden or Helen would accompany Arthur. Honestly, although I can’t offer much, but Alice and I are more than willing to compensate you guys in whatever way we can if you do this.”

“Don’t talk like that, Rey, we’re all family here. I, for one. would love to accompany him and watch him grow, anyhow,” the gentle giant responded, his narrow eyes becoming even smaller as he smiled.

“Durden is right. You, of all people, should know that we aren’t doing this for the money. Besides, we managed to get quite a bit of treasures off from of our last dungeon raid.” Helen said, shaking her head.

Suddenly, a silent hand shot up, making everyone at the table turn to look.

“I would like to volunteer.”

“J-Jasmine? You, you want to go with Arthur?” Angela sputtered, looking at her brusque companion in shock.

Angela had made it clear about how eager she was to accompany me, but I felt like Angela would be a greater source of danger than any of the possible threats of an adventurer. I tried to lightly hint that she might not be the most suitable but even I was surprised that Jasmine would take the initiative to accompany me.

“Hmm... Logically speaking, Jasmine is the most suitable person to protect Arthur. Durden only specializes in offensive area of effect spells. Although I do want to go with Arthur too, but I feel that maybe I’m probably not the most suitable person since protecting someone isn’t really my strong suit.” Helen just scratches her head.

“Jasmine, are you really okay with going along with Arthur?” my mother asked, concerned.

Giving my mother a determined look, she looked at my mother with a determined gaze as she nodded firmly in response.

“Pfft! The lady says she wants to go, let her go. She’s the only Augmenter among us that has an elemental affinity! She just reached the dark yellow stage last year, and coupled with her wind attribute, I think she’d be the best suited.” Adam said after a let out a chuckle as he leaned back on his chair.

“Hmm... For Arthur’s safety, I guess I’ll just have to step down from this. It’s a pity though.” Durden just scratched his head, clearly disappointed.

“Sorry, Durden, I know how much you care about Arthur.” My father put an arm on the large mage’s shoulder.

“Maybe I’ll join the Twin Horns on a dungeon raid in the future!” I exclaimed. Durden just smiled at this, giving me a nod as he tousled my hair. The rest of the Twin Horns chuckled merrily as we finished up our conversation.

It was decided that, in a week’s time, I would go with Jasmine to the Adventurer’s Guild and register myself. I would automatically start off as an E class adventurer after passing a simple test and could, depending on how well I do on any missions or on quests I take, raise my class accordingly.

Getting back home, I spotted Lilia downstairs —meditating— right as when a maid was gently placed a cup of water by her side.

“Uu... Lily no fair! Training without me!” My sister rushed past my side and plopped down into a comfortable sitting position to start her mana manipulation training as well.

As far as I could tell, it would take the both of them a few more years to actually form a mana core, but at the pace that Lilia was going, it was easy to imagine that she would awaken around the average time most children did.

On the other hand, Ellie didn’t have the patience for training, and grew bored after an hour or two, so it would take her a lot longer. That’s fine though, I wouldn’t want her to become a mage too early, as; she would attract too much unwanted attention. I would be proud if she could simply can form a mana core by the age of nine or ten.

Putting away my jacket, I turned back to face my father, who was still making his way up the stairs.

“Dad, can we go to the Auction House again? I’d like to pick out a sword? We never had the chance to after the incident, and I’ve wanted to start practicing.”

“Yeah, I have a few things I need to tell my team there anyway. We’ll ask the carriage driver to stay for a little bit, so go wash up.”

---

Both Lilia’s father and mother were already waiting for us at their auction house. It was my first time seeing either of them after the incident so I was faced with another long string of questions from the two of them regarding my health. After much coaxing and reassuring them that I was fine, we finally went inside. I could tell that Vincent had been less than thrilled by the treatment the King had shown

regarding this incident, but at this point, just like how the King felt towards me, I only felt apathy towards the man. It was clear that he had not put me into any sort of consideration besides that of a less-than-insignificant child, which suited me just fine for now.

The King's representative had told us that night that both the augments that had attacked me and Sebastian had been stripped of their nobility. Vincent merely scoffed when my father told him this, though.

Rolling his eyes, the auction house owner spat out that their sentencing was nothing but comforting lies. "Bah! Men like them... as soon as they get their wrists slapped, and they just take a relaxing break for a bit, they'll be long before they'll have their positions back."

I noticed my father tightly clenching his fists, but these sort of politics were all too familiar to me.

Father went off with Vincent to meet the guards, while Tabitha took our carriage back to take care of Lilia, leaving me with only Sylvie search for a sword.

Perched on my head, my bond curiously looked around the cluttered storage hall, littered with vaguely sorted crates and shelves of miscellaneous goods. Vincent had told me that the Helstea Auction House stored a lot of goods, most from different merchants and adventurers, and others from remote places, including the Dwarf Kingdom.

There had been almost no business transactions done with elves ever since the war over a neutral territory had reached a stalemate. Over the years, relations between the two races were said to have gotten better, to the point of even having a friendly tournament, but it would be a slow process before the enmity is actually ceased. This was a pity since elf weapons, which were comparatively lighter and thinner, would've been perfect for someone of my physique.

