

The Beginning After The End – Chapter 51: Classes and Professors

“Hey isn’t that one of the DC officers? I think his name was Arthur, right?”

“Isn’t he only a first-year? How was he able to get into the disciplinary committee? Does he have connections or something?”

“Stupid. Even if he had connections, I hear everyone from the disciplinary committee needs to be really strong.”

“He’s kinda cute, no?”

“Yeah, he’s totally my type.”

“That white fox on top of his head is so adorable!”

I sat towards the back of the classroom with Elijah next to me. The constant murmurs and whispers that echoed against the walls made my head hurt. The professor for our first class, Fundamentals of Magic Theory, had yet to arrive, allowing the discussions of this morning’s ceremony to ceaselessly go on.

“Look at how popular you are, Mr. DC Officer.” Elijah nudged me with his elbow while giving me a sarcastic smirk.

Before I had the chance to respond, the person who I assumed was the professor, walked in with confident strides.

Our professor seemed pretty young—at most, in his mid-thirties. He had well-parted brown hair that he kept neat and styled. His face was freshly shaven to reveal a narrow jaw. He was on the thinner side, but in no ways out of shape. His proportions were good for a conjurer, which I could tell by the wand strapped to his side.

Using the folder he was holding as a gavel, he thumped it on the front podium before speaking. “Now, now... I realize that there are many wonderful things to talk about, but you guys aren’t very good at gossiping. If the person of topic is in the same room and can hear what you are saying, then it really isn’t gossip now, is it?” He looked in my direction and gave me a wink, making me shake my head in defeat.

Some of the students gossiping shrank down in embarrassment but most of the students just laughed.

“My name is Professor Avius and I must say that it’s great to meet you all. While this is technically a basic class and some may think that it is unnecessary, I, on the other hand, believe this class is the foundation for what will make you a great mage. We won’t be doing much casting but there will be fun assignments and projects that I will assign along the way, so look forward to it!”

With that, the class erupted in a synchronized groan at the thought of doing projects. I couldn’t imagine what sort of projects he was going to assign twelve to fourteen-year-olds but it should be rather easy.

“On that note, I think today is a rather fine day to have a lecture! No one’s going to get any younger so absorb as much knowledge as you can while your brains are still fresh! Take out your notebooks and writing utensils!” His thin face wrinkled as he smiled.

Elijah adjusted his glasses and promptly took out a fresh new notebook and pen while eagerly writing the title of the class and today's date.

I just leaned forward and rested my chin on my hand as I began to listen.

"Today's topic will focus on the segregation between conjurers and augmenters!" He wrote messily on the chalkboard. "There is a deeply embedded discrimination against augmenters by conjurers on the premise that augmenters are 'brutes' or 'savages' that can only fight by getting themselves dirty." He used his fingers to air quote. "This is a rather uneducated stigma that everyone should get rid of right here and right now." He leaned forward, his face turning serious.

His words caused a few murmurs of disagreement and some of acknowledgement.

"Coming from the point of view of a conjurer, it is silly to say that we are above augmenters because our bodies are more suitable for influencing mana remotely as this is an advantage we have only while we are in lower levels." He scribbled some key points on the chalkboard. "When a mage's mana core, conjurers and augmenters alike, reaches the silver stage, the ability to manipulate mana becomes much more unrestricted. There becomes less of a distinction between the usage of mana veins and mana channels because the purity of mana that is produced from our mana core enables us to freely manipulate mana remotely and directly." He underlined 'remotely' and 'directly' while circling the point, 'less of a distinction.'

I heard Elijah 'ooh' in understanding and furiously scribble the statement into his notebook.

Hmm... This professor at least knew what he was talking about. While training, I'd become more and more aware that the higher the stage you reached in your mana core cultivation, there indeed was less of a true distinction.

"So tell, me class. If, in the end, two mages—one conjurer and one augments, both reach the silver core stage, who would have the advantage? I, for one, say that it's is either evenly matched or that even the augments would have an advantage." This statement creates even a louder protest from the students.

