

The Beginning After The End – Chapter 41: I'm Not That Nice

As we plowed our way through the crowds in City Square, I overheard various conversations about the Lances. These Six Lances were more than just a group of overpowered mages; they would soon become the very symbol of this continent. Composed of two lances for each race, they were impartial towards all humans, elves, and dwarves. I had to hand it to the three royal families for coming up with such a bold plan. With such a glorified incentive—or rather, goal—I wouldn't be surprised if this stirred up a new era of mages.

It was fairly obvious that the kings purposely put a bad light on this new continent so that this mysterious potential common enemy would become the reason for the three races to unite. Looking at it logically, there could be great advantages, such as trading raw material, knowledge on magic and artifacts, and different technology, but this could also potentially create a competition between the humans, elves and dwarves—each of them trying to get to the new continent first to claim the new resources. While this propaganda-esque manipulation didn't quite sit well with me, it beat the consequences of going with the latter choice.

My father stepped into the carriage, waiting for us at the edge of City Square, instructing the driver to first take him to the Helstea Auction House.

"I have a few things to take care of so I'll meet you guys back home later tonight. Don't cause too much trouble, Son." My father gently gripped my arm and patted Sylvie, who was on top of my head.

At the sight of my father's carriage leaving our view, Vincent beckoned for a public carriage with a wave of his hand. Finally, an unpainted, wooden carriage pulled by two horses stopped for us with the driver tipping his hat as a silent introduction.

"Please take us to Gideon's facility," Vincent prompted, directing the driver to our next destination. About thirty minutes into the drive, the scenery shifted from tall buildings into small houses with signboards reading "Artifacts" and "Elixirs" on many of them.

I stared out the carriage window, making a mental note of stores that I would want to visit later on, until Vincent's voice stirred me out of my daze. "We're at the part of the city where all of the artificers gather. You'll see a lot of neat gadgets and other useful aids for mages if you guys want to check it out sometime."

This had sparked Elijah's interest, apparently, because he asked the driver to stop at the nearest artifact store. "I'm going to look around for a bit and see if I can find anything worth buying," he informed before excitedly stepping out.

'Sylv, go with Elijah while I visit Gideon with Uncle Vincent,' I transmitted to Sylvie, who was on my lap. Tilting her fox-like head, she gave me a curious look but didn't complain, hopping out of the carriage after Elijah; I might be just overthinking, but I didn't want a genius researcher like Gideon eyeing Sylvie.

"Do you have any money?!" I shouted out at him from inside the carriage as we leave him, realizing that normal twelve-year-old boys shouldn't have that much money.

“Unlike someone, I’ve been saving the money we earned from the dungeon!” He patted his chest pocket and shot me a smug grin.

“Well, no need to kiss and tell,” I shrugged, leaning back in the carriage seat.

About an hour later, after we passed through the densest part of the city, we arrived at a fairly large building. This building was a single story but was quite large in width, which was rare to see in a clustered city like Xyrus.

“We’re here!” the driver announced as he opened the door for us.

Hopping out of the carriage after Vincent, we made our way to the unadorned front door. After a few firm knocks, an old man with a handlebar mustache and dressed as a butler appeared, not opening the door completely.

“Greetings. Master Gideon is not—ah, hello, Master Vincent, please come in,” he greeted, motioning us inside. Judging by the stern expression the butler had for a split second before realizing who we were, I’d have to guess that this Gideon person wasn’t very welcoming of guests.

As we stepped inside, a foul mixture of metal, herbs, and rotting material bombarded my nose. While the exterior of the facility was hardly grandiose, the inside was even less appealing to look at. The whole place was a mess with tools scattered with no order, piles of discarded clothes and other miscellaneous items littered across the floor, and rather intriguing and unfamiliar raw materials stacked high atop shelves. There were also microscopes and other tools that appeared vaguely familiar to the ones in my old world.

“Himes! I told you not to let anyone—Oh, it’s you, Vincent. I see you’ve come to bother me again.” From the dim corner of a back room, a very short, hunched man made his way over.

Taking a closer look at the supposed genius inventor/researcher/artificer, I could say for certain that he definitely looked the part. His curly hair that looked like it’s been struck by lightning more than once complimented the beady eyes with dark bags under them. His complexion was pale and he had a pair of goggles hanging on his neck paired with a dirty lab coat.

“Haha! As welcoming as ever, Gideon.” Vincent shook his head, giving his acquaintance a helpless smile and handshake.

“Bah! Don’t even start! This past year, the Royal Families sent in over a dozen messengers asking for a way to start traversing the ocean to reach the new continent! I haven’t had a chance for a decent sleep in months!” The hunched eccentric flailed his arms in disgust as he started pacing around.

“Is it really true that they found evidence of another continent, Gideon?” Vincent asked quietly, leaning closer to the inventor.

“Hoho! That, my lad, is actually a truth those snobby Royal Families are telling for once. I was the one to study the evidence! All I’ll say is that the new continent has better artificers and perhaps even better

magés than ours.” His beady eyes disappeared as his wicked grin widened to reveal a set of yellow teeth with remnants of whatever he had eaten for his last meal.

“What makes you say that?” Vincent pushed, taking a seat on a stool besides Gideon.

“The Royal Family took back the evidence for safe-keeping, but that ‘evidence’ was an artifact. Even I couldn’t figure out everything it does, but this artifact was attached to a bird-like mana beast that had never been seen in Dicathen before. This bird-like mana beast had the ability to camouflage almost completely against its surroundings. The only way we were able to catch it was because an adventurer accidentally shot it down while he was actually aiming for a nearby squirrel he was hunting to eat. Not only that, but one of the functions I was able to figure out from the artifact was that it was able to record and store moving images. The artifact was the size of my palm and it could do what four big magic projection crystals could and more! Tell me, why would someone from our continent need to record videos?” He leaned towards Vincent too so that the two of them were only a hand’s width apart.

“Fascinating!” Vincent sighed as he rubbed his chin.

“So... who’s the little b****r you brought? Your mistress’s son?” Gideon waggled his eyebrows lewdly at Vincent.

“Oh God... Don’t even make jokes like that. Tabitha would kill me... quite literally, I’m afraid. No, this is Arthur. I consider him a nephew of mine.” He placed a hand on my shoulder.

Giving a respectable bow, I introduced myself. “Arthur Leywin, son of Reynolds Leywin. Hello, Mr. Gideon. Uncle Vincent has told me many great things about you and your work.”

“Quite the etiquettes for a little booger. How old are you?” he mused, studying me with his beady eyes.

“I’ll be turning twelve in May,” I answered simply.

“I see... So, why did you bring him here, Vincent? I don’t take on students or disciples, you know.” He puffed his chest out condescendingly.

“Actually, I would like to know for myself why he wanted to come.” Vincent turned to me.

“Mr. Gideon, the fact that you have messengers from the Royal Families visiting you, I can assume that your work is quite influential, correct?” I put on the air of a respecting young lad.

“Of course! They’re a pain but I receive quite a lot of money from them!” He stuck his chin out and I could almost see his nose getting longer from his pride.

“Perfect.” Without saying anything more, I pick up a large piece of parchment lying on the ground and sketched out a blueprint. It took a while for me to think of an idea to sell without it changing the world too much. This world relied heavily on magic for a lot of the bigger tools and machines. That was primarily one of the reasons they couldn’t build a ship capable of travelling long distances. No magés had an infinite source of mana and trying to carry along enough magés to power up a big ship would be impractical.

I could feel both Vincent and Gideon’s hot breaths on the back of my neck as they peered closely at my drawing.

After about half an hour, I finished drawing a rough draft of a steam engine. I didn't draw in some of the key components so that Gideon wouldn't just steal my idea; I would draw those in after the negotiations were complete.

"Th-This is...this..." His beady eyes widened two-fold as he snatched the paper away so he could study it in depth.

"Of course... why didn't I think of this? There was this solution as well!" I could see his hands trembling as his nose practically touched the parchment.

Suddenly, his eyebrows furrowed and his gaze darted all around the paper. "I feel like something's missing..."

I gently took the paper back and rolled it up. "I did leave out some key details that I will more than happily include... once our negotiations are over." I put on an innocent smile.

"Are you really just a twelve-year-old?" His gaze became sharp but after a few seconds, he let out a helpless sigh. Even Vincent looked baffled by the turn of events but he handled it better since he knew what kind of person I was.

"Yup! Can you show me some of your most precious artifacts? Uncle Vincent told me you make some of the best!" I smiled, tucking the parchment inside my robe pocket.

"Himes! Bring my latest works!" Gideon barked. Soon after, the poised butler with the handlebar mustache appeared, with him, a protected case the size of an adult, sealed with something even I didn't recognize.

Gideon whispered something into the lock while placing both hands on it. After a brief moment, the lock glowed and folded itself into different shapes before opening. Inside the case was an array of various enchanted weapons.

Gideon spent some time going over each of the weapons and what they were capable of. The quality of these items were several levels above the ones sold at the auction house. I knew that each of these weapons were invaluable and incomparable to the ones sold in shops and forges, but they didn't quite fit the bill. I looked at some of the wands to maybe get for Elijah but none of them suited him.

As I shook my head, the mad scientist grumbled something foul.

Gideon eventually led us into a hidden storage room with precious gems and raw material that made even my eyes twinkle in greed. "This is an ironite diamond, one of the most valuable gems found on this continent. It has properties capable of storing a lot mana to use in case of an emergency." Gideon studied my face, hoping for an expression of satisfaction to appear, but it never did.

Gideon let out a defeated sigh. "Himes, can you bring me the pendants?" he asked, rubbing his temples.

"But Master, this was made so that—"

"I know! Just bring it!" Gideon interrupted the baffled Himes.

Eventually, Himes comes back holding a small case with an even more intricate lock on it.

“These are some of the products I made for the Royal Family. They’ve been asking for life-protecting artifacts in case of any danger.” He just shrugged his shoulder, any sense of confidence he once had nowhere in sight.

I picked up one of the two identical pendants to take a closer look. The main jewel was a very soft, yet radiant pink color carefully ornamented and decorated in a thin white-gold chain.

“I had some of the best designers work on the actual piece itself so it would be err... ‘suitable’ for the Royal Family,” he clarified.

I willed a bit of mana into the pendant and when I did, I was vaguely able to see the outline of a mana beast I’d once read about. “This is made from a phoenix wyrm,” I muttered.

“You were able to figure that out?” Gideon became even more intrigued as his eyes carefully studied me, trying to figure out exactly what more I was capable of.

Continuing on, Gideon explained, “While the phoenix wyrm isn’t nearly as rare as the dragon species, this particular breed is still a high S class mana beast. They aren’t really known for their power and combat capabilities but their unique ability to preserve their own life. When the phoenix wyrm is attacked, its pink scales will elongate and harden around them, forming a sort of cocoon.”

This caught my interest.

“However, that’s not even the best part. When the super hard cocoon they’re protected in breaks, they deplete all of the mana in their beast core to instantly transport themselves to wherever they know they’re safe. It’s a very unique ability that I’ve only seen in the phoenix wyrm. These two pendants are probably the most valuable artifacts I have. The jewel itself is made from the beast core of the phoenix wyrm and also small fragments of its scales, allowing it to reproduce the life-preserving effects of the beast, to a certain degree,” he continued.

“How many times will the user be able to utilize the effects?” I asked, studying the pendant even more closely.

“Honestly, I’m not too sure. The Glayder Family presented five of these beast cores that had been kept over time for generations. However, they didn’t know what exactly these mana cores were capable of; they only knew that they were extremely valuable. They had already been studied and none had the beast will, but still, the value of just one of these beast cores cost more than normal S class cores. The first of the five I made was a failure, not showing the ability at all. The second and third showed its ability once before turning to dust. I imagine since the mana core doesn’t completely deplete itself to transport a human, it’ll work at least twice like the previous two cores I used to make the pendant did.” He shifted his gaze from the pendants to me with hopeful eyes.

“These are for the Glayder Family, right? Is it really all right for me to take these when the Glayder Family provided the raw materials for it?”

“Well, like I said, they don’t know what exactly those beast cores could do so if I just make a good replacement life-preserving artifact, I think it’ll be fine. Of course, if you choose to trade your blueprint for something else, that’d be even better,” he revealed another toothy grin.

“Haha! I’m not that nice, Mr. Gideon. I’ll take these two pendants.” I unrolled the blueprint and filled the rest of the key components that I had left out.

“Sigh...you’re putting me in a tough position but I know that you’re doing me a charity by giving me these blueprints. With this, I imagine that our people will be able to reach the new continent before they reach ours.” He studied the blueprint before folding it and carefully putting it in his pocket.

He turned back to me, his gaze not looking at me as if I was a child but more so an equal. “Where did you come up with this idea, though? What are you really planning, Arthur? Did you want to speed up the process for the voyage to the new continent?”

I only laughed and headed out the door, the silent Vincent, who was still bewildered by the turn of events, trailing behind me.

“Like I said, Mr. Gideon, I’m not that nice of a person. I only wanted to get my little sister a good birthday gift,” I answered without looking back, waving the small case that had the two pendants inside before getting into the carriage.

The journey back home was silent for the first half until Vincent finally spoke. “Not only a genius augments but a brilliant inventor? What exactly was it that you drew out for Gideon?”

I explained in simple terms. “I drew the blueprints for a steam engine, which is capable of producing quite a lot of power by using steam produced from specific material that exists on this continent. With that and some modifications so that it could be interchanged with fuel powered by mana, traversing a long distance shouldn’t be a problem.”

“From what magical star were you born under?” Vincent shook his head.

“Please, this was an idea I got from somewhere else and I just tweaked it a little to make it work better. Please don’t make too big of a deal out of this to my parents,” I begged, looking at the two beautiful pink pendants again.

“Well, your parents probably wouldn’t even make a big deal of something like this considering how abnormal you are,” he shrugged, chuckling to himself.

Luckily, no one was home, so I carefully hid the case after wrapping the two pendants individually. My sister’s birthday was next week and then there would only be a few months left until my twelfth birthday, and eventually, the new year of Xyrus Academy. Even though I wouldn’t be that far from my family while I was at school, I would certainly be limited in how often I could visit them, so my main goal during this time was to ensure that my family could take care of themselves in case anything bad happened.

I knew I was probably overthinking everything but I preferred to be on the safe side when it came to my family. For that, I was willing to sell even my soul.

The Beginning After The End – Chapter 42: A Ball

The ballroom inside the Helstea Manor had been lavishly decorated with colorful string tapestries hung along with other fine embellishments on the tables and stage to match. The elaborate placement of the

orbs that made up the chandelier sparkled, creating a serene ambience as the guests started entering through the towering front doors.

I was dressed very formally for the special birthday party the Helsteas and my family decided to throw for Ellie. While this world did have formal wear that were very similar to tuxedos from my old world, this world did not have ties. Instead of ties, handkerchiefs were wrapped underneath the collar and tied fashionably. Sporting a black suit with a white-collared shirt underneath, the only bit of color in my ensemble was the light blue scarf I had tied underneath the shirt collar. I wanted the black handkerchief but my mother insisted that I should wear blue to accentuate the color of my eyes.

With my gaudy blue scarf and windswept hair that had been thoroughly cemented by whatever paste was made to style it, I felt like some sort flamboyant show dog.