Something I had learned while living with the Eralith family in Elenoir was that, while both weapons and armors forged by dwarves were considered the highest class because of the race's innate mastery in the field, elves had their specialties in bows as well as conjurer staffs and wands.

Most of the enchanted weapons were bid during the event yesterday, so the only things left were regular weapons that would eventually be sold in stalls, which was fine for me; I wasn't looking for anything special, just dependable.

Peering through the endless rows of shelves and racks, I picked out a few to test. It didn't take long before I stuffed it back on the shelf it came from, malcontent by the crude workmanship of the swords. The balance between the blade and the grip had all been off and were shaped sloppily with no mind for executing all but simple swings or thrusts.

I didn't think of myself as overly nitpicky, but after hours of scouring through the room, it was clear that my taste in swords had become too particular.

Sylvie, growing bored of the repeated actions of removing a sword, swinging it a few times, and unhappily putting it back in place, hopped off my head and began having her own little adventure.

I treaded deeper into the large storage hall, passing the shelves and racks of the more appealing blades on display and arriving at a section where sheathed swords were simply crammed in barrels.

One thing I noticed about the swords in this world was that they fell into a couple of categories:

There were the large swords, either the wide heavy swords, or the long claymores. Many warriors and offensive augmenters preferred these behemoths because of the raw power that could be generated through a single swing, but others considered the weapons savage and unrefined.

The more balanced swords, seen most commonly used by knights and adventurers alike, were the broadswords. These were generally wielded with one hand, coupled with a shield in the other, but there are two-handed varieties. These swords provided the most balanced and versatile performances and were the standard swords to begin learning swordsmanship.

The last category of swords were the lighter and thinner blades. Weapons like sabers, curved single-edged swords—which my world called katanas— and rapiers as well as daggers all fell into this category. Sabers, katanas, and rapiers were focused on speed and precision while daggers were often used as a concealed weapon or dual-wielded for more versatile and acrobatic styles of fighting.

Even if the weapons here were second rate, the inner swordsman in me couldn't help but bubble in excitement.

However, it didn't take long for that bubble to pop. Letting out a defeated sigh from my fruitless search for a sword, I mindlessly swung the plain short sword I had picked out earlier and barely deemed acceptable. I would have to settle for this sword if I couldn't find anything else.

Giving up on the search for a better sword, I made my way into the miscellaneous section where they held different types of weapons. I could see various unique, albeit inefficient, weapons that looked like they were designed by a child.

Navigating through the aisles, I couldn't help but laugh aloud as I came across something very similar to what my world called nunchucks. There was even a morning star that was so heavy that, even after augmenting myself with mana, I struggled to lift it off the ground.

"Whew! Looks like a dead end Sylv." I sat down on the ground, leaning against a gigantic shield as Sylvie continued to trot about.

Suddenly, Sylvie let out an eager chirp.

Making my way towards my bond, I spotted Sylv digging through a pile of weapons. A cloud of dust soon encompassed us as Sylvie continued searching for something.

Making another excited squeak, she used her front paw to point at an unremarkable black rod.

It was less than a meter in length and just looked like some sort of walking cane.

"This wasn't what I was looking for Sylv," I sighed, but she hopped to me, nudging me toward the black stick.

Relenting, I walked over and picked it up, surprised by the weight of the rod that looked much thinner now that it was in my hand.

While it seemed to be made of some kind of polished wood, it weighed a lot more than just a simple walking stick.

Holding it up, I took a closer look, inspecting the rod more carefully.

The stick had a matte coat to it, not reflecting any light at all, while the whole rod was smooth to the touch.

While unnoticeable at first, I could see intricate indentations that formed a design throughout the pole, but other than that, I couldn't find anything special about it.

Sylvie continued gazing at the rod in my hands, her golden eyes twinkling as if she had found a national treasure.

Finding nothing remarkable about it, I tried swinging it.

It felt good.

The weight was distributed in a way where it was balanced like a sword, even more so than the short sword I picked out as a backup. Taking another swing made me confident that this rod's balance was too purposeful for it to be just used as a walking stick or a staff.

Excitement growing inside me once more, I willed mana into my eyes. I had hoped to notice something with enhanced vision and my hopes came to light. It was so faint that I only noticed it after reinforced mana into my eyes; even then, I was only able to spot it because I was looking for it.

Even more faint than the indentation markings over the pole, was a small line that seemed to separate two parts of the stick.

"..."

This was a sword!

I immediately tried to pry the sword out of its scabbard, but it wouldn't budge. Even with my body reinforced with mana, I wasn't able to muster the strength to pull it out.

Don't tell me this was some sort of Excalibur that I had to be worthy of...

Pushing away the silly thought, I infused fire attribute mana into the sword, but still, no use.

After half an hour had passed, I realize that elemental attribute mana was not the answer.

...No way... what if...

I activated Dragon Will. I didn't use its power but simply infused the Will into the sword. And, despite all of the previous struggle to pry the sword out, a light tug was all it took for the sword to glide out of its sheath.