"Before you shoot me down, think about this. Until the silver stage, assuming that we have both the talent and necessary luck to get there, both conjurers and augmenters train in developing their magic. However, augmenters also trained in hand-to-hand combat, refining their bodies along with their skills since the time they awakened, which was usually during the prepubescent age. As the augments becomes stronger and reaches the latter stages of his core, he will continue to develop his long-range skills, although it may be inferior to conjurers at this point. However, once the Augments reaches closer and closer to the pinnacle of his core development, casting long-range spells will become more and more natural while the augments will still naturally keep his combat skills. So, tell me... are conjurers really the more noble, more dominant type of mage?"

"Some old-fashioned mages continue to believe that conjurers remain the prevailing mana manipulator but Director Cynthia, along with many other influential figures in this continent are trying to establish ways to inhibit this belief. I implore you youngsters to keep this fact in mind. augmenters, don't get hot headed because of this topic since, at this stage, you are still clearly at a disadvantage against conjurers. Conjurers, don't just mope around at this news and develop your combat skills. While it may be harder

for you to defend yourselves without the natural competency in forging mana around your body internally, that doesn't mean there is no way to use spells to strengthen your body. So learn how to fight hand-to-hand." He closed his notes and stopped talking, leaving a moment of silence for us to digest what we just heard.

"Any questions?" he said softly, giving us a sincere smile.

Elijah's hand immediately shot up and the professor pointed at him to ask away.

"Professor, if what you're saying is true, what is really the end result between the two category of mages when they reach the silver stage or even higher?" he asked seriously, not a hint of my usual girl-thirsty friend in sight.

"Good question...Elijah Knight." He looked down at his notes before he responded. "The end result is two mages with different preferences in styles of fighting. The conjurer at this stage will be able to imbue their body with mana just like an augmenter can at lower stages, but their fighting style will lean more towards long-range combat, consisting of many layers of spells to trick and weave around an augmenter who may be more adept if they get close." He wrote down some of the major points in his explanation.

"As for the augmenter, while long range spells will become more natural for them, just like the conjurers at this stage, they usually lean more towards fighting up close and using projectile spells more straightforwardly. Augmenters, after all, are not as accustomed to remotely fighting like the conjurers who, in order to distance themselves from close-range threats, prepare many layers of spells through multi-casting and chain-casting." He circled the keywords for us to remember.

Elijah just nodded in understanding as he again wrote down, almost word for word, what the professor just explained.

The class ended with a few more minor questions from various classmates. As the giant bell tower rang, the professor wrapped up the discussion and we prepared for our next class.

"I'll see you at lunch then?" Elijah asked while he packed up his bag.

"Sure. The person who gets there first saves the other a spot in line." I patted my friend on the back before leaving through the door.

As I walked through the densely packed hall, I sensed some gazes here and there after they recognized my appearance and uniform. On the way to my next class, which was Practical Mana Manipulation, I realized that there were quite a bit of students who had bonds. Most weren't so impressive, like the horned rat I saw on a student's shoulder, but there were some rather large beasts that students were proudly showing off. This boy who looked to be around 15 was riding on top of a giant lizard and had his chin proudly out. I didn't even know what that lizard was called but from the amount of mana it had inside its beast core, it couldn't be more than a C class mana beast.

When I arrived to my next class, I noticed that the layout of this room was very different. It was shaped like a miniature arena, with a battling platform in the middle, encased in a barrier field, and rows of seats circling around it.

I made my way to a random spot and sat down. 'I'm hungry,' Sylvie grumbled as she began impatiently thumping her head on top of mine. 'Yeah, me too; lunch is still a bit away though, do you want to go and catch something?' Sylvie nodded and scurried off at a speed that startled me. She was surprisingly fast when it came to food.

More and more students started filling the room after a few minutes. While most were first years, there were some second years that decided to take this class later.

"May I sit here?" I turned my head to find Kathyln in her disciplinary committee uniform standing beside me.

"Sure, go ahead." I moved my bag that I had on the seat next to me so she could sit. Her expression didn't change but she did give me a slight bow before removing her notes, carefully straightening out her skirt in a refined manner before taking a seat.

"Well, look who we have here! If it isn't Princess Kathyln and my rival, Arthur Leywin." From the front of the door, Feyrith confidently walked towards Kathyln and I.

Since when did he become my rival... and a rival in what, exactly?

"Aren't you loud this morning." I leaned my head on my hands as I looked at him.

"Well, it is a fine morning today. Didn't the commencement ceremony today make you excited?" he harrumphed as he took the seat on my other side.