Since the ballroom was located in the opposite wing from our rooms, Ellie had no idea that we were throwing her this party. She was under the assumption that the both of our families were going out to a fancy restaurant so she was excitedly getting ready with our mother and Lilia, who came back for the occasion.

Sylvie was sleeping inside my room, her body still getting used to the big change she underwent recently. She resisted going to sleep until she had my verbal guarantee that I would save her some leftover food.

“Welcome. Please come in.” Putting on a gentlemanly smile, I welcomed my little sister’s lady friends she met at school, a duty I was assigned by my mother and one I wasn’t too fond of.

Met with shy giggles and red faces, I kept a gentle smile on as more and more guests started trickling out of their carriages, accompanied by a driver and a chaperone.

The attendees of my sister’s party consisted of her female friends, the female friends’ chaperones, which were an older group of people, and either my parents’ friends or Vincent and Tabitha’s friends. By eight in the evening, most of the people on the list had arrived and my mother notified the maid that she and my sister would be coming down shortly.

“Well aren’t you dressed all neat and spiffy?” I turned around back toward the door to see Gideon in his signature brown lab coat—a cleaner one at least—and a set of new goggles hanging on his neck.

“This is quite a pleasant surprise, Mr. Gideon.” My smile must’ve tipped him off because he grumbled under his breath before replying, “You d**n well knew that I would try and see you again, didn’t you?”

My smile never wavered as I use my hand to guide him towards the refreshment booth. “I’ll admit it was unexpected of you to utilize my sister’s birthday to meet with me though.”

“Bah! You and I have a lot to talk about and don’t you forget, I’m not leaving you until I’m satisfied!” He, once again, began grumbling before trotting over to the refreshment booth, asking for an alcoholic drink right off the bat.

Elijah, who I saw talking with a chaperone girl that was a bit older than us, walked towards me, his shoulder slumped.

“My third time trying to strike a conversation with a girl and they all so kindly made convenient excuses to go elsewhere,” he sighed, his crooked glasses further emphasizing his dejection.

Before I had the chance to start teasing—comforting him, I was interrupted by a loud voice.

“Everyone, please get ready! Lady Alice and Eleanor are both on their way here!” the maid announced before she signaled to turn off all of the lights.

“...Mama, I thought we were going to go out for dinner? Where are we...”

“SURPRISE!” a synchronized chorus of voices exclaimed.

With the chandelier sparkling on and an array of artifacts popping off in colorful lights, my little sister’s confused face turned from initial surprise to pure joy. Her eyes widened and cheeks blushed red as her hands instinctively went to cover her gaping mouth.

She didn’t have too long to indulge in her moment of astonishment as her school lady friends all ran up to her and gave her hugs, almost carrying her away along with Lilia, giving me a meaningful gaze before disappearing.

“Good job welcoming all of the guests, Art.” My mother came up to me, gently patting my head before some of her friends pulled her away to leave me wandering. I spotted my father with Vincent and some other importantly dressed figures, talking business and other various uninteresting topics.

Waiters walked around, handing out platters and cups of various foods and drinks. I was munching on something akin to a bite-sized sandwich when the melodic chime of a glass being rung pulled my attention. My father, wine glass in hand, was onstage, his cheeks slightly rosy and his eyes relaxed.

“Ahem! Before the party officially begins, I would like to thank you on behalf of my precious daughter for coming here tonight!” As my father spoke, I spotted my sister blushing in embarrassment as her friends giggled and clapped at this joyous occasion.

“Please start the music!” My father signaled towards the back of the stage where five musicians stepped out with their instruments. I was surprised to see that the instruments looked nearly identical to the string family instruments in my world, with two violins, one viola, and one cello musician stepping out with a pianist behind them. The piano was shaped a little differently and as they started playing, the sound it produced was much deeper and richer than a regular grand piano.

“It would bring great joy to see my beloved son and daughter have the first dance!” My father raised his glass higher, his eyes narrowing into a tipsy grin as he requested something that could potentially be disastrous to this party. I turned to my mother, who bore a look stricken with panic, because neither her nor my father had ever given either of us dancing lessons.

I caught my sister’s face, petrified in horror, as she realized she could become a total embarrassment on her birthday. Keeping calm, I took confident strides towards where my sister and her friends stood.

“Will you honor me with your hand for a dance?” I bowed, slipping off my gloves and placing a hand out in front of me; I heard various squeals and giggles from her friends but I ignored it.

Ellie, still fretful at the turn of events, couldn’t find the words, so she just nodded her head, accepting my hand and eliciting a round of applause.

As soon as she was in my hands, a crowd formed around and their applause died down as the soft flow of music became louder and filled the room. The music was slow and rhythmic, making it easy to follow along. Her once panicked face gradually turned calmer as she realized she just needed to follow my guidance.

My right hand holding onto hers and my left gently placed on her fragile waist, we circled around, her light coral dress fluttering gracefully. Each step she took mirrored mine as we waltzed around the small dance floor formed around us by the dazed crowd. I was calm and poised, dancing and swaying to the song with grace, since dancing had been something I was required to learn for any formal occasions as a king.

I couldn't embarrass myself as a figurehead for my nation now could I?

My sister's face gradually shifted from a tranquil calmness to an excited glee as she truly began enjoying our dance. Her skin glowed from her smile and perspiration, giving her a radiant feeling to the crowd. Twirling her around as if we had rehearsed for a grand performance, the musicians played along with our dance as if they were drawing inspiration from us. As the last verse of the song was coming to an end, she followed my lead well, coming to a beautiful halt synced perfectly with the musicians.

The applause and cheers of the audience—some of the more intoxicated adults even whistling—washed up the soft panting of my sister as the both of us bowed, hand in hand.

"That was wonderful!" "Truly splendid!" "What a great performance!" Sounds of compliments and praises from all around us caused my sister's smile to grow even wider as we soaked in the limelight.

"Brother!" My sister couldn't hold in her excitement as she jumped into my arms, almost knocking me down in surprise. Her innocent and pure laughter rang contagiously as she flung her arms around my neck.

"Holy c**p! That was great! Where'd you learn to dance like that, Art?" Elijah ran up to us, his narrow eyes gleaming in excitement underneath his glasses.

I just gave him a shrug before gently placing my sister down. Giving her a pat on the head I said, "Happy Birthday, Princess." Giving her a playful wink before my intoxicated father picked her up.

"Haha! My beautiful princess and my handsome son! What a great performance!" My father must've been drinking more because he was even more flushed than he had been on stage.

"Owowowow!" My father let out a howl of pain as my mother pulled him down from his high horse by grabbing his earlobe. "Do you understand the disaster this could've caused if Art didn't happen to know how to dance?" She whispered.

"I learned from Jasmine while being an adventurer. I thought it'd be useful!" I lied, only getting rid of half the suspicion of my keen mother.

"Don't mind, don't mind!" He managed to wheeze out as my sister, who was put back down, scurried off to her friends. My still-angry mother dragged my intoxicated father by the earlobe back to where the adults were.

ELEANOR LEYWIN'S POV:

“Your brother is so handsome! I’m so jealous! I wish my brother was like him; he seems so nice!” The friends I’d made at school were all complimenting Brother and me about the dance.

“Hehe! I told you he was great!” I couldn’t help but smile with pride at being Brother’s only sister.

“Yeah, he’s awesome! I bet the both of you practiced a lot for that dance! It looked SUPER hard.” My best friend, Nicole, was really excited.

“U-Umm yeah! But our teacher was really good so we got it down really fast!” I lied, looking down. I thought it would be weird for them to know that only Brother knew how to dance, not me, when it should be the other way around.

My heart was still beating really fast from the dancing. It was really tiring but also really fun because Brother led me through it so well that I felt like a professional dancer.

“You’re grinning really big, Ellie,” Nicole smirked at me, elbowing me with her arm.

“Hehe! Let’s go get some food!” I needed to look busy so some of the guys here wouldn’t ask me to dance.

ARTHUR LEYWIN’S POV:

I slumped in a corner, a glass of apple cider in my hand. The dance gave all the more reason for the adults and chaperones to come and greet me, some hinting for a dance. Putting on a smile and speaking in a higher pitch than usual to sound more respectful could get tiring.

I spotted Elijah dancing with a girl that looked around our age—maybe a year younger—probably one of the older friends of my sister.

I guess he finally managed.

“Hey, you must be the Arthur that everyone’s talking about.” A blond-haired boy, rather tall and poised, leaned against the wall next to me.

“Then I guess I must be.” I managed a faint smile while I took another sip of my cider.

“My friends are all jealous of you for stealing the attention from the girls here,” he snickered while sticking out his hand. “My name is Jarrod Redner. I heard a lot about you from Lilia at school.”

“Ah, you guys both go to Xyrus. As you already know, I’m Arthur Leywin, pleased to make your acquaintance.” I received the handshake before my eyes spotted Lilia, who came towards us after seeing us together.

“Before she gets over her, am I to assume you guys are either dating or that you like her?” I said in a low voice so that only we could hear.

“You’re pretty sharp, aren’t you? Yeah, we’re part of the student council together, she being the secretary and me, the treasurer. I’m trying to pursue her and I’ve expressed that many times already.” He let out a sigh before smiling and waving at Lilia.

“She may look a little plain, but she’s a good girl, that Lilia. I hope you treasure her well,” I said simply.

“Well I hope to get the chance to do that someday since she’s rejected me all three times so far.” He chuckled, a hint of disappointment escaping his face.

“Hey Arthur! I’m so sorry I couldn’t get the chance to say hi to you at all today! I’ve been so busy since as I got here earlier, and you were busy with preparing too!” Her face was flushed and by the way she spoke so quickly and excitedly, I was beginning to understand why Jarrod came up to me.

“I’ll leave you two alone.” Jarrod solemnly walked away, a hint of jealousy in his eyes, not even looking at Lilia as he passed her.

“You look beautiful today,” I noted, clinking my glass of cider with her glass before taking another sip.

“O-Oh... I mean, thank you!” Lilia was really jumpy as she started fiddling with her turtleneck light green dress that was embellished with frills and subtle trimmings. I hadn’t seen her since before she started attending Xyrus. Lilia had matured a lot this past year and a half, her childlike face slowly becoming a bit more refined.

We started talking a bit more about her school life when I started teasing her. “You must be pretty popular at Xyrus. Do you have a boyfriend yet?” Even my sister would sometimes tell me about boys who liked her, gloating that she was popular.

“N-No, of course not! I don’t have anything like that yet, haha.” Lilia was desperately waving both her hands, signaling ‘no way,’ which made me laugh.

“You’re still young so take your time and meet the right guy. But you better bring him to me first so that I can approve before you start dating him!” I poked her in the arm.

A shred of dejection showed on her face before she quickly covered it up, saying, “Yeah, I will! Just don’t be too hard of a judge!”

“Ahem, mind if I borrow the, young lad?” I looked up to see Gideon walking up to us, something akin to a polite smile strewn across his usually scowling face.

The Beginning After The End – Chapter 43: A Ball II

It was obvious Gideon’s abrupt intrusion caught Lilia by surprise, but she replied evenly with a polite smile.

“Of course. I’ll see you later then, Art!” She waved at me, bowing towards Gideon before running off to the heart of the party.

“You know that young female cohort of yours likes you, right?” Gideon scratched his cheek awkwardly as his gaze followed Lilia’s figure.

“I know,” I responded simply.

“You two seem to get along, though. You’re not going to do anything about it?” he pressed.

“She’s someone that has had her life changed by me. More so than the feeling of like or love, it’s something more akin to gratefulness that she feels. She doesn’t know that now, but later in the future, I’m sure she’ll distinguish the two on her own,” I answered with a shrug, taking another sip of my cider.

“You know, even when you say something disgustingly conceited like that, it doesn’t sound vain coming from you.” Gideon smirked, taking a small sip of his wine.

“Because I don’t mean it in a conceited way. To her, I am something like a hero who saved her life. She may have fantasies about a relationship between us like any young girl about her idol, but that doesn’t mean she is in love with that person; it’s more of an infatuation,” I explained. “Anyway, I’m sure you’re not here to give me love counseling. What is it that you wanted to discuss?”

“Why does it feel like I’m talking to someone my age? But yes, you’re right. How did your sister like the present you so kindly took from me?” He changed the subject, sitting down on the floor while leaning against the wall.

“Received as compensation, not ‘took,’” I corrected, wagging my finger. “And I haven’t given it to her yet. I will, later.”

“Right. Well, after refining the blueprint and creating a plan, I sent it in to the Council of Dicathen. They approved it and it is undergoing a construction plan right away,” he announced, his usual joking manner nonexistent.

After the founding of the Six Lances, the Three Kings and Queens of Dicathen had come together and announced to the public that the current monarchy of each of the three kingdoms would be changing into one Council for all of Dicathen. This decision wasn’t really up for debate but it did bring some groups to rebel against it. For now, the location of the Council of Dicathen was unknown with the only source of communication available through some trusted individuals while major broadcasts were publicized through each City’s Governor.

“Congratulations. I’m sure they rewarded you well for that,” I said sincerely, holding up my glass.

“Bah, money is just a means to an end for me. Gold is but a useless commodity that only has use in buying stuff actually useful to me. But you—you’re an asset that I do not want to let go. What is it you want, brat? Money? Power? Knowledge? I can give you all of that if you are more open to me about what you know as well.” He got up, his beady eyes gleaming with curiosity.

“I don’t intend to change how the world works for my own benefit. This Continent is doing just fine without any of it,” I retorted, making my intentions clear.

“So you’re saying you have ideas for inventions capable of changing how this world works? Fascinating...” His ears must’ve only heard what he wanted to hear because I wasn’t getting through to him.

Imbuing mana into my voice, I growled in a low tone so only he could hear. “Mr. Gideon, let me make it clear that I’m not here to indulge your selfish curiosities.”

The tone in my voice appeared to have shook him up a bit, as he nearly jumped.

“Well you sure sobered me up real quick. Yeah, I guess you’re right. How about a give and take then? I’m not asking for world-changing inventions like that steam engine you gave me. I just want to get to know how you think, really. I’ll be your personal benefactor for whatever you need. Really, I’m desperate, brat. Don’t make this old man plead anymore.” Surprisingly, His voice sounded sincere this time.

This was what I planned for but I didn't want to give in to his wishes too easily, so I persisted. "Can I take your word for it?"

"Of course! What do you take me for? I'm a man of my word. You're quite a family man so I understand why you were so interested in that Phoenix Wyrms necklace. I may not be a great mage but I know my way around artificing and magic implementation theory. Hell, you need some allowance for school, right? So how about it? Yeah?" His beady eyes and electrocuted hair made him look even more pitiful.

Sticking my hand out, I shot him a business smile that I'm sure made him think twice for what he had just gotten himself into.

The party eventually came to an end after the bell rang for midnight, making it officially my sister's birthday. After more dancing, eating, drinking, and present-giving, the guests slowly started leaving, allowing the maids to finally start cleaning the ballroom.

My parents gave my sister a pair of beautiful hair ties with ornamental bells that were silver on first glance but reflected a glimmering array of colors underneath the light. My sister excitedly asked my mother to tie her hair for her into twin ponytails.