Why was he sitting next to me? I thought he wasn't very fond of me.

"While it is a bit late into the morning, it is still technically the morning so...Good morning!" A rather upbeat, bulky man wearing a light armor clapped to get everyone's attention. He looked more like a low-class adventurer instead of a professor but when I inspected his mana core level, I was surprised to see that he was light yellow stage.

"Well, we have quite the crowd of students. I know my class is always popular but I'm honored to have this many students! My name is Professor Geist. Welcome ladies and gents, and welcome DC officers. It is a privilege to have you in my class." I couldn't tell whether he was being sarcastic or not when he directed his little welcome at us but I chose to not mind it.

"This is Practical Mana Manipulation, or PMM as I like to call it. That means we will be doing things very practically! Practically, in my definition, means through example, because what better way to learn than through hands-on experience, right?" His deep bass voice boomed throughout the class, waking up anyone that might've still been sleepy, which included me.

"I understand that most of you are first-years and that many of you have just awakened not too long ago. However, parents have been more and more dedicated in teaching their children as soon as they awaken before they even send them here, so even that assumption is mostly inaccurate. However, for the sake of equality, I shall assume that every first year is a beginner in mana manipulation, of course with the few exceptions, i.e. the three sitting right there." He pointed to the three of us while giving us a wink, drawing attention to us from everyone inside the room.

"I'm sure everyone, including myself, is curious as to what sort of level in ability our newly formed DC has. They are the ones that are going to be protecting the students here in this academy after all, right?" Several shouts of agreement spawned from around the room.

I inwardly sighed, realizing that this professor was going to make this class a real pain in the a*s for me. I saw even Kathlyn's brow twitch in annoyance on her usually expressionless face.

"Hmph! Well, if Professor Geist insists, I shall volunteer myself on behalf of the disciplinary committee to demonstrate the ability that our group, that was personally picked by the director, possesses." Feyrith got up from his seat and placed his right hand over his heart in a proud manner.

Sigh...

"HAHA! That's more like it! Feyrith, correct? Come down to the stage," he gestured.

Feyrith elegantly hopped down from his seat onto the battle arena in the center of the large classroom. Some of the students cheered for him while others were eager for blood.

"Hmm, if my guess is correct, you are a light orange stage conjurer with water specialization, correct? Pretty good for a fifteen-year-old, even as an elf." The professor rubbed his chin, studying him.

"Yes! By the fact that I cannot sense your mana core level, I assume that you must be quite a bit of a higher level than myself. It is an honor to receive your tutelage." While Feyrith's response was very well-mannered, he had a slight tone of arrogance, as if implying that even if the professor was a higher level, he could stand his own against him.

"Of course! I am at light yellow level stage, after all! To make things fair, I will only use long range attacks in this demonstration." He took out a two-handed sword from a dimension item he had attached to the buckle of his belt and stabbed it into the stadium behind him.

I could tell Feyrith was about to protest that it wasn't necessary but before he could, Professor Geist held his hand up. "Please. If I were to lose, I would at least have an excuse, right? Please cut this old man some slack." He winked at him as the other students started laughing.

He sounded sincere but I could tell that he was confident in winning against Feyrith, even with this handicap.

"Feyrith is going to lose," Kathlyn said softly.

"Oh really? How can you tell?" For me, it was just a gut feeling but it seemed like Kathlyn saw something that I didn't.

However, she didn't respond, so I just went back to watching the mock battle that was about to start.

"Let me quickly set up the barrier before we begin so that our audience is safe from mana projectiles." The professor mumbled a few incantations and a space around the arena started glowing dimly.

"Let us begin!" He grinned as Feyrith took out his wand and prepared for a spell.

"Water Serpent!" A stream of water circled around Feyrith and soon took the form of a giant snake.

"Flood Domain!" Feyrith instantly set off another spell immediately after the water serpent spell

formed. Soon, a pool of water rose up to their knees on the arena, and the water serpent dove into the layer of water surrounding both Feyrith and Professor Geist.

A domain spell was a higher-tier technique that was used to make the territory more advantageous to the casting mage.

“Fireball,” Professor Geist said to my surprise. The low-tier spell that every fire attribute mage learned formed in Professor Geist’s palm but rather than the normal reddish-orange color, the spell glowed a dim blue.