Despite the success of the party, my sister had been pretty disappointed that the Twin Horns couldn't make it to her birthday since they were currently in a dungeon. However, she got over it quickly after seeing the wrapped boxes in my hands.

"Happy birthday, little sister." I gave her my present and handed the other box, which wasn't as prettily decorated, to my mother.

"Wow! It's so pretty!" My sister was ecstatic at the precious necklace, though she probably would never know how much it was worth.

"Th-This is gorgeous..." My mother's reaction was actually even stronger than Ellie's, her eyes locked on to the light pink gem embedded on the white gold chain.

"Keep it on at all times, okay?" I said directly to my sister, but I also looked at my mother so that she would catch my drift.

"Where in the world did you get something like this, Son?" My father was still a little tipsy but he was fully functional.

"I'm sure you met Mr. Gideon, right? I'm going to start working for him while he teaches me various things about magic. He gave me this as a token of my apprenticeship." It wasn't a lie but it wasn't exactly the full truth either.

"Well, I'll have to greet him one more time and thank him for taking care of you. I can't believe my boy is going to attend Xyrus Academy soon! You're going to kick some b**t out there, right? Ow!" My mother smacked him upside the head at the last statement and gave me a big hug, my sister following suit.

"Thank you for these presents. We'll both keep them on, right Ellie?" She hugged my sister too.

"Yeah! We're matching now!" she chirped, a newfound glow on her face. I was glad that she liked it, but more importantly, relieved that she'd be safe. That was all that really mattered that this point.

After my sister's birthday, my daily life had turned very repetitive. My birthday passed by as well, and although the Twin Horns couldn't make it, their dungeon exploration leading them to the depths of the Continent, we did hear back from them at Guild Hall, indicating that they were still alive and okay. My birthday was nowhere near as grand as Ellie's but I had no qualms with that.

Only a few people aside from my and Lilia's family came, Gideon included, of course. He gave me exactly what I asked for, which was a seal for my attribute mana for fire and water.

"While it's a little gaudy, keep this bracelet on at all times when you want to hide your mana attributes. It's still a trial product from me, so be careful. The two charms on the bracelet can each hide and seal one elemental attribute's mana from being sensed and gauged by others. By gods, I still can't believe you were a quadra-elemental augments but..."

I'd gotten a lot closer to Gideon over these past few months and, while he was quite eccentric and quirky, he was a sincere and trustworthy person. However, I hadn't indulged him in much besides my abilities as a mage, which he took as quite a shock.

My birthday was, all in all, a quiet and pleasant time with my family. Elijah and I quickly went back into training, and while his abilities had become a lot less powerful, he had become a lot more adept in controlling his Earth and Metal conjuring. Still, he had a lot to learn if he was going to catch up to me, but we both had time.

As for me, training was going by steadily. I was planning to only use earth and wind attribute mana, which probably accounted for twenty percent of my actual power, but that didn't mean I planned on laying low and hiding myself at school. Why not enjoy the benefits of being a handsome and prodigal dual elemental augments? I had a family that I had to make proud, right?

Elijah was much more eager to go to school than I was, expressing on many occasions what kind of "hot" female friends he'd make. I kept telling him that we were only twelve and that girls weren't "hot" at our age, but he filtered that out and said he was going to try and woo the older girls as well.

My father's training resumed, albeit a bit slower after he used all the benefits from the beast core I'd brought, but he did manage to level up his fire augmentations, and his skills and abilities became a light orange rather than red like most other fire augments.

Like I expected, the beast will didn't react to Elijah when I gave it to him. He couldn't even sense anything, becoming confused as to why I still had it.

With Ellie enjoying school and bringing a closer group of friends over more often and my mother and Tabitha enjoying the free time of being housewives, life couldn't be any more content. Seeing how peaceful and happy they were, I would give my life to make sure it lasted as long as possible.

The eventful day in the Dicathen Calendar, marking the day the first steam engine ship called the Dicatheous would set sail on a voyage to the other Continent, also marked another important day.

The Dicatheous was scheduled to set sail tomorrow, which was also the day both Elijah and I would start our first day of Xyrus Academy.

Dear Readers: As volume 2 has come to an end, I'd like to just thank you all for your wonderful support and amusing comments. Sorry for mere two chapter release—I promise that the releasing pace of this novel will get faster. I hope everyone will continue enjoying the upcoming adventures of Arthur and co. Also, please don't forget to leave a review here for hesitant onlookers to see!

The Beginning After The End – Chapter 44: Xyrus Academy

“Wake up!” a shout pierced through my ears.

Air was forced out of my lungs as Elijah oh-so-tenderly pounded my sternum with the force capable of resuscitating a corpse.

I threw the sleeping Sylvie at him in hopes that she'd protect me from my aggressive roommate.

“Sylvie! It Hurts!” Elijah howled. As expected, my startled bond had instinctively started clawing at Elijah's face until she calmed down.

“There has got to be a better way to wake me up besides physical pain,” I grumbled, rubbing my stomach.

“You're telling me. Do you know how hard it is to wake you up? And you reward me by throwing Sylvie at me? Even if she isn't in her full dragon form, do you know how sharp her claws are?” He winced, gingerly touching the shallow scratches that Sylvie had inflicted.

“Anyways! We're going to be late if you don't hurry up and get ready. I've already washed up so get your b**t out of bed.” Elijah stood on top of my bed, pushing me off with his foot.

“Let's go wash up, Sylv!” I pretended to be excited as I grabbed my companion and headed over to the shower.

‘No! Papa, I don't want to shower! I'm cleaaan!’ “Kyuuuu!” The desperate wails of Sylvie merely escaped out the other ear as I hauled her inside. Sylvie now had fur, or very thin, long and soft scales that were very similar to fur. This meant that she attracted dirt like a magnet, so washing her more often had become a necessity.

“Brother, are you awake?” Ellie opened the door as I was changing. Elijah was at least fully dressed but I only had my bottom half clothed.

“How do you like your big brother's awesome muscles?” I flexed my body in different poses.

“Eww! All I see are skin and bones, Brother.” She just shook her head, giving me a hard stare that seemed to question whether I was the same brother she so admired back on her birthday.

“Anyway, Mom told you guys to hurry up and get dressed so we can eat.” Ellie closed the door behind her without waiting for a reply.

I let out a sigh as I started buttoning my shirt. She was so cute at her birthday party. Kids grow up too fast.

The uniforms that Xyrus had sent us weren't too out of the ordinary. For me, it consisted of a white dress shirt, a grey vest, a maroon string we tied around our necks underneath the collar, and a pair of

tailored navy dress pants. There was also a gold pocket watch attached to a chain on my vest's breast pocket, overall giving me a very scholarly look.

Elijah's uniform, on the other hand, had a much sharper design. His black blazer had white trimmings that matched his black pants. Instead of a string, he wore a black square-end tie with one white stripe, indicating that he was a level one student. With his white dress shirt underneath and a badge with a crossed sword and staff etched intricately over the breast pocket, he looked dashing.

Instead of the usual tools a conjurer carried, Elijah, instead, had fashioned a black two-part band on his index and ring finger. These two bands were connected by a thin black chain, which gave him a very gothic look, especially now that he'd recently purchased new glasses that were a bit more fashionable. He made it pretty clear to me that this would be his debut in finding a girlfriend so he took great pride in how he looked, although he always grumbled on about how no matter how much he tried, he would always be in my shadow.

I gave him a helpless shrug, but I took a mental note to thank my mother and father for their genes later.

Taking a good look at both Elijah and myself in the mirror, I could tell how much we'd matured physically. The once nerdy Elijah from two years ago was now gone, a much sharper and cooler appearance replacing him, which oddly contradicted his personality.

As for myself, my eyes were a rich sapphire color that almost seemed to glow, my hair a fiery auburn color that contrasted well with my eyes. Bluish eyes and reddish hair made me realize how coincidental it all was. What were the odds that my defining traits aligned with the two base elements I was most adept at? My facial features were a lot softer compared to Elijah's but while soft and kind, they also looked poised and elegant.

I studied my face as if it weren't my own. Even after twelve years in this body, I hadn't gotten completely used to my appearance compared to the rather normal face I had in my old world.

"Are you sure you made the right choice, Art? I can't believe you wanted to go in as a scholar mage. I thought you would for sure go in as a battle mage like me," Elijah remarked as he styled his hair. The trim straight black hair that he had was now shorter and styled to the side.

"And I can't believe one of the main reasons you wanted to attend Xyrus as a battle mage student was because it had cuter girls." I slapped him firmly on the back while giving him a perverted smile.

"Shut up... Just watch. The new and improved Elijah will be popular and find a girlfriend that can only make you drool in jealousy!" He adjusted his blazer, taking one last look at himself. Obviously satisfied by his appearance, he walked towards the door while I followed. Sylvie hopping on top of my head and her small claws dug into my scalp to keep grip, worrying me ever-so-slightly that I might bald prematurely.

"Took you boys long enough to get ready! Who are you guys trying to impress?" My mother wagged her finger at us while Tabitha, who was in an apron matching my mother's, started giggling.

“Good morning, boys. Hurry up and eat. Lilia is going to be up onstage for the orientation since she’s part of the student council. She’s probably nervous by now so make sure you cheer her on.” Tabitha sat down across from us next to Mother and Ellie.

“I see the both of you are wearing the necklaces I gave you,” I noted while my mouth was still full of oatmeal and fruit.

“Yup, why wouldn’t I when it’s such a beautiful piece of jewelry? I wish your father had half the amount of sense that you do,” my mother sighed, fiddling with the Phoenix Wyrms ornament.

“All my friends are jealous because of how pretty it is! Be sure to get me things like these more, okay Brother?” Ellie leaned forward on her chair as she talked excitedly.

“Sure,” I dismissed, trying to calculate exactly how much something like the pendant would actually cost.

“Umm, Aunt Alice? do you mind healing my face before we go to school? I don’t want my debut at school to go wrong because of these cat scratches.” Elijah turned his gaze to Sylvie who stuck her tongue out in reply.

“Still fighting with Sylvie?” my mother grinned. “Come here and let me take a look at that.” She placed a hand in front of Elijah’s face and whispered a faint chant until a glow started emanating from her fingertips. A few moments later, the small scratches on his face disappeared as Elijah let out a content sigh.

“Thanks, Aunt Alice.” Elijah leaned back in his chair and continued eating breakfast.

My father came in, quite evident he had been training from the beads of sweat rolling down his face. “Sorry I’m late for breakfast! I was in the middle of a small breakthrough!” He eagerly sat down and looked at Elijah and me. “Wow, my two boys are already going to school. I can’t believe it. Looks like we raised Arthur well, right honey?” My father smiled broadly.

“What do you mean ‘we’? I was the one that raised him,” my mother scoffed, giving him a sly grin.

“I guess the only times I raised my children were when they got into trouble then?” My father raised a brow.

“As long as you know,” my mother stated matter-of-factly, causing the whole table to chuckle.

The only ones missing were Vincent and Lilia. Lilia had to go to school a few days earlier since she had to do some work for the student council but Vincent had been more and more busy these days as he was part of the management committee for the ship, Dicateous, setting sail today.

“I was pretty surprised when you said that you wanted to attend Xyrus as a scholar mage though, Art,” my father brought up while scarfing down his eggs.

“Yeah, both are good choices but, in the end, battle mages are the ones that get all the glory,” Tabitha sighed. Lilia was a battle mage as well despite disagreements from both Tabitha and Vincent. The two of them wanted Lilia to become a scholar mage since it would be a lot less dangerous in the future but Lilia was persistent on making a name for herself.

“I’ll still take some general classes on mana battling whenever I can to loosen my muscles but there’s not much for me to learn if it’s just fighting tactics,” I chuckled.

“Not much to learn... If any of the students heard you say that, you’d get beat up—no wait, if they could even beat you up.” Elijah just laughed to himself at the thought of the massacre the school would have if anyone picked a fight with me.

“Please control yourself to a degree, Arthur. There are members of very influential families attending that school. You wouldn’t want to create trouble for Tabitha’s family,” my mother chided, her face filled with worry.

“Don’t worry. I’ll be sure to only moderately beat people up!” I saluted while stuffing my face with more oatmeal, Sylvie stealing the fruits mixed into it. My mother just shook her head but my father laughed, just as a maid walked in.

“Mr. Arthur, Mr. Elijah, the driver says that we should leave now if you are to make it on-time for the orientation ceremony,” she said while bowing.

“Well, off we go!” Elijah finished the last bite of his ham and stuffed some greens into his mouth before standing up and straightening his black blazer.

I stood up and walked around the table to where my mother and Ellie sat. “Mom, Ellie, before I leave, I need you guys to show me your index finger for a bit.”

“Huh?” My mother looked at me, confused, but nevertheless showed me her index finger while my sister unhesitatingly followed suit. I took a quick poke at both their index fingers with my mana-imbued finger, just enough for a droplet of blood to form on the tips of theirs.

“Put the blood on the necklaces.” The seriousness in my voice made them silently concede despite their initial surprise. They both placed their index fingers on their respective necklaces and the blood on the tip of their fingers got absorbed into the jewel immediately.

“These necklaces are now bound to you so only you two can wear them. They’ll protect you just in case me or Dad isn’t there, but still keep yourselves safe while I’m gone, okay?” I gave the both of them a strong hug and my sister teared up a little bit. I hugged my father and Tabitha as well, my father holding me firmly in his strong arms.

“Be good, boys, and don’t worry about us,” my father said.

“Come visit whenever you can and keep in touch!” My mother added before letting us off.

“Bye Brother, bye Elijah! Be safe!” my sister shouted out to us as we walked down the stairs.

“Your luggage is in the back of the carriage.” The driver bowed and opens the door for the both of us.

“Destination, Xyrus Academy!” Elijah pointed his finger to the sky as if making a declaration before getting inside the carriage.

I couldn’t help but smile, looking back at my old home, as I stepped inside the carriage that would bring me to my new one.

The ride to Xyrus Academy wasn't too long since it was in the same city, but the campus itself was enormous, so going in through the main gate took some time.

There was an abundance of other extravagantly decorated carriages, some twice as long as normal carriages, with low-ranked mana beasts pulling them.

"Pshh... what a bunch of show-offs," Elijah grumbled as he watched pompous-looking students, confidently stepping out of carriages, with decorated weapons to signify that they were either a conjurer or augments.

Our carriage was quite luxurious as well, but that was from the standpoint of commoners. Compared to those richly decorated carriages of major families, ours weren't nearly as eye-catching.

"We have arrived, Master Arthur, Master Elijah." The driver opened the door for us and we stepped out, the both of us inhaling a deep breath of the campus air.

"Huh...the air tastes the same here...Thought it'd taste better," Elijah said while smacking his lips.

"Don't be stupid." I pushed my friend forward as we followed the crowd of students walking on the bright marble path.

"Holy mother of..." Elijah's jaw dropped as he looked almost vertically up at the building in front of us. The enormous white building that had runes etched covering it left even me astounded.

"Let's go in." I snapped Elijah back to his senses and we walked in alongside the other new students attending this school for the first time.

Once inside, I winced by how loud it was. Thousands of excited students chattered away, some with friends that they had come with, some with people they were meeting for the first time.