It amazed me that an augments was able to figure out and apply the theory behind the properties of fire when even the smartest conjurers had trouble efficiently using it.

The blue fireball shot out of Professor Geist’s hand and flew towards Feyrith, who had no idea how strong that spell actually was.

“You’ll have to do better than that, Professor!” Feyrith confidently flicked his wand up and manipulated the layer of water on the ground to form a thick wall of water in front of him. At the same time, the Water Serpent spell Feyrith conjured erupted out of the water beside Professor Geist and lunged at him.

Our professor enveloped his left arm in a blue flame and braced against the force of Feyrith’s spell. As the water serpent struck Professor Geist, a cloud of steam erupted, hiding him from view.

Meanwhile, the blue fireball smashed into the wall of water, creating a sharp hiss as our professor’s spell bore through Feyrith’s defense, making its way towards my fellow DC member.

Feyrith’s face paled as he realized he was defenseless against the fireball but he was able to react in time to form another layer of water in front of him to minimize the damage.

“Oof!” The fireball, now reduced to the size of a fingernail by the time it reached Feyrith, still left a hole in the protective uniform he was wearing, knocking him back a couple of steps before he stumbled onto his b**t.

“Do you surrender?” Professor Geist gave a wide grin as he walked out of the cloud of steam while juggling two more blue fireballs in his hand.

“Y-Yes...I concede.” Feyrith had his head down in shame as he trudged back to us, his uniform soaking.

The students were all mumbling about how the DC wasn’t that great, doubting whether we actually had the capability to protect them.

“You did well, Feyrith.” I patted the elf’s back. He did well considering he didn’t know what he was up against. What was this professor trying to do by making a fool of us here? Did he just want to boost his ego by picking on his students?

“Would anyone else like to volunteer?” he stated while looking at Kathyln and I. I was about to raise my hand but was startled when Kathyln suddenly shot up from her seat and spoke. “Please guide me well,” she said simply before lightly hopping down into the arena.

The Beginning After The End, Chapter 52: Classes and Professors II

“Kathlyn Glayder. I must say that it is an honor to have your presence in my humble class.” Professor Geist gave a deep, exaggerated bow. “Please do not hold whatever the results may be in this ‘demonstration’ against me,” he continued, putting on a pitiful face.

Her cold expression unwavering, Kathlyn just nodded, drawing her staff out from the dimension ring on her pinky.

“Very good! Let us proceed!” The Professor clapped, fire igniting from between his palms.

Without a word, she lifted her sky blue staff. Before Professor Geist had a chance to unleash his fireball, two javelins of ice formed around Kathlyn.

“Shoot.” I heard my fellow disciplinary committee officer mutter before the javelins fired towards our professor.

So she decided to go the offensive route to keep Professor Geist from attacking her.

A faint smirk crept up on our professor’s face as he lifted his hands that were still aflame, ready to block the ice spears.

As soon as the ice javelins touched the fire on his palms, they instantly melt, disappearing slowly as a sharp hiss resounded.

“Ice Javelin,” she muttered again, and this time, instead of two, five spinning javelins formed near Kathlyn.

“Shoot.” Her expression remained icy, like a coiled serpent ready to spring.

“Haha! Impressive! As expected of our princess!” Professor Geist grinned, the class leaning forward to get a better view of this intense battle. Since most of the students were first-years, they weren’t at the level where they’d be able to conjure something like this, let alone almost instantly.

Our professor concentrated as the five spears shooting toward him, ready to pierce through if not countered.

“Ember Wisps!” The spell he prepared finished in time as Professor Geist jumped back, releasing small, floating orbs of blue flames.

Wasn’t this the spell Lucas used during his rank examination?

“Break,” Kathlyn muttered, and she willed her five ice javelins to shatter into an uncountable amount of small, sharp shards of ice.

“Fire!” Professor Geist, his face not nearly so smug as before, willed his orbs of blue fire to shoot at his opponent. Kathlyn, on the other hand, was so focused on finishing her final spell that she ignored the incoming streams of blue fire about to hit her.

“Ice Tornado!” Her voice filled with a faint panic as she realized upon finishing her spell that she was about to receive the brunt of Geist’s attack.

PROFESSOR GEIST’S POV:

That idiot! Why didn't she defend herself instead of trying to finish the last spell?

As the tornado of ice shards began to whirl around me, I became nervous. I wasn't scared of this fancy spell; I was scared that she might be gravely injured from my attack.

Wasn't it common sense for a conjurer to have a layer of defense in battles? I chose a relatively easy spell to counter and the fact that she was a deviant specializing in ice made it all the more easy for her. Did she want to win so much that she chose to forego that?

I cancelled the spell but only the ember wisps disappeared. The streams of blue fire that they shot at the stupid princess was still heading her way.

D**n it. I'm screwed.

Scorch Field.

I willed a layer of heat around my body to melt the shards of ice circling me. I was left with some light scratches but I didn't care. What happened to the princess? I didn't hear any screams from the other students. Maybe she was okay?

D**n... I should've stopped after making a fool of the elf.

After the layer of ice shards that were blocking my view melted, I immediately tried to find the princess but instead, I found the last member of the three DC officers in my class, Arthur Leywin, in front of Kathlyn, who was still covering her face with her arms in panic. His palm was out in front of him while his other arm wrapped protectively around the princess.

His eyes... I couldn't help but involuntarily tremble from the baleful glare that pierced through me. It felt even sharper than those ice spears that the princess threw at me.

"I think this little game of yours has gone on long enough, don't you think?" His expression stayed icy, the innocent façade that I now knew he usually kept nowhere in sight as his domineering gaze looked at me without remorse. Was this his true face?

"While I am thankful for your concern over the princess, it was unnecessary, as I had it all under control." No way was I going to lose face right here, on the first day, in front of all of my students.

"Under control?" Arthur's brow slightly twitched and I could sense his annoyance. Was I the only one feeling this pressure? This wasn't normal. AA class mana beasts didn't even exude this much pressure.

"Yes. Do you think that I, a professor at this esteemed academy, would actually put one of my students in harm's way?" I said calmly. There was no proof! Today was all just a little mistake.

ARTHUR LEYWIN'S POV:

This ingrate really planned on insisting that he had this all under control. I already knew from watching Lucas that once the remote spell from the wisps were shot, they couldn't be cancelled. Then again, there was no proof since I'd blocked it.

"I see... then in that case, allow me to take the place of my colleague in this 'demonstration.'"

“Haha...well, if you insist. I seem to have scared the princess a little too much with my last spell. I should’ve cancelled it earlier if I knew you were going to interrupt. Now, some of my students may misunderstand that I was trying to actually hurt her.”

Even now, this pathetic excuse of an instructor was trying to defend his position. I could already tell from the various murmurs around the class that most of the students already believed what he was saying.

I turned back to Kathlyn. “You’re okay. Do you think you can make it back to your seat on your own?” I gently stirred her from her stupor.

“Y-Yes... I’m really sorry.” For the first time, I saw a change in Kathlyn’s expression. She looked really embarrassed, her porcelain white skin flushing a light red as she turned away to go back to her seat.

“Then please guide me well.” I turned back to Professor Geist and drew Dawn’s Ballad. The translucent teal blade triggered gasps and mutters of amazement as even Geist looked at my sword, wide-eyed in wanting.

“Quite the nice weapon you got there. Since you are an augments, I suppose it would be fair to let you choose which method you would like for me to fight with.” He shrugged his shoulders helplessly as he walked towards his sword, which was embedded into the ground.

“It doesn’t matter,” I responded simply.

I could see a vein popping in annoyance from our professor as he looked back at me.

“I Insist,” he retorted.

“Then please go with what you’re more confident in.” I took a couple steps forward, my face still peering deep into him, studying his every movement and action.

Scum or not, this professor was still a light yellow class veteran augments. The fact that he had the insight to use blue fire meant he was pretty capable.

I saw the once grinning professor scowl as his face turned a bit red. I could tell he really wanted to leave an amazing impression on his class, and so far, I wasn’t giving him much face.

“Very well then. I’ll be sure to go easy on you.” The upper portion of his face betrayed his lighthearted smile.

Pulling out his sword with ease, Geist made his way towards me as well, his blade dancing around him gracefully as he handled it with little effort.

He blinked towards me without warning, swinging his blade down with a force that wasn’t exactly ‘easy.’

His sword was imbued in a layer of blue fire, the heat that radiated from it making deadly. After parrying his initial surprise attack, I used wind attribute mana to keep the trail of fire away from me.