"LET'S FIND A SEAT!" I needed to shout for Elijah, who was right next to me, to hear. Eventually, we found a seat in the middle of the auditorium near the back rows.

Looking around more carefully, I was surprised at how many dwarves and elves I spotted, chatting away with those around them.

"Wow, I've never seen full elves until now. Looks like it's true that all three races can fully attend this academy now." Elijah excitedly looked around, scouting for potential soul mates amongst the crowd. I couldn't help but shake my head at the expected behavior, unable to see these students as anything other than little kids.

Getting bored of looking around me, I focused my attention on the stage where it was still empty except for a single podium. Suddenly, a sharp blur focused into form and I saw Director Goodsky standing behind the podium. She wasn't wearing the oversized hat that conjurers normally wore like she did the last time we met almost four years ago. Instead, she wore an elegant white circlet that matched her white robe, appearing much more refined than the witch-like impression she had given off on our first encounter. Director Goodsky had her eyes closed but when she opened them, she seemed to be peering straight into me, sending shivers down my back. Smiling, she raised her hand slowly while her eyes remained locked onto mine.

By this time, many more of the incoming first years noticed her and began talking even louder, some cheering, but when Director Goodsky's hand reached the level of her head, suddenly, everything went dead silent.

Looking around, everyone had expressions of surprise, because while everyone's lips were moving, no sound was heard from anyone in the audience.

"Excuse me for my rudeness but I do hate speaking up. Not good for my throat, no it is not," she said in a pleasant voice that—while soft—was heard perfectly clear, even from here in the back row.

"I welcome everyone here, the future leaders, scholars and powerhouses of Dicathen, to this humble academy. I am Cynthia Goodsky. Please call me Director Goodsky and do not be afraid to say hello when I walk around campus. I am no good with speeches so I stand here before you mages today to say hello, and introduce to you the Student Council that represents this academy and takes part in making important decisions along with me. Please give them a warm welcome." She waved her raised hand and one by one, members of the council started walking out.

I first saw Jarrod walking confidently, looking straight ahead, his pretty boy face eliciting a wave of shrill screams from the girls in the audience. Behind him, a very playful, cheery guy came out waving at the audience and beaming us a bright smile.

"Look, look! There's Lilia! We need to cheer!" Elijah stood up and shouted at the top of his lungs and I followed him, yelling her name as well. Her shy demeanor was nowhere to be seen as she walked calmly towards the center of the stage, where she gave small bows in each direction. There was no way she could see us or make out our individual cheers but we still gave it our all to cheer on our friend.

Behind her walked out a tall student with long, parted bangs. His face was frozen into what looked like a stern grimace with a sharp gaze that seemed to be looking down on everyone, giving him a rather pompous appearance. While the cheers for him wasn't as loud as it was for Jarrod or the cheery guy, he, nonetheless, strode with practiced grace.

Finally, the last to arrive actually made the crowd silent. The unmistakable gunmetal silver hair that reflected the lights in the auditorium gave her a serene glow as her peachy-cream complexion made the boys around me gape. She turned to face the audience so that her round, turquoise eyes captured the hearts of every boy in this auditorium.

She was only thirteen...right?

I had a hard time believing the girl I couldn't see as more than a kid had matured enough to catch me off guard. Her face still contained a childish innocence but the way she carried herself made me doubt that this was the same girl I had known since near-toddlerhood.

While still a little taller than Lilia, she was quite a bit shorter than the serious-looking guy next to her, but her posture made her seem bigger and grander than everyone else on the stage. Taking a deep bow, she came back up while tucking part of her hair behind her pointed ears, her face emotionless as a doll's.

"My name is Tessia Eralith, and I am honored to stand here as this academy's Student Council President."

The Beginning After The End – Chapter 45: You Dare?

The incoming students of all three races that were cheering for each of the Student Council members fell silent when Tess walked in. With her gunmetal silver hair swaying behind her as each of her dignified steps echoed throughout the silent auditorium, she single-handedly changed the atmosphere inside this entire building.

As she bowed and tucked her hair behind her ear, a roar of applause erupted as both males and females alike cheered with admiration. I thought the cheers would last a lot longer but as soon as Tess started speaking, it was as if each of the students in the crowd covered each others' mouth so that they could hear her voice.

"My name is Tessia Eralith, and I am honored to stand here as this academy's student council president."

Murmurs started after the crowd once again cheered for our beautiful president. Next to me, a scrawny human boy spoke excitedly to his friend beside him.

"That's the Princess Eralith I was talking about. My older brother told me she's been on campus since last year as a direct disciple under the Director and will start formally attending this year with us!" He leaned into his friend so only he could hear but the volume at which he spoke betrayed him.

"Th-That means she was the first non-human to set foot on this campus. Wait... she's only a first year and she's already the Student Council President? Is that even possible?" His friend, whom I couldn't really see, spoke louder and louder with each word, causing the neighboring students to hear as well.

"Yeah, I heard of her as well! She's supposedly a super-genius of some sort, right?"

"Why the hell is she so d**n pretty when she's talented as well? This isn't even fair..."

"I wonder what I would have to do to get her to even look at me?"

The audience was filled with different talks about Tess but while, for the males, it revolved around how much of an unobtainable star she was, for the females, it was a mixture of admiration and envy. Sylvie was going crazy on top of my head as she recognized Tess down onstage.

"Kyu~" 'Papa! That's Mama! She's down there! Let's go say hi!' Sylv was jumping up and down so I picked her up and wrapped my arms around her.

'Who's your Mama!?' I couldn't help but sigh in defeat at her excitement. Tess became pretty close to Sylvie a bit after hatching so I could see why she was so fond of her... but 'Mama'?

"Woah..." Elijah, who I had stopped paying attention to, firmly gripped my arm with both of his hands as if he needed me to support him from fainting.

"Woah," he repeated. For how smart he looked, he sure acted like an idiot at times like these.

"You okay there, Elijah?" I lightly nudged his head but it just bounced like a bobblehead toy.

“...Art...I think I’m in love.” He suddenly released the hands that had firmly gripped my arm to link arms with me, as if to imagine I was Tess.

Okay, this is getting out of hand. I released my bond to attack and she promptly locked her jaw on the top of Elijah’s head, causing him to start screaming more from surprise than pain.

“Oh, sorry...” With Sylvie still dangling on the crown of his head, Elijah let go of my arm and started focusing on the stage below again.

As the crowd settled down enough for Tess to start speaking again, Director Goodsky silently disappeared.

Tess spoke eloquently enough to surprise even me. She was only thirteen, yet she had the ability to draw the crowd’s full attention with her unadorned words filled with maturity. She spoke about the principles of this academy, how this was a holy ground where students should feel safe to walk freely around. Tess emphasized the discipline one would face if anyone hurt another student outside of a consented duel.

“While I may be a first year as all of you are, having given the privilege to be inside the academy a year longer made it all too apparent to me that there is deeply embedded discrimination against the scholar mage students by the battle mage students. I, for one, will not tolerate any sort of aggression or bullying based on the trivial fact that one is a scholar mage student.” Tess’ voice never wavered as she stood behind the podium.

The crowd grew a little noisy at this statement, as everyone present had heard rumors of the hardships one may face as a scholar mage student.

“Starting this year, while uniforms and the upper courses required may be different, for the first two years, general education, that contains a mixture of both scholar mage classes and battle mage classes will be mandatory, for better assimilation between the two different types of students. After the two years are up, one may choose to switch their education specialization by taking a test, although it will be quite a difficult one.” This last statement drew in dissatisfied complains from amongst the students in the crowd. While both Elijah and I didn’t have to take a test due to my special connection with Director Goodsky, most students, regardless of background, had to test for either a scholar mage or battle mage position.

To get in as a scholar mage, an incoming student only needed a basic foundation of magic, which was mana gathering. While they had to take a written exam to test their mental acuteness, the practical portion of the exam was much more simple. battle mage students, however, had a much stricter practical exam, and actually performed basic spells or techniques depending on whether they were a Conjurer or Augmenter. It may have seemed like a cakewalk for someone like Elijah, Tess, or me, but I admit it could be quite a challenge for someone who had just awakened.

The tall, stern-looking student stepped up next, silencing the crowd with a wave of his hand.

“My name is Clive Graves and I am your Student Vice President. As the President mentioned, this year contains many changes. Along with the assimilation and freedom to move between the two student types, there will also be no limit on how long a student can attend this academy. While in the past, the professors here pushed students to graduate after four years, it is becoming more and more apparent

that many graduating mages' capabilities are becoming less than satisfactory. Therefore, the Director has declared that instead of a time limit on graduating, in order to graduate from Xyrus Academy, one needs to fulfill a list of requirements and pass the graduation exam.

While the conditions to graduate have become many folds harder, the time limit to graduate has increased to ten years. In that time, we fervently hope to produce top class mages in both theoretical and combat fields. We welcome everyone here—humans, elves and dwarves alike—to this Academy.” Clive bowed, the rest of the Student Council following him.

The last part of the announcement wasn't exactly news for any of us. It was announced quite recently though, which made me think that it had something to do with the new Continent. Was this Academy being used to produce higher quality mages in case of a future battle against the new Continent?

“That's the firstborn son of the famous Graves family! Make sure you don't get on his bad side,” the boy next to me whispered, again, in a pointlessly loud volume.

After finishing up the ceremony, all the new students were dismissed to their dorms. Filing out of the auditorium, my eyes unconsciously looked for Tess, but she was nowhere in sight. Outside, the trees arched over the marble walkways producing small showers of fall-colored leaves. The students were all excitedly chatting amongst their peers, getting to know new people. Walking deeper within the campus to where the dorms were, I saw a few female students pass by Elijah and I, doing a double-take back at us and giggling with their friends.

Elijah sighed. “I feel like I become significantly less better-looking when I'm next to you.” Elijah's shoulders hunched as we walked along side-by-side, Sylvie pitifully patting Elijah's head from on top of mine.

“Well, even if most come after me, some of the girls will have to eventually settle for you, right buddy?” I teased, giving him a playful wink.

“Screw you.” He hit me on the stomach as the both of us laugh.

Suddenly, a loud explosion startled the both of us as well as the students walking around nearby. Something was happening at the end of the marble walkway. After a quick exchange of glances, Elijah and I shot off.

“I don't see how a short-a*s dwarf like you can even hope to be a proper Augmenter. Why don't you stick to forging some weapons for real warriors like me?”

“What da hell didja say? Who do ya think ya are, anyway?”

I stopped running a good distance away and shook my head when I realized what was going on. It was just stupid posturing between two students. The explosion had been made by the human, hitting his fist on a nearby tree with mana.

“Couldn't this become dangerous?” Elijah looked around where some of the students had to deliberately walk around the two of them, just in case they started fighting. We were amongst the last to leave the auditorium so most were already deeper within the campus or inside their dorms, so there weren't many people around but if they did start fighting, some of the students in the vicinity may get caught up in the mess.

“They wouldn’t dare do something like fight on the first day, right? Let’s just go.” I tried to nudge my friend to a roundabout route avoiding the two arguing students.

“Come on, we have nothing to do besides unpack anyway! Let’s just see how good they are. Look, the human looks to be a second level augmenter.” He pointed at the brawny human.

Looking at them, both the dwarf and human students had battle mage uniforms, but the human had two stripes on his tie while the dwarf only had one.

“My name is Nicolas Drey! Declare the duel, short-a*s, so we can start! Or are you all bark and no bite?” the human smirked, placing his right hand on the badge pinned to his left breast.

“Tch! Yer gonna be sorry.” The dwarf that was a head shorter than his opponent with a bulky build looked awkward wearing the blazer uniform but the way he carried his giant battle-axe with ease told me he was more than what the single stripe on his tie told us.

The metal badge on both the human and dwarf glowed brightly as the dwarf placed a hand on his badge and started chanting. “I declare a duel between me, Broznean Boor, and Nicolas Drey!”

“I accept the duel!” The two badges glowed different colors until they synced together, producing a loud ‘ping’ sound.

The badge on the battle mage uniform and the pocket watch on the scholar mage uniform acted as artifacts for the dueling system, creating a barrier around the users that could take a certain amount of force. When the barrier broke, the duel was considered over, and the other party the winner. It took around 24 hours for the artifact to charge another barrier where, during that time, dueling was prohibited. Mages of a higher level weren’t allowed to issue a duel with lower levels to keep it fair, which was why the human had to taunt the dwarf to start the duel.

The human mage took out dual swords from his dimension ring and got into a stance as the people around start backing up to avoid getting caught up in the fight.

“Go dwarf!” Elijah started cheering in favor of Broznean, getting dirty looks in the process.

I studied the two augmenters and saw that the level two human was a red core stage mage while the dwarf was still at black stage. This should be interesting.

“HAAP!” The human student roared as his two broadswords glow a dim yellow color and the earth surrounding him started trembling.

“JAH!” The dwarf leaped up and propelled himself forward by pushing off of a nearby tree, charging his battle-axe as well with earth attribute mana.

“Ooh! Both are earth-attribute augmenters, Art!” Elijah got more excited as leaned closer towards the fight as Sylvie curled up, sound asleep on my head.

“Tremor Smash!” the dwarf shouted, placing his left palm on the head of his axe and making the dull glow condense.

With a resounding boom, the power of the blow from the dwarf forced the human to skid back, even as he blocked with both swords. I could see his arms shaking as he grimaced.

The human boy lowered his two swords and dashed towards the dwarf who was already in a defensive stance. The dual swords scraped along the ground. As he got into range, he swung up, a trail of earth followed along, creating twin blades of earth after each sword.

Not bad. While it wasn't surprising that the dwarf could already use his earth attribute element, it surprised me that a human in the red stage could already augment his earth attribute to that degree. He was talented in that sense.

"Shatter!" The dwarf's body glowed yellow as he stomped his right foot hard onto the ground, creating a ripple around him that broke the earth blade approaching him into fragments. The dwarf blocked the human's two actual blades with his axe but got a little scrape on his arm from the upward swing.

"Earth Pillar!" Nick exclaimed. Following the upward swipe, he stomped hard with his leading foot directly in front of the dwarf, creating a pretty fragile column of rock from the ground that hit the dwarf squarely in the stomach.

"Oof!" The dwarf's body lifted into the air from the force of the blow and his shield broke with loud shattering sound, signaling that the duel was over.

Cheers went off from the humans that gathered but the dwarves amongst the audience groaned in embarrassment.

Elijah just sighed and started to leave but before I turned to follow him, I saw a slight smirk on the human's face as he once again imbued mana into his two blades.

That fool wasn't planning on finishing it with that. He was going for the final blow.

If I were to use a long-range technique, that'd create even more problems, but if I went there and directly interfered, everyone would know my face.

I was partly frustrated that Elijah couldn't figure out that the human was going to cast another technique. If Elijah interfered with a spell, it would be more natural since he was a conjurer.

There was this way, too. Sorry, Tess.

"Is that the student council president I see coming over?" I deliberately yelled louder so that the human boy that won the duel would be startled.

Just like I anticipated, he clicked his tongue and put his swords back into his dimension ring, jerking his eyes around to find the president.

The crowd that was talking amongst their friends, analyzing the duel, all started looking around for Tess.

"Where's the student council president?" Elijah stretched his neck above the crowd to look for her.