Since I was only able to use wind and earth mana, I had to really think about how to best utilize my assets to overcome a stronger opponent. While it would’ve been easy to use blue fire myself, I didn’t have that option right now.

His bombardment continued, the force of each swing and stab getting faster and stronger, as if trying to test the limit I could handle. Every time I parried or dodged his attack with ease, his next attacks would be kicked up a notch.

I wasn't using any spells to receive his attacks, just mana strengthening and pure sword technique, which seemed to frustrate our professor even more.

"I'm sure the disciplinary committee aren't only made of rats who keep dodging and running away," he said loudly, putting on a joking face.

"Is there really a need for me to attack when our esteemed professor can't even land one on a first-year student?" I countered, putting on an innocent face.

He didn't answer, his lips contorted in anger instead. By this time, a couple of the students had already caught on that this wasn't just a simple demonstration, some whispering if they should call the director or the student council over.

Professor Geist's attacks became fiercer as he started implementing several spells along with his attacks.

"Flame Pillar." A stream of blue fire shot up from the ground beneath me as I instantly sidestepped to avoid it, countering him with a concise strike to his neck.

Catching him by surprise, he jumped back a lot further than he had to, in order to dodge my blade, a bead of sweat forming on his brow.

"Even rats become deadly when cornered, Professor." I shot him a snide grin as I immediately closed the distance between the two of us.

Appearing right next to him, I willed wind mana around the blade of my sword as I prepared a spell. Each swing I took formed a still path of wind, confusing Professor Geist who was still able to block my blows. Every swipe, every lunge, and every swing I took created an almost transparent path of air in its trajectory.

Professor Geist wasn't trying to put on an act of confidence anymore, concentration was etched on his face as he tried to block my flurry of attacks.

He was reaching the edge of the arena as each blow from me forced him to take a step back, the flames on his sword flickering helplessly upon receiving each attack.

It was about time to end this.

I willed the surface of the ground where he was about to take his next step to concave in, making him slightly lose his balance. As expected of a veteran augments, he stumbled for a split second but was able to soon regain his balance. However, that split second was all that I needed.

[Tempest]

The dozens of trails of wind that were produced from each of my mana-instilled blade suddenly glowed and shot out. My assault reached its climax as the speed of my attacks increased, my blade becoming barely visible. All the while, the spell I had just activated, Tempest, followed behind each of my attacks, making my barrage a chain of both sword and sharp blades of wind.

“AHHH!” Overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of attacks that he couldn’t hope to block completely, he stumbled onto his b**t and rolled out of the arena.

The protective barrier that blocked all spells from going through flickered and cracked as my tempest spell bombarded against it until finally, the barrier broke with a sharp sound. It had been strong enough to block all but one last blade of wind from my spell, which grazed my professor’s neck, producing a trickle of blood.

Fortunately, the Professor’s mana-imbued body was strong enough so that my deadly blades of wind only grazed him, but he still sat flat on his back, his face pale in fright and knees shaking as I buried my blade in the ground right next to his carotid artery.

Pulling out my sword and putting it back into my dimension ring, I look down at our professor. “Thank you for your guidance.”

As if on cue, the bell rang, and I walked out of the room, leaving the entire class’s eyes wide and jaws slack.

“...A-Arthur.” I heard a soft voice from behind me. It was Kathlyn running towards me with Feyrith following behind.

“I have to admit, you were impressive back there, Arthur. As expected of my rival.” Feyrith crossed his arms, but his face looked a little disheartened.

Putting an arm on the elf’s shoulder, I said to him, “You did good out there, Feyrith. If you knew the type of spell that the professor was using, I know you would’ve prepared more preventive measures.”

“O-Of course! If I knew that the specific spell he would use was a lot stronger than I anticipated, I’m sure I would’ve come out as the victor in the end,” he said, but the faint smile on his face showed that he appreciated my faith.

I turned to Kathlyn, who was still a bit shaken up. “Are you an idiot?” I said to her, flicking her lightly on the forehead.

She looked at me in utter shock, and even Feyrith looked a bit panicked.

“If you chose to defend yourself instead of focusing so much on beating the guy, you wouldn’t have put yourself at risk like that. Don’t be so stubborn and think things through more carefully. You know... you’re awfully emotional for someone whose face never changes.” I gave her a playful smirk before walking to my next class, leaving the princess in a daze while Feyrith panicked, thinking of ways to console her.