"Oops! I must've been mistaken!" I just shrugged my shoulders and turned to walk past when a hand firmly grasped my shoulder.

"Are you picking a fight with me or something, brat?" It was the human that was just dueling; Nick or Nicole or whatever.

“Yeah! What the hell, man?! Getting us excited for nothing!” I saw some of the humans evidently disappointed at not being able to see their idol in person.

“I thought I saw her. Once again, my bad.” I used my hand to peel his hand off my shoulder, giving him a wink.

“Yeah, your bad.” He snatched his hand away before he walked off, spitting on the ground in front of my feet.

“You know, a good piece of advice if you want to graduate. I don’t think killing that dwarf boy would’ve done you any good.” I stood still as Sylvie spat directly at the back of his neck.

He instantly whirled back around with his two swords in his hands once again. I could almost see a vein bulging out of his forehead like it would in a cartoon.

“Pfft.” Oops, I shouldn’t laugh in this situation. I took a quick glance back and saw that Elijah was just shaking his head, knowing it was too late.

“You dare—?” The thirteen-year-old boy with swords too large for his immature body dashed towards me in a manner I found clumsy, preparing to cross-chop with his two blades, his face bright red in anger.

I raised an eyebrow as I lifted one hand up to stop the blow. Why make myself look foolish?

Just as I prepared to shatter his two swords, a voice stopped him straight in his tracks. It was the voice that all of the new students heard not too long ago, and the voice probably every male had fallen in love with. It was also the voice of my childhood friend.

“Do you dare?”

The Beginning After The End – Chapter 46: Not Quite As Planned

The face of the dual-wielding boy visibly paled as he froze at the unmistakable voice. I turned to see that the whole student council was walking towards us through a gap created by the students.

Taking calm but hurried strides in the front was Tess, her doll-like face expressionless. Behind her, I spotted Lilia, who gave me a worried look.

My attacker immediately recalled his two blades into his dimension ring and gave a respectful bow towards them, sweat beading down his forehead.

“What is going on, Arthur?” Jarrod is the one that spoke up, making everyone in the crowd raise an eyebrow in surprise.

“Looks like the scholar Mage knows someone from the student council.”

“No wonder he was acting so c***y just now.”

“Pfft. Did you see him raise up his arm like he was going to stop the attack with his bare hands?”

I couldn’t help but roll my eyes at the whispers from the crowd. Even for preteen children, I had expected them to be taught manners to some degree since they were all from influential families.

“No, nothing much happened, although you should go take a look at that dwarf student lying over there—Boznean, I think that was his name.” I pointed over to the tree where the dwarf was still groaning while clutching his stomach.

Elijah walked towards me, hoping to distill the situation. “Hi, Lilia. Sorry, we ended up getting caught up in this little scuffle after the duel between them ended. No harm done!” He gave a slight wave at her as he started talking while directing his words at Tess, her face still shrouded in a mask of apathy.

“Still, this student was about to attack you when a duel wasn’t even issued. This is a serious offense.” Lilia stepped up, her gaze a bit sterner as she pulled out a small notebook and jotted something down.

While Lilia, Jarrod, and Elijah were talking about what exactly happened, Tessia’s piercing eyes drilled into me, as if she was expecting me to do something. Honestly, even with extended life experience, I have no confidence in what to do when it came to these situations.

Did she want me to treat her respectfully as the student council president? Did she want me to treat her as a childhood friend? Did she want to keep our past relationship a secret as a whole?

‘It’s Mama!’ Sylvie ‘kyu’d’ on top of my head, and I had to firmly tell her to hold still and not go to her.

Meanwhile, the crowd was getting more and more rowdy, the males doing the best they could to get a better look at Tess, hoping to engrain her image into their memories to use in times of loneliness or longing.

“You. I believed I asked you a question. Do you dare?” She took a step forward, her eyes boring down on the second-year student. I was thinking that the student was technically a level higher than Tess, but when I took a look at the ribbon that was tied neatly underneath her collar, it had two stripes as well.

“N-No. Of course I would never dare break the rules like that. I simply wanted to scare the boy—I had planned to stop before my weapon would hit him. But seeing that I was still acting rashly, I apologize,” he said, shooting me a threatening glare as he bowed to Tess.

“Leave.” Her eyes continued to look down at him as he shuffled a good distance away before he turned around and ran out of sight, a few of the boys in the crowd following after him; most likely the ones that fanned the flame in this whole scuffle.

“And you! Why are you starting a fight with a senior on the first day of school? You should know your place! No matter how rowdy he may have been, he is still your senior and he didn’t break the rules when dueling with the other student. Furthermore, he is a battle mage student while you are a scholar mage student. Did you not pay attention to my speech about discrimination between the two sects of students here? Yet, you still chose to interfere, making these types of problems apparent on the first day!” She knit her arms tightly as her stern gaze bore down on me, her face flushed with either anger or embarrassment—which of the two, I couldn’t tell.

“What?” My gaze narrowed as I asked, unsure if I heard her correctly.

I took a step forward this time, and I could see Elijah’s eyes widen in horror as he realized I was going to go past the point of no return.

“Correct me if I’m wrong, but it seems to me like you’re lecturing me based on a presumption you drew from the last five seconds of stumbling upon this situation. Are you really lecturing me, right now?” I took another step forward and I could see Tess’s once haughty face beginning to crumble.

“He was about to seriously injure or even kill that dwarf lying there right now, after the duel system broke. If I hadn’t stopped that arrogant brat, you would’ve had to deal with a murder case, not an unregulated fight between two students,” I continued, my voice coming out louder than I had wanted to.

“I apologize for the trouble I’ve caused, Student Council President,” I said icily, stunning everyone, including Tess.

As soon as I turned around, a hard lump formed in my throat from the guilt. I had just mocked the students for their immaturity, but here I was, acting the same way. I had forgotten that Tess was just a thirteen-year-old girl, yet I had expected her to act in a way that even I couldn’t.

Elijah followed closely behind as I kept walking, my pride keeping me from turning back around.

What a lovely reunion.

“Hold it, first year.” Clive Graves ran towards me, grabbing me by the arm as he tried to spin me back around. “Were you raised in a cave? Are these the manners your mother taught you growing up? Do you even know who she is?”

Holding firm, I stopped and looked at him over my shoulder.

I knew from first glance that I would’ve never gotten along with him, but his words somehow had the power to irk me more than most fools. Was I raised in a cave? Was he seriously deprecating my mother?

“Let go.” The malice dripping in my voice startled even Elijah as he instinctively took a step back. Clive immediately released my arm, jumping away as he guarded himself with mana.

I took a quick glance at Tess and realized she’d fallen down, more from surprise than out of fear. There was a brief moment where I asked myself if I should help her back up, but as a crowd quickly formed around her to make sure she was okay, I simply let out a sigh and continued my way towards the dorm. Elijah trailed behind as gasps and startled murmurs resounded behind us.

“President Tessia, please get back up! Are you okay?”

“Who the hell was that? I think Treasurer Jarrod called him Arthur, right?”

“Oh man, he is so screwed. He just told off the student council president of the academy.”

Elijah took a few hurried steps to catch up to me, eventually walking by my side. “You know what you just did, right? Man, you sure love attracting trouble, don’t you? First the dungeon and now this?” He shook his head but continued to follow me as he reassured me nonverbally that he’d remain by my side.

I almost chuckled at the fact that no one knew my history with Tess until another wave of guilt twisted my insides. Maybe I was bit too harsh on her—no I was definitely too harsh on her. She’s still just a little girl! I shouldn’t have lost my patience just because she acted her age.

As the guilt consumed my thoughts, I slapped my cheeks and decided to let nature take its course—because that was always the best course of action to take in a relationship.

School should at least be this exciting, right? I comforted myself. I wasn't really mad at her, but for some reason, my patience had grown thin at that moment. I knew I should reconcile with her before it became too awkward but I got the feeling that the timing was going to be an issue.

Elijah and I had managed to make it to our dorm building without further trouble. There were two male dorms and two female dorms within the academy. The two set of dorms were separated by underclassmen and upperclassmen. Underclassmen were students that were still taking their general education classes. These students were then moved into the upperclassmen dorms after they'd finished their general education courses and had formally decided on what type of student they were going to be.

The underclassmen dorms were simple, to say the least. It was clean and well-kept but lackluster in terms of furniture or decorations. It was a warm beige-colored interior with stairs that went all the way up to the top floor, where each floor contained a narrow hallway lined with rooms.

"Room 394. We're here!" Elijah unlocked the door by placing his palm on a round stone above the handle. It looked to be a simple artifact used to read basic mana signatures. As soon as he had opened the door, Sylvie bolted into the room, immediately making a nest out of one of the beds.

The room wasn't nearly as fancy as the one in the Helstea Manor but had a very homey feel. Walking in, to our right were two closets and to our left was a small bathroom crammed with two adjacent sinks, a shower and toilet.

Two beds were placed side by side, separated by a nightstand placed against the left side of the wall while on the right side was a long drawer for folded clothes. The sleeping area and the studying area were divided by a wall that came up to our waist, with three elevated steps leading to an arrangement of desks and couches. The two desks were placed against walls opposite of each other so we would be seated facing away while studying. A long couch was positioned against the miniature wall, separating the desks from the beds. The far side of the wall was made almost entirely of glass, which instantly attracted me towards it. The view encompassed a big portion of the campus, which was currently a canvas of fall colors. Looking at it from here, I would have no idea that this place was an institute for mages without being told so.

I took a seat on the couch, somewhat excited about the days to come. Sylvie leaned against the window, looking out at the view.

"Ahh! We didn't even have dinner yet but I'm already pooped! I wonder whose fault that is?" Elijah jumped on the far bed that was right behind the couch, the one that Sylvie hadn't claimed as hers.

I fell onto the couch, my body practically melting from fatigue. My eyes glazed over, staring off into the sky outside my window until I noticed the pile of luggage cases that were brought in by our driver beforehand. Letting out a sigh, I turned away and denied their existence, dreading the hours of unpacking to come.

TESSIA ERALITH'S POV:

GAAHHHHHH! I screwed up. I screwed up. I screwed up. I TOTALLY screwed up!

I buried my head into my pillow and screamed my lungs out in frustration.

“MMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMPPPHHH!” We were supposed to have an emotional, romantic reunion! Well, it was emotional, but in the complete opposite direction! Why did I even say all of that anyway? Why did I lash out at him? I know Art would never pick a fight without a reason but I just went and told him off on something I didn’t even see! Gah!! I’m so stupid!

I bet he hates me now...

Why did I say that! I even brought up my speech! Bahhh! I must’ve sounded like such a snob! But still, we were in a crowd like that and he did have some fault in the commotion. B-But...

I’m sure he hates me now...

If Art just greeted me or even just talked to me normally, I wouldn’t have said that! That’s right! It’s all Art’s fault! He even ignored me when I came all the way there to help settle the mess he was in! He didn’t even say hi! I wasn’t expecting a full-blown hug or even a k-k-kiss or something! Just a ‘long time no see, Tess,’ would’ve been fine! Who was that black-haired guy that reminds me of a raven, anyway? Is he his friend? Best friend? It seemed like the both of them knew Lilia and Jarrod! Gahh! This is so frustrating!

I screamed into my pillow again in hopes of releasing some of my frustration. “MMMMMMMMMMMM!”

A sudden knock on my door jolted me upright.

“This is Clive...I’m here to check up on you. Are you feeling okay?” I heard the muffled voice through the door.

I quietly cleared my throat before I responding. “I’m fine, thank you.” I used my ‘public’ voice, as I called it, which made me sound much colder.

“Who was that first year, anyway? I can’t believe he dared lecture you like that when you were trying to give him advice! Should I talk to the director about this? We could get him punished and—”

“It’s fine, so leave. Don’t go to the director, either...that’s an order.” I spoke harsher than I usually did to get the point across. How dare he badmouth Art. Only I can badmouth him.

I fell back onto my pillow after I heard the faint sound of his footsteps leaving. Dorms were separated by gender and class while before, it was separated by the type of student you were. For the student councils though, we each had our own room in a building that was right next to the Director’s office. It was uncomfortable living with guys in the same house, but Lilia was here, and the guys were generally okay, so I didn’t mind too much.

Stupid Arthur. Did you know how much I wanted to scream out your name and run to you when I saw you in the audience? Even if he was far away, how could I ever miss that bright auburn hair with a mana beast resting on top of his head! Sylvie looked really different from when she had first hatched but that didn’t surprise me. The fact that she was a dragon was something that should’ve shocked me but with Art, nothing he ever did could surprise me... he was just like that.

“Haaa...” I didn’t even have the energy to scream in frustration anymore. I wanted to blame Art for all of this but I knew he wasn’t all at fault. He probably wanted to keep our relationship a secret for me since I was a public figure here. But still... Why was Art only dumb when it comes to a girl’s heart?

D***y...

I hope he doesn’t hate me...

There were so many questions I wanted to ask him too. What has he been doing? How was his time as an adventurer? Did he get hurt anywhere? Did he miss me? Did he think of me at all these past four years?

I wanted to brag to him how much stronger I’d gotten too... After directly training under the director, my skills as a conjurer improved by leaps and bounds. I would’ve trained under Grandpa, but it wasn’t the best idea because he was an augments, which limited what he could teach me. He taught me the basics of mana manipulation but as far as going down the route of a conjurer, the director knew a lot more. She was also familiar with the differences in elves and humans, which helped her train me specifically.

Grandpa knew I had great potential because, when I first awakened, I created an implosion that blew up my entire room and part of the downstairs kitchen. That was back when Art used to live with us. That was when I had to wake him up every day too.

I sniffled.

Oh no. I shouldn’t start crying. Art wouldn’t hate me just for that, would he? I should just clear things up with him and apologize. He wouldn’t ignore me, right?

‘Curse his ignorance and insensitivity towards the female heart!’

ARTHUR LEYWIN’S POV:

I watched idly as Sylv took a nap beside me on the couch, her tiny body heaving up and down with each tiny breath.

“It’s not like you to explode like that all of a sudden though, Art. It would’ve made more sense for you to just ignore her and walk off, right?” Elijah was still lying down in his bed, his hand propping his head up as he faced me.

“Well, I admit I shouldn’t have exploded but I couldn’t help—”

We both turned our heads to the door when two brisk knocks interrupted our conversation.

“That’s strange, who would want to see us on the first day? Maybe our neighbors are just saying hello?” Elijah got up to answer the door.

“Who is...” After a brief silence, I turned to see Elijah frozen still. Getting up to see what was going on, I saw Director Goodsky standing nonchalantly at the door, smiling at me.

“Good evening, Arthur. Elijah. May I come in?”

The Beginning After The End – Chapter 47: Wiser Than The Wise

“D-D-Director Goodsky! I-It’s an honor to meet you in person.” Elijah gave a forceful bow that looked almost comedic towards the ever-graceful Cynthia Goodsky.

He lifted his head back up too quickly, almost dropping his glasses in the process while the director gave a polite smile, the crow’s feet around her eyes adding to her charm.

“Please come in, Director Goodsky. Elijah, stop blocking the doorway.” I pulled out the chair from my desk, motioning for the director to take a seat on the sofa.

“I told you to call me ‘Cynthia.’” She pouted as she almost floated past Elijah and took a seat on the couch, the door closing on its own. The amount of harmony she had with the wind element continued to amaze me, as the air around her almost seem to bend to her will without even a command.

“I don’t think it would be wise of a twelve-year-old with no background to be on a first-name basis with the director of the most prestigious academy in this continent.” I chuckled as I took a seat on my desk chair while she sat cross-legged on the couch cushion, her back straight and proper.

“My...your bond has changed a lot in appearance since the last time we met. Intriguing.” Cynthia tried to hold Sylvie, who was curled on the couch, but she hopped out of her reach and nestled herself on top of my head.

“Haha, as shy as before, I see.” She gave Sylvie one last studying look before turning her gaze to me.

“Hmmm...how peculiar. I seem to only sense wind and earth attribute mana inside of you. Are you, by chance, using a seal?” She tilted her head to the side while Elijah stood ramrod straight behind her, as if in front of a commanding officer in war.

I lifted my left arm to reveal my bracelet with two charms dangling on it to answer her question.

“Can’t say I’m not disappointed. I was hoping to go around flaunting you as my little protégé but I guess even a dual elemental augments is rare enough to do so. Though you becoming a scholar mage student was something that I definitely expected.” She let out a soft chuckle.

“I was planning on paying a visit to your office to update you on some things but it saves me the trouble with you coming here, I guess. I’ve probably made an enemy from a not-so-friendly family while I was an adventurer so I don’t want to give him any reasons to suspect me, at least not right now.” I leaned back in my chair, studying the two charms attached to my bracelet.

“Yes, I’ve read the reports on the case between Adventurer Note, and Adventurer Lucas Wykes. Quite a troublesome foe you’ve managed to procure. Since they are a military house, I do have a certain amount of authority over his family, but they have too many hidden workings that continue to elude us.”

Director Cynthia rubbed her chin, trying to think of a solution.

“It’s fine. I don’t consider that an urgent matter. He’s just a chore I’ll have to get around to finishing someday. If I do something rash now and it blows back to my friends and family, that’s when it will be a problem. I would actually like your help with another matter.” I put my elbows on my knees as I leaned forward towards Director Cynthia.

“Please speak,” she kindly replied.

“I want to take higher level mana theory classes, especially those on deviants,” I stated simply.

“Hmm... That wouldn’t be too difficult to do, but Arthur, wasn’t one of your main reasons for attending this academy to fit in with your peers?” She eyed me in a scrutinizing manner.

“I don’t mind taking these extra classes on top of my normal ones, where I would be with students my age. I’m just impatient to learn a bit more about deviant mana manipulation since I’ve hit a ceiling on that recently.” I almost blurted out, ‘since there was no deviation magic in my old world.’

“Fine. I can make that happen, and I can even give you a pass to permit you to observe the upper class top mages’ mock battles as well.” She sounded magnanimous but I only eyed her suspiciously.

“Okay... So what’s the catch?” I raised an eyebrow.

“Arthur, I’m heartbroken! I only wanted to do this for your growth!” She over-exaggeratedly placed a hand on top of her heart, as if genuinely offended.

“Art! You’re being rude to the director!” Elijah looked a little panicked, as he couldn’t see the director’s facial expression as she did this.

I smiled at her, waiting silently for an answer.

Goodsky sighed. “Very well. Of course I believe it’s only fair to receive some compensation for doing these kinds of favors for you,” she caved in, baffling Elijah.

“I hope you don’t say something absurd like joining the student council.” I shook my head.

“I heard of your little bout with the princess earlier,” she laughed as my face turned a bit red in embarrassment.

“I didn’t expect the ever calm and composed Arthur Leywin to explode like that. I guess Princess Eralith is a bit special?” She was still snickering at my embarrassment.

“Wait, what does she mean by that, Art?” Elijah walked towards us so he could see the both of us now, although he remained standing out of respect towards Cynthia.

Before the Director answered, she looked to me to see if I was okay with it. After giving her an unconcerned shrug, she told Elijah. “Your best friend also happens to be the childhood friend of our lovely student council president.” The Director’s lips curled up into a sly grin, as if she was just a teenager telling some rich gossip.

I was a little worried that Elijah’s jaw might unhinge by how much his face slacked. I could see a mixture of emotions, from shock to betrayal to envy, all in his face.

“How? When? What?” He couldn’t produce complete sentences as he tried to wrap his head around the whole situation.

Ignoring him, I turned back to Cynthia. “How did you find out, anyway?” I asked, curious. “I’m not surprised that you know but it shouldn’t be something you could just randomly stumble upon either.”

“Haha, about that... Virion Eralith happens to be an old acquaintance of mine. I didn’t tell anyone else, but I did excitedly mention to him that my academy would be receiving a gifted quadra-elemental mage in a couple of years. He and I were quite competitive since way back, but he took the news quite calmly, which made me suspicious. However, I didn’t find out until I took in his granddaughter as my disciple. Do you know the first thing she said when I took her in?”

I could tell she was trying to hold in her laughter, but why? I just shook my head in defeat, my face becoming even a deeper shade of red.

“When is Arthur Leywin going to start attending this school?” Director Cynthia said in a high-pitched voice, attributable to a younger Tess. For how grand and mysterious she might seem to everyone else, here she was, laughing like a preteen, taking joy in my embarrassment.

“What? Art! How do you know her?” I could tell that Elijah practically wanted to choke the answers out of me but was holding it in since the director was still here. Although, she probably wouldn’t have minded.

“Eventually, I pieced two and two together. Really...Being trained by Virion, I feel somewhat betrayed, Arthur.” She put on a pouting face again.

By this time, Elijah had just sunk into his desk chair, giving up, done with life.

“I don’t mean to intrude in on your love life but she thinks very highly of you, Arthur. I’m sure she didn’t mean to come across as the way she did earlier. My training regimen is not easy and the few that have tried before her have failed. The reason she is able to keep up and continue to train under me is because of her desire to catch up to you, Arthur. Even you must realize that you acted quite immaturely back there.” She caught me off guard, suddenly scolding me like a disappointed mother.

“Yeah. I know how dumb I acted there as well, no need to remind me.” I sighed, leaning further back into my seat.

“You will make up with her soon, right? I’d hate to see my disciple disheartened while she trains.” She smiled at me gently before continuing. “What I want from you is not to be in the student council, but actually be a part of a committee that is going to start this year. The disciplinary committee.”

I knew she would want me to do something like this. “Forget it. I don’t need the theory classes. I’ll just teach myself from the books in the library.” I shook my head.

“The books on deviants aren’t accessible to underclassmen and even for upperclassmen, you need to show that you are a deviant—something you can’t do right now, right?” She calmly refuted my plans.

“Being part of this disciplinary committee or whatever...how does that make sense? I’m a new student that’s in this academy as a scholar mage, What would the other members think, anyway?” I tried to reason.

“While they might not agree at first, with some time, I believe you will be more than capable of changing their minds, even with your self-placed handicap.” Director Goodsky threw in a playful wink, seemingly dead set on going through with this.

“Arthur, unlike the student council members that are chosen on a broader criteria, the disciplinary committee will be strictly based on strength. Your responsibilities won’t nearly be as much as the student council, and being in the disciplinary committee will give you the chance to work with students, some of which are also deviants, that are all strong in their own fields.” Her arguments were getting stronger.

“You mentioned that the disciplinary committee members are based on strength—” Before I finished my sentence, she cut me off.

“No, Lucas Wykes will not be on the disciplinary committee if that is what you are curious about. Arthur, this opportunity is something that other students would take as an honor. I insist on you taking it.” She leaned in, her face a bit more serious now.

“...” My head bent down as I thought things over. On top of regular and extra classes, I would have to do committee work, putting a big strain on my individual training time, which I was still figuring out where to do in secret.

As if she read my mind, she threw out her final offer. “Since the amount of work may be a bit too much on top of class and independent study, how about I offer you access to a private training facility where you won’t need to worry about anyone intruding.” She pointed at my bracelet.

“Please, Arthur, I really feel like this could be a good deal for the both of us in the long run.” Her face softened a bit as she showed sincerity.

I started thinking about how being in the disciplinary committee would fit into my plans, and finding no particular detriment in agreeing to this, I answered. “Fine, I’ll agree to be a part of the disciplinary committee.” My shoulders loosened as I let out a sigh.

“Good! Since classes start tomorrow, I will give your new schedule to your first period professor. Here is your new uniform I prepared in the case of good news. The knife is just meant to be the symbol of the disciplinary committee, but it is quite expensive so do take care not to lose it.” She gave me a wink as she threw me a tailored uniform with a sheathed knife and strap. It irritated me that she already had this prepared before she came in, even if it was ‘just in case’.

It dawned on me that even with my previous life and this life put together, both Grandpa Virion and Director Goodsky would still be older than me; after all, I only lived until my late thirties, around where I was getting past my prime as a duelist. I’d been so caught up in the fact that I had two lives that it didn’t occur to me that there were still people here that were older. Of course, I still had the advantage over traditional mages here because where I came from, the ‘magic’ usage was a lot more advanced.

The advantage that the older mages from this world had have, however, was that they were used to the amount of mana in the atmosphere here and had mastered it to a certain degree.

I guess even with two lives, there was still bound to be someone wiser.

I involuntarily shook the thoughts out of my head, causing Director Goodsky to tilt her head in curiosity.

“Now that the matter I’ve come to settle is settled, I shall take my leave! Enjoy your first dinner here and do please patch things up with my dear Tessia as fast as you can. I don’t want my precious disciple to

keep moping.” She wisped away, leaving me wondering why she didn’t just enter like that. It was probably to respect our privacy or something.

As soon as Director Goodsky left, a shadow loomed over me as Elijah peered down at me, his facial expression akin to a demon’s.

“You’ve got some explaining to do.” And I swore I thought I saw pointed teeth as he smirked evilly.

The Beginning After The End – Chapter 48: Attention

I couldn’t help but pat Elijah on the shoulder, as it looked like his soul was about to escape from his mouth. There were shadows underneath his lifeless eyes, his sunken cheeks making him look like a hollow skeleton.

“There, there...” I sighed. Even Sylvie took pity on him as she hopped off of my head and landed on his, biting the crown of his head to stir him awake.

His ghastly eyes bore into me as he turned his head. “... Not fair,” he mumbled.

“What?” I leaned in closer to better hear what he was whispering.

He leaned in closer to me, his lips almost touching my ears. “IT’S NOT FAIR, GODDAMMIT!”

“AHH!” I jumped in surprise as my ears start ringing. “What the hell! Don’t shout in my ear!” I stirred my pinky inside my ear canal to wipe away the stray spit that had been launched inside by my bitter friend.

“Looks, talent, and even luck with girls! Why do you have everything?” He placed both of his hands on my arm, a concentrated expression across his face.

Confused by this seemingly random action, I asked, “What are you doing?”

“...Trying to see if I can absorb some of your Arthurness,” he mumbled, still concentrating.

“Are you dumb?” I shook my head, waving his hands off of me.

On our way to the dining hall a bit down from the dorms, I explained briefly to Elijah how I met Tess—he really hated how I called her that—inside the Forest of Elshire. The whole time I was telling him the story, from living inside the kingdom of Elenoir’s Castle with Tess to learning mana manipulation from her Grandfather, I could almost see my words pierce through him as his life slowly drained from him.

“Do you know how attractive dwarves are, Art?” He leaned in a bit too close for comfort while the both of us kept walking.

“H-How much?” I peeled my head back from my overly emotional companion.

“NOT. AT. ALL,” he said matter-of-factly. “The sense of beauty that dwarves hold is the complete opposite of humans, Art! I may have been raised in their kingdom but there will never come a day when I can empathize with their definition of ‘attractive.’”

I laughed, unable to wrap my head around what an attractive female would look like to the dwarves, but I asked anyway. “Haha! Elaborate for me how devastating your life was.”

“When I turned eight, my grandfather, the elder who took care of me, introduced me to whom he hoped would be my future wife. The whole week prior, he was going on and on about how beautiful and elegant she was. When she showed up, I swear I thought I was looking at a man, Art.” His body shivered from the thought of recalling his past nightmare.

“Her name was Helgarth, and I swear she made me fear for my chastity. Her square jaw, her trunk-like, veiny limbs, her long, thick nose...She had a s-stubble on her upper lip, Art. She had FACIAL HAIR at the age of nine, Art!” Elijah was shaking me at this point, as I couldn’t stop laughing.

“Okay, okay, I get it! You were a very deprived young boy who started going through puberty much too early for his age.” I shrugged with my palms up while trying to calm my fit of laughter.

“You spend your childhood filled with masculine woman who go around showing off their bulging arms and see how you turn out when you see normal girls.” He shook his head, returning back to his lifeless self.

“Well... You are in the most prestigious school as a battle mage student, and you’re probably at least a full stage ahead of anyone in our class, so just show off your skills. You’re bound to land someone, somehow,” I said, optimistically.

“Your pity is literally hurting me.” He sighed, making the both of us laugh.

“I personally like your new uniform better,” Elijah mentioned as he studied me. “It makes you seem more strong and unapproachable somehow.” He nodded in agreement at his own statement.

The new uniform I received from Director Cynthia wasn’t too different in terms of looks from my Scholar Mage uniform.

It was composed of a white dress shirt with a single black stripe on the mid-arm above the elbows, and a light gray vest. Both the new vest and dark gray pants were made from a different material though, with special engravings on the inside that made me suspect that it had protecting qualities to it. In place of my pocket watch on the breast pocket, however, was a strap that went across my chest and snugged in around my shoulder, holding my sheathed, silver knife over my heart. A gold string replaced the red string that I had tied around, underneath my collar, giving my whole attire a more royal look.

I looked down and let out a sigh. I had to admit that the uniform did look good, but I didn’t like gaudy clothes like this. There was also an outerwear piece that I was supposed to receive later when it was properly fitted for me.

“So, what are you going to do about the disciplinary committee?” Elijah asked me a bit more seriously.

I tilted my head, not knowing what he was implying. “What do you mean?”

Shrugging his shoulders, he looked forward, realizing we were almost at the dining hall. “I mean, I know you’re already part of this new committee and all, but are you going to really take it seriously and stuff? It sounds like a lot of work.”

True. The director wanted me to be a part of this new committee but didn’t really specify what exactly I had to do. “I’ll try my best. I might as well give it my all since I’ve decided on going through with it, right? Besides, Ellie is going to be attending this academy in a few years. I need to do my best to pave a path

for her so when she does come, it'll be easier on her." I opened the door, welcomed by the students' indistinguishable conversations and the hearty aroma of meat and herbs.

As the both of us stepped in, the hall turned quiet and I could feel the stares of the students as they studied us. Ignoring the glares and the occasional curious glances, we made our way into the line and got our food, situating ourselves in a back corner.

"Looks like you're already popular, Art." Elijah smirked as he picked up a piece of roasted meat with his fork.

"What can I say?" I gave an arrogant hair flip and the both of us started laughing.

"Ah! Don't forget that we have the club rush tomorrow morning!" Elijah said, his mouth full of meat.

I let out a sigh at this. "Oh yeah... I have to go to the auditorium pretty early tomorrow. The disciplinary committee is being officially announced before the club rush starts tomorrow." I played around a bit with my vegetables before trying to give them to Sylvie, who promptly rejected them.