“Kyu!” ‘Ah~ I’m full! How was class, Papa?’ Sylvie scurried on top of my head and settled in, messing up my hair.

‘Meh, it was okay.’ I simply think, patting my precious bond.

The Beginning After The End, Chapter 53: Classes and Professors III

While walking to my next class, I couldn’t help but become a bit frustrated with myself. I had been impatient back there, only wanting to overpower Professor Geist to end it fast. Using only my wind and

earth attributes, I couldn't end it as easily as I'd wanted to. I guess being blessed with too many gifts had made me become a bit too impertinent. In reality, I'd yet to reach the pinnacle of strength in this continent even though I definitely had enough advantages that would allow me to reach the top. With that mindset, I needed to stop comparing myself to students my age and think bigger. My only hope was that the upper division classes would offer insight into mana manipulation that I couldn't pinpoint on my own.

I was rather interested in my next class, Basics of Artificing. Artificing was something that never existed in my old world. I was sure there were relevant ties to technology used in my old world but the premise of manipulating and coding mana to have specific uses designated to an object would be new to me.

Upon entering the classroom, I was pleasantly surprised to see that the layout of the room was that of a laboratory. Beakers, containers, different types of ores and various gadgets filled the room, making it all the more authentic.

I was somewhat relieved to see that there was no one I knew in this class, giving me peace of mind. As students started filing in and sitting next to acquaintances and friends, a girl that looked to be about my age walked by and stood next to the stool beside mine.

"Is this seat taken? If it is, I'll move somewhere else!" I didn't know why she looked so panicked but I couldn't help but chuckle at her innocent personality.

"No, the seat isn't taken. You're free to sit there if you wish." I said with a welcoming smile, taking a seat myself.

The girl was ordinary, to say the least. Her thick round glasses magnified her eyes and the freckles underneath them. Her curly hair looked like it had a life of its own, as it was forcibly tied into a ponytail down her back.

Compared to girls like Tess and Kathyln, whom everyone fawned over—and for good reason—she was rather plain. But for some reason, it was comfortable around her.

"Th-Thank you..." she muttered with her head faced down. "...mily."

"What was that?" I leaned in closer to hear her last sentence.

"Emily! My name is Emily Watsken! Please be my friend—I mean, please to meet you!" Her eyes widened, stunned at her own words.

I shared her expression before I burst out into a laugh.

"Sure. My name is Arthur Leywin." I grasped her hand and couldn't help but become surprised by how coarse her palm was.

"O-Oh! I'm sorry! It probably feels gross, right?" She retracted her callused hand while her face turned a bit red, accentuating the freckles on her cheeks.

"No, it's quite fine. I have calluses too. See?" I held my sword hand out to reveal the hardened lumps on my palms

“Wow...you’re right! You must practice a lot! It’s no wonder you’re in the disciplinary committee. I really admire that! For me, I really love artificing, so I end up fiddling around with a lot gadgets. Unfortunately, it makes my hands get this rough.” She scratched her head, her sentences becoming faster as she got more comfortable with me

“Really? I rather admire people like you. I’m jealous that you have such a passion for artificing. The only thing you get better at when fighting is destroying and killing, but the better you get at artificing, the more things you can create.” I looked down at my own callused hands.

“Woah... that’s deep.” I saw Emily readjust her thick glasses while she pondered what I had just said in her head.

“Haha, I ended up saying something unpleasant. I apologize.” The class was getting pretty loud as the room filled up with eager students, most of which were here as a scholar mages.

“No no no! It wasn’t unpleasant at all! Just, it’s not something you hear every day from a twelve-year-old.” She desperately shook her hands to gesture that it was okay.

“You say that as if you aren’t a twelve-year-old yourself,” I snickered as I looked at her.

Slumping in her chair, she lets out a sigh. “True... It’s because I’m apparently a genius of some sorts. I don’t really get why people say that but people don’t really treat me as a child anymore after I created the projection display artifact.”

“Wait what? You’re the one that invented the display used to show the kings’ and queens’ announcement?” I stood up from my stool.

“Mhmm, well only a part of it... I tinkered around with some of the things in my parents’ lab and I made the basic designs a couple years back.” She scratched her curly hair again