Director Cynthia had left me a note with a couple instructions along with the new uniform.

"That means you're going to meet the rest of the disciplinary committee! How exciting! Wake me up before you leave then."

"Will do." I picked up a piece of roasted meat for myself but Sylvie stole it before it reached my mouth.

We conversed about the clubs Elijah should join and the classes we had. As it turned out, the disciplinary committee met every morning, which irked me. Looks like I'll finally break my poor sleeping habits.

Besides that, my daily class schedule consisted of: Fundamentals of Mana Theory, Practical Mana Manipulation, and Basics of Artificing.

After lunch was when my upper division classes would start. Those classes were Deviant Magic Theory I, Team Fighting Mechanics I, and Spell Formations I.

During the fall semester, there were a lot more upper division classes for battle mage students while the spring semester classes consisted of a wider variety for scholar mage students.

Most students only took 3-4 classes a semester but I was essentially loaded with double the classes, my last class ending at 7 in the evening, not leaving me any time for clubs. As for Elijah, we only had Fundamentals of Mana Theory together; his other classes comprised of Basic Chain-Casting and Mana Utilization I.

Clubs geared towards upper-division students met before lunch, since their classes were all in the evening, and vice-versa for underclassmen. "Maybe I should join a hand-to-hand fighting club. I heard that more and more conjurers are trying to become at least a bit adept at close-range fighting, just in case," he pondered while shoving another piece of meat into his mouth.

"Mmm yeah, I heard that from my father. He's been telling me that there are some conjurers that wants to be recruited to learn close-ranging fighting, though I don't exactly know how that'd work." I wondered why I didn't feel full even when my plate was empty, but then I realized that I'd barely eaten any of the meat thanks to Sylvie, who was now 'kyu'ing in satisfaction on top of my head.

During our meal, the both of us could tell that people were conversing about us, with looks being shot every now and then from random people. However, none of them actually came up to us until now.

A group of students, all with battle mage uniforms, walked up to our table, completely ignoring my existence. The leader of the group, a tall male with wavy brown hair that was parted in the middle, stuck his hand out to Elijah.

“My name is Charles Ravenpor II, born from the famous Ravenpor Family. I’m sure you’ve heard of it, right? I couldn’t help but notice you spending time with someone beneath you. I’m being especially courteous today in letting you be in our group.” His chin stuck out, confident that Elijah would take his hand.

“You should be honored to be part of the Ravenpor Group,” one of the groupies echoed in the back.

“The Ravenpoop Family? Never heard of a family named after a bird’s feces. Have you, Art?” Elijah looked at me with a very clueless look, making me laugh through my nose.

“No, but I’d be very embarrassed to be in family like the Ravenpoop, even if I did know of them.” I tried to hide my smile as I played along in this immature exchange.

Some of the students nearby who were listening in on our conversation started snickering.

“Y-You... How dare you mock a prestigious family like the RavenPOR House?” Charles slammed his fist on our table, emphasizing his house name, which made them laugh even more.

“I am a second class student that should be shown respect! I reached out to you, a newbie, because I didn’t want a battle mage student to lower himself by being with a scholar trash student, but you instead spit in my face like this?” His hand was already twitching to reach for the wand strapped to his right leg.

Elijah looked him dead in the eye and refuted, “First of all, it’s scholar MAGE student. Arthur is just as much of a mage as any battle mage student. Second, why would I go with someone who blatantly looks down on my best friend and roommate? Third, it’s obvious you’re not here out of kindness towards me but here because of hostility towards Arthur, so stop your childish show and go p**s off.”

I had to admit that when my friend put on a serious expression, coupled with his naturally sharp features, he did look quite scary.

Issuing duels inside a facility not meant for battle was prohibited so using magic inside the dining hall would result in quite a big punishment, but that didn’t seem to stop Mr. Ravenpor here.

Wind gathered around him as he struggled to keep his anger under control. “Jack!” he roared, the wind settling down around him as he called forth one of his minions.

A boy that had a face that looked around 13 but a body that looked too big for his age stepped up from the back.

“Show these brats how things work around here,” he growled, stepping back.

Jack looked a little hesitant but Charles barked that he’d be properly compensated, making Jack reveal a wicked grin as he fit a clawed gauntlet over his fists.

“Sucks for you,” he simply smirked, cracking his neck before splitting the table in half.

The dining hall was in a commotion by now as the students all gathered around, some standing up on the tables to get a better view.

Elijah protected his face in surprise as the table split into pieces but I remained unfazed, my legs crossed as I took a sip from the water cup I was holding, while even Sylvie had fallen asleep.

“Are you crazy?! This is a dining facility!” Elijah shouted as he stood up to face Jack, who cracked his clawed fists.

“Don’t matter. Boss is going to take care of everything anyway. Keep your teeth clenched now.” He smirked as his right fist glowed with non-attribute mana.

He was a second-class student as well by the two stripes on his black tie, but even without an attribute, his core was still dark orange, which, for his age, was pretty d**n good.

Elijah’s right hand glowed, his two rings a dim yellow as he prepared a spell, but I’d already noticed that Jack’s pitiful killing intent was directed towards me, not my friend.

I didn’t even look up and prepared to settle this quickly but once again, before I got the chance to do anything, vines shot out from the ground and wrapped tightly around Jack.

The Beginning After The End – Chapter 49: Reminisce

It only took a couple of moments for the vines to completely encase Jack. As he struggled to break free, the vines twisted tighter, turning his face into an ugly shade of purple.

While most were confused, Charles seemed to know exactly what was going on as his face paled and he immediately stepped away from the commotion he’d created. Elijah was a bit surprised as well, his head turning left and right to see who used the spell, but the person responsible had yet to show herself.

Standing up, I faced the suffocating Jack, who’d given up his struggle against the vines. The atmosphere in the dining hall turned tense as everyone stayed silent, waiting for the perpetrator of the spell to show up. Giving Elijah a meaningful glance, I silently lifted my arm, placing my palm on the vines as I released the spell. Holding back on the amount of mana I used, I willed a sharp gale of wind from my palm.

[Torrent]

The Ravenpor groupies behind Jack covered themselves against the sharp gale as they got caught in the attack as well. With the spell, I so graciously freed Jack from the vines that were choking him, but in the process, shredded his clothes as well, leaving him the same way he came out from his unfortunate mother’s womb.

Jack plopped to his knees, coughing and gasping for air. Without either a word or a change in expression, I turned and walked towards Charles, who was still trying to discreetly make his way out of the dining hall. He was by the wall, almost in front of the main doors, when I unsheathed the Disciplinary Committee knife I received from the director, imbued wind mana into it, and threw it. The knife cut through the air and pierced through his blazer, pinning him against the wall.

“What the hell?” He yelled as I came face to face with him.

“Maybe it’s just me but I find it pathetic when brats like you who come from noble families beat your chest for something that you never even earned. Before bragging about how powerful your family is, be competent enough to at least not embarrass them.” I pulled out the knife he was struggling to remove in one swift swipe and left through the door, not looking back.

The brisk autumn air greeted me as I closed the door, my breath becoming visible in a cloud in front of me.

‘It’s Mama!’ Sylvie’s head shot up from atop my head.

I ignored my bond, looking up at the night sky illuminated by countless stars as I spoke out loud. “You know, you could’ve killed him if I didn’t disrupt the spell.”

Just a few meters away to my left, the familiar voice responded. “I was going to cancel it once he passed out. Besides, I know you were going to handle it.”

“Oh, now you leave it up to me? What stopped you from doing the same this morning after the ceremony?” I snickered.

“...”

I walked toward the figure that was leaning against the wall of the building, her face and other recognizable features masked by the shadow of the starry night.

By her silence, I could already picture what sort of troubled expression she had on her face. I stood in front of the figure, close enough to see her face, but she was looking down so I could only see the crown of her silvery gunmetal hair that seemed to shimmer in the moonlight.

“Ahem,” I awkwardly coughed, covering my mouth with a fist. The silence between us felt like an eternity. Finally, she glanced up, revealing her face as she fiddled with her hands behind her back.

“...”

“I’m sorr—Oww!”

The awkward atmosphere surrounding us instantly dissipated as we head-butted each other in our attempts to bow in apology at the same time.

I couldn’t help but burst into laughter as I rubbed my throbbing head. “I think I heard my skull crack just now.”

“Shut up.” Tess massaged her head too as she continued to look down her shoulders began trembling and I heard a snuffle.

I squatted down so I could see my childhood friend’s face. “Tess. Are you crying?” I teased, gently wiping her tears with the inside of my sleeve.

“I-it’s because it hurts...” She sniffed, her eyes continuing to avoid mine as she let me wipe her face.

“Did it hurt that much?” I softened my voice as I stood back up, gently patting the place where my head hit her.

“Yes! It hurt a lot!” Smacking my hand away, she buried her face in my chest, wrapping her arms around my waist as she began crying.

The seconds seemed to elongate as I felt her body tremble from her erratic breaths and hiccups. I looked back at the night sky, feeling my face burn as I clumsily returned her hug.

“I-I th-thought you h-hated me.” I could barely make out what she was muffling with her face still buried in my chest in between her sniffing

“Even if there are times when I get mad at you, I would never hate you, Tess,” I said gently.

“I-I don’t want that.”

“Don’t want what?”

“I don’t want you to get mad at me either!” she mumbled into my chest.

“Well this time, I was in the wrong. I shouldn’t have lashed out at you like that.” I suddenly realized that I didn’t really treat Tess like everyone else. While I didn’t feel a reason to get mad over most people—besides my family and Elijah—Tess was probably the only one capable of making me act genuinely, even if that was sometimes immature.

“No! I was wrong too! I-I shouldn’t have called you out like that in front of all of those people! B-bBt it was because I have to be the strict student council president in front of everyone, you know?” Her face looked desperate as she finally looked up, her concerned eyes red and a little puffy from crying.

“Art! You should’ve seen everyone’s faces after you—oh my heavens...” Elijah, who only saw the shaded outline of my back, came running towards me, until he spotted who I was with.

Realizing that Tess was still wrapped tightly around me, I couldn’t help but give him an embarrassed look.

“I-I’ll see you b-back at our dorm...” he stammered out before darting off, nearly tripping over his own feet.

“Haha. Tess, I think it’s about time you let go of me.” I smiled as I watched her face turn crimson.

“O-Oh right.” She immediately let go of me, taking a step back as her gaze shifted down, too embarrassed to look at me.

I couldn’t help but let out a soft laugh at how my childhood friend really hadn’t changed. “Do you want to take a little walk with me?” I gave her a smile as Sylvie jumped off from the top of my head and into her arms.

“Kyu!” ‘Long time no see, Mama!’

TESSIA ERALITH’S POV:

Each of his steps were light and confident, as if always certain of his direction and purpose... Was it the way he walked?

Those eyes that looked calm and poised, yet still a little playful... Was it his gaze?

The way it glowed even when it was this dark outside... Was it his smile?

What made me this stupidly attracted to him? He's just another boy! Another, rather talented, rather well-mannered and slightly better-looking, boy. That was it!

What was it about him that made me become so foolish around him and why did I keep doing things to embarrass myself in front of him?

I unconsciously let out a defeated sigh.

"Is something wrong?" He looked at me with concern. His gentle voice sending shivers go down my spine.

"N-No! Nothing's wrong, haha!" I felt my face turning red again so I started petting Sylvie faster as a distraction. Gosh dangit!

I could feel his eyes studying me as we walked along the marble path, the only source of light from the moon, peeking between the trees that arched the walkway. The last time we had met, earlier today, we barely spent a few seconds together before things got bad, so it'd really been almost four years since we'd last seen each other. I would've stared at him too but I knew I was going to turn bright red, so I just keep my gaze down.

I wondered if he looked at any other girl like this. I wanted his attention all to myself, just like now. I stopped myself before I sighed out loud again.

We started talking about what we'd both been doing these past few years. His time as an adventurer was really exciting but I couldn't help but be a little disappointed that he had been with that girl named Jasmine the whole time.

"Pfft!" The corners of Art's eyes crinkled as he revealed his bright smile.

"W-What?!" I held Sylvie up in front of me defensively.

"It's just that I'm enjoying the different expressions you're showing me while I tell you my story." I caught a glimpse of his eyes, making me turn red again. This was getting ridiculous.

I would've been pretty cold if I didn't have Sylvie as a heating pack, but Art didn't look cold at all. I wondered if being a beast tamer made his body stronger in these situations too. I started getting embarrassed as I remembered hugging him for so long.

He was really warm, though.

As we kept talking, I got a little less tense. I told him a bit about my training with Grandpa but I focused more on when Grandma Cynthia was my teacher.

"You call her 'Grandma'?" His head tilted a little in curiosity.

Nodding, I replied, "She told me to call her that since I was her only disciple and since she didn't have any children."

"I see..." He pondered.

I continued on about the strict training I had to go through and how it was hard for my plant attribute magic to improve because of the lack of reliable teachers. Although there weren't any other races that could manipulate plant attribute mana, even amongst elves, there were very few people that were adequate in plant magic. While some noble lineages did have the capacity to learn it, they ended up focusing on another element instead because of how hard it was for them to learn plant magic.

"So you ended up becoming a dual specialist in plant and wind, huh? Wow, I knew you'd be a talented mage." His genuine look made me feel proud. I often got embellished praises from all sorts of different important figures but just a simple compliment from him made me this happy.

He continued, "It makes sense that Director Goodsky is teaching you then."

I wanted time to stop as we reached the front of the dorms. Why were the dorms built so close to the dining hall? It should've been on the other side of the school...

"We should both get some sleep. It's getting late and tomorrow is a big day." He patted my head.

I would've enjoyed it a lot more if it didn't make me feel like he was treating me like a kid.

"Y-Yeah, you're right. Congratulations on becoming a disciplinary committee member, Art." I tried my best to smile but I started over-thinking how I looked.

Fortunately, he just grinned back as Sylvie hopped back on top of his head. "Thanks." I stared at his back as he started heading to his dorm. But to my surprise, he turned back arounds.

"I almost forgot!" He took my hand and brought it up, placing something from his pocket into my palm.

"Here! This will probably help you a lot." Letting go of my hand, he gave me a playful wink before turning back toward the dorms as Sylvie waved her small paw at me.

He didn't even give me a chance to thank him.

Looking down, I studied the small, dull green orb. It didn't seem special at all, but it did mean a lot to me just because it came from Art. Knowing him though, this wasn't just some sort of decoration he wanted me to have.

"I wonder..." I willed a bit of mana into the orb and almost dropped it in surprise, my hands trembling uncontrollably.

"Th-This is...!"

ARTHUR LEYWIN'S POV:

'Papa, you're really happy. Is it because you made up with Mama?' Sylvie teased me as I walked up the stairs and back to my dorm room.

'Can it, Sylv. And can you stop calling her "Mama"?' I pinched my dragon bond's ear, making her squirm.

"Room 394! Finally..." Tessia and I had been walking pretty slowly and had stopped in between while we talked so it was pretty late at the night. I opened the door carefully, just in case Elijah was asleep, but I almost jumped in surprise to see him sitting cross-legged, facing the door, his eyes bloodshot.

“Err... I see you’re still awake.” I waved awkwardly.

“Hell yes, I’m awake.” He crossed his arms and used his chin to point at my bed, signaling me to sit.

“Haa...Go on.” I sighed helplessly as I let my best friend release his barrage of questions.

It was almost four in the morning when he was finished, the two of us sprawled out on our beds, tired both physically and mentally while Sylvie had fallen asleep hours ago.

“I can’t believe you were h-hugging her.” I saw him shake his head while he lay on his back.

“I told you, I’ve known her since she was five. It’s not surprising that she’d be more comfortable around me,” I simply stated.

He shook head again. “After you left, some of the students suspected that it was the president that used the vine spell since she was the only one that could use it to that degree. Do you know all of the things the students called her?” He got up and looked at me.

“What did they call her?” I asked, a bit interested.

“There were two I heard the most.” He leaned in closer. “One: The Untouchable Princess,” he stated.

“Untouchable? Why? Is she that much stronger than everyone else?” I asked.

Ignoring me, he said the other. “Two: Lunar Goddess.”

“Huh? Why Lunar Goddess?” I chortled at the juvenile nicknames.

“Because she’s like the moon, Art. The moon looks so close that you can grab it, but no matter how much you try, you’ll never touch it. But you! You t-touched the Moon! You hugged the moon!” he flailed his arm in defeat and plopped back into bed.

“Go to sleep,” I retorted.

We were both too tired to even try to wash up, and my head was already hurting at the thought of how tired I would be in the morning, but memories of what happened tonight had kept me up. I kept wondering if I had done the right thing in the dining hall. It was a habit I’d acquired from being a king—to overthink my past actions and always plan my future actions. To my side, I could hear Elijah fast asleep, mumbling something about the moon again.

“Wake up!” I smacked Elijah on the stomach as I finished fastening the shoulder strap for the knife that represented my status as a disciplinary committee member.

“Oof!” Elijah bolted up in surprise but groaned once he realized how tired and in pain he was.

“I can see why you don’t like being woken up like this,” he mumbled as he rubbed his stomach.

Smirking at my friend, I walked to the door. “I’m leaving now so hurry up and get ready. I’ll see you in first period.” Without looking back, I gave him a wave and headed towards the auditorium. I was

supposed to formally meet all the other members of the disciplinary committee in the small waiting room inside the auditorium, so I was a bit excited as to what kind of people they might be.

Sylvie “Kyu-ed” in excitement as well as she swayed her head from side to side. After today, everyone would know that I was part of the disciplinary committee. I grinned at myself after imagining what the Ravenpor group’s face would look like after becoming aware of what my different uniform meant today.

Arriving at the back entrance to the auditorium, I straightened up my shirt, vest and strap, and opened the door, feeling tired, sleepy, curious, and a bit excited.

The Beginning After The End – Chapter 50: Disciplinary Committee

As I opened the door to the back entrance of the auditorium, I was met with an unexpected greeting.

My hair was blown back by a bloodcurdling roar as Sylvie had to cling onto me to avoid falling off. Along with the deafening shout of the mana beast that greeted me came bullets of saliva that showered my face and upper chest.

“There, there.” While wiping off the spit of the mana beast, I nonchalantly proceeded to pet its face, which was inches away from my own. This mana beast stood about two meters high on all fours. Its body was covered in thick dark brown fur and a deep red mane circled its head. Two pointed, vicious teeth spouted out from above its jaw, making it all the more menacing, but compared to Sylvie’s dragon form, I could only see it as an overgrown kitten.

Even Sylvie looked at the mana beast with little interest as she just settled back on top of my head.

“Woah... he wasn’t surprised at all...” From behind the mana beast peeked out a student that looked to be a couple of years older than I was. He had very dull, light gray—almost white—hair that reached over his brows. He had narrow eyes that were virtually slits and a smile on his face that didn’t come off as pleasant but more so mocking.

Though lean and tall, his overall frame looking quite frail. What stuck out the most, however, was that his uniform was very different from mine and any other I’d seen so far. He wore a loose, dark gray oriental-style robe that covered his arms and came down past his torso, black pants, and a golden sash tied around his waist. Peeking out of the inside of his robe was the insignia that all of the disciplinary committee members had to carry around—the silver knife. Something felt a tad off about him—something that made me wary.

“You must be the last DC officer to arrive! My name is Kai Crestless, a fourth-year! Just call me Kai.” His expression didn’t change at all, his eyes still narrowed and lips still smiling, but he put up his arm in a welcoming gesture, revealing hands that were completely wrapped in bandages so that it looked like he had gloves on.

“Hello. My name is Arthur Leywin. Pleased to make your acquaintance.” I shook his bandaged hands.

“Bah! Another frail-looking pretty boy! Why aren’t there any more real men in this committee?” Looking around, I found where the voice came from and couldn’t help but remember what Elijah had told me yesterday before dinner.

A female dwarf that came up to my chest with limbs as thick as tree trunks hopped down from where she was sitting and came up to me. The only indications that told me she was female were her long brown hair and high-pitched voice, neither of which suited her masculine appearance.

“Looks like we’ll be working together, so I might as well introduce myself. I’m Doradrea Oreguard, a first-year, like yourself. Let’s get along, ey?” she said simply while firmly smacking my back, sending a jolt throughout my body. What power.

“Arthur Leywin. Nice to meet you,” I replied, rubbing my back.

“Well, come on now! Follow me. Kai and I waited in the front to see who the last guy was going to be. The rest of the DC officers are in the other room. Director Goodsky didn’t really give us any details so everyone is curious.” She led me through a hall, Kai following behind us with the mana beast.

“Everyone! The last guy is here!” Doradrea shouted at the top of her lungs as we reached a room at the end of the hall.

Inside the gigantic room that I figured was used to hold events, I saw five other figures.

Without further ado, I walked up closer to greet them all at once. “My name is Arthur Leywin and I just started attending this academy as a scholar mage student. I am a dual-elemental attribute augments capable in wind and earth.” I offered a curt bow.

“Arthur Leywin?” The first voice that spoke up sounded surprised. Looking back up, I saw a boy that appeared to be around seventeen. He had deep, mahogany-colored hair that spiked out, making him look almost like a lion himself. His fierce sword-shaped brows combined with his strong brown eyes produced a striking gaze. It took me a couple of seconds but I soon realized who he was.

“If I remember correctly, you must be Prince Glayder?” The longer I looked at him, the more confident I became that he was Curtis Glayder, son of Sapin’s king.

“I can hardly call myself a prince now ever since the three kings and queens dismissed their titles and became The Council. Just call me Curtis.” He spoke very charismatically, his deep voice carrying a certain depth. His expression was a bit troubled though, no doubt because his father’s guard did cause some problems for me the last time we met.

“Nice to see you again, Curtis. You must be a fifth-year now, right?” I responded cheerily, which eased the troubled look he had.

“Yup! fifth-year fire attribute augments as well as a beast tamer. Nice to see you again,” he announced as we grasped hands. Curtis’ uniform looked much more intricate than Kai’s loose-fitting robe. His outfit reminded me of an old-fashioned military uniform without the cap. His black blazer had dark gray accents and gold buttons. A military cord attached from his right shoulder to the collar of his blazer, giving a refined yet fierce air to him.

“Ahh, that world lion that greeted me must be the one your father acquired at the auction several years back.” Everything clicked as the mana beast that so kindly greeted me sat down behind Curtis.

“Ah... did Kai use Grawder to scare you?” He shot a look at Kai who just shrugged back. “Anyways, yes. I remember you were with us when we purchased him as a cub. We formed an equals contract last year

after he reached A class.” He tried to sound humble but I could tell he was extremely proud to call himself a beast tamer. I didn’t mind because it really was a great feat he had accomplished, especially since he was able to form an equals contract instead of a master-servant contract with his beast.

“Looks like your bond changed a bit as well! Although it didn’t really change much in size.” He rubbed his chin while studying Sylvie, who had fallen asleep on my head. Just by analyzing his internal mana circulation, Curtis didn’t seem to have gone through assimilation since the World Lion’s beast will wasn’t too strong on him.

“Yeah, her growth rate seems awfully slow,” I said indifferently.

“It’s okay! Even though there are quite a bit of students here that have bonds, most of them aren’t beast tamers and not many of them even have equals contracts.” He patted my shoulder, trying to comfort me.

Looking closely, Curtis and his world lion looked oddly similar. Curtis’ hair and Grawder’s mane were of comparable color and both of them had a fierce look.

“Ah, right! You remember my sister, Kathyln, right?” he continued. The pretty, petite black-haired girl gave me a silent bow. She was dressed very similarly to his brother except instead of pants; she wore a skirt that came down above her knees, much like all the other girls in this academy. The only girl I’d seen so far that hasn’t worn a skirt was Doradrea, which I had no complaints about.

“Nice to see you again.” I gave a simple bow in response. She had grown to look more and more like her mother. The stark contrast of her flawless porcelain skin and her jet-black hair, dark eyes, and long lashes made her look like a doll.

“Nice to meet you once more, Arthur. I am a first-year as well, coming in as a scholar mage student. I am a single specialist conjurer in ice attribute magic.” She bowed once more, her expression set like stone.

I see... She’s a deviant!

“I guess I’m next, although the order is off! My name is Claire! Claire Bladeheart. After the new changes in the school grade system, I’m considered a sixth-year battle mage student with dual attribute in fire and wind, and I’m also the leader of the disciplinary committee! I’m an augments like yourself, so just ask me if you have any questions!” This upperclassman oozed positivity and passion from her very pores. She wasn’t nearly as pretty as Tess or Kathyln but she did have her own charm, with her scarlet red hair that came down to her chin. Claire wore a military-style uniform as well but instead of golden cord like the Glayder siblings, both her shoulders had gold epaulettes, which were basically ornamental shoulder pads along with an embellished collar that went up around her neck. That, along with her light gray and gold-accented skirt with knee-high boots gave her uniform a much more royal feel compared to my simple one.

I tried imagining myself in a uniform like Claire’s or Curtis’ and I shuddered at the thought. While it looked great on her, I was glad that the DC officer uniforms were tailored to each of their preferences and that Director Goodsky made mine much simpler.

It took me a second to register but I suddenly remembered why her name sounded so familiar. “Are you perhaps related to Kaspian Bladeheart?” I questioned.

“Oh? Do you know my uncle?” She tilted her head to one side.

“No. I’ve just heard many great things about Kaspian Bladeheart’s strength from my father’s ex-party member.” I gave her a warm smile as she nodded in understanding.

“I see. Well, I received training from my uncle as soon as I had awakened so many of my techniques are similar to his. Of course, I still have a long way to go, though.” I saw her place a hand on the golden hilt of the rapier strapped on her left side.

“Long time no see, Arthur Leywin!” a tall blonde elf that looked to be a couple of years older than me walked up, crossing his arms while he looked down at me.

“I apologize... Do I know you?” I really had no idea who this elf was until Sylvie mentally transmitted who he was.

“Ah! You’re Feyfey!” I pointed at him in surprise. Boy, did he get big. He was at least a head taller than me and he turned out to become quite the pretty boy.

Feyfey’s face instantly turned beet red as he placed both hands on my shoulders. “It’s FeyRITH...Feyrith Ilsaar III. And although I’m a first-year like you, I’m still a couple of years older than you so don’t call me by nicknames. I’m a water specialist conjurer, by the way.” I could see veins popping from his forehead.

“Haha! Long time no see!” I exclaimed as I shook his hands. He just looked at me, bewildered. His uniform was completely black with gold stripes across his shoulders. It was simpler than everyone else’s but it suited him well.

“Last but not least, this is Theodore Maxwell!” Claire got in between Feyrith and I and directed my attention to the last member.

“Hmph! Seems like the disciplinary committee has stooped low enough to recruit twerps.” Theodore stood up and I swore I thought he was a bear. He stood at about two meters high at least, easily around the same height as Grawder. His uniform was just a vest that was unbuttoned, revealing his bulging muscles. By the tear marks on the arm openings of the vest, I could assume it wasn’t originally designed as a vest.

He stood in front of me and placed a hand on my shoulder.

Suddenly, I felt the weight on top of me increase several times over as my feet began sinking, the floor around me beginning to crack. This was a deviant capable of manipulating gravity.

My body was able to withstand it thanks to the assimilation I had gone through with Sylvia’s dragon will but I still definitely felt my body begin to protest. I strengthened my body further with mana as I lifted his hand off of my shoulder, my eyes dead set on Theodore.

He wanted to test me?

“Hmph.” Feeling the cold, wordless gaze I gave to him, Theodore released his skill and walked away, muttering, “Not bad.”

A whistle sounded from the cluster of students.

“Arthur has guts. Feyrith crumbled to his knees when Theodore did that to him.” Kai snickered from the side.

“Hey, I’m a conjurer and Arthur is an augments! Please do not compare me to brutes like you guys,” he lashed out, his face red from embarrassment.

“Now, now! I’m excited as to what this semester will bring us! We’re going to be a team from now on, guys! We’ll get lots of chances to bond and get closer, so look forward to it!” Claire piped up in a cheery voice as she puts her hand out.

“I’m looking forward to it!” Kai put his bandaged hand on top of Claire, his face still a mocking smile.

“Aye! Sounds like we’re going to have some interesting times!” Doradrea got on her toes as she put her beefy hand on top of Kai’s.

“Haha! Yes! Let’s do our best!” Curtis placed his hand in as well, Kathryn wordlessly following suit.

I’d just met everyone and I was already tired. “I’m sure it’ll be a blast,” I breathed out while placing my hand on top of Kathryn’s. Sylvie ran down my arm and placed her paw in as well.

Theodore put his massive hand on top of Sylvie’s and my hand, making the whole circle stumble a step forward. As Theodore gave a silent nod, Claire gave us a big, confident smile and shouted, “TO US! THE DISCIPLINARY COMMITTEE!”

“AYE!”

“Before the club rush commences, the student council would like to formally introduce to you, the students of this academy, a group that was personally picked by the director in hopes to resolve and prevent disputes amongst students as well as enforce penalizing measures for troublemakers. While the student council’s main job is to help the director make sure this academy and the events held run smoothly, this group’s job allows them to use magic appropriately to uphold the peace and safety of students, whether against other students or trespassers. Please join me in welcoming the disciplinary committee!” Tessia’s voice rang at her last words.

The auditorium filled with applause as the red curtains we stood behind were raised. We stood there, shoulders square and hands glued to our sides. I had to admit that with people like Curtis with Grawder behind him, Theodore, Claire and even Feyrith, we were an impressive sight in our color-coordinated uniforms.

I took a peek at Tessia and I realized she was staring at me but as soon as our eyes met, she quickly turned her head away. As we stood in front of the students of Xyrus on the stage, side by side, we pulled out our knives and held them out in front of us so the insignia showed. Unsheathing our knives, we proceeded to do a small, choreographed routine before saluting the crowd.

Claire spoke out on behalf of the disciplinary committee with a short speech before we all headed out towards the back of the stage, leaving the crowd with mixed emotions.

For some students, the disciplinary committee meant to serve as a shackle that prohibited their spoiled behavior. For others, the disciplinary committee served as an aegis, protecting them from the threat of harm.

Either way, it would be an interesting school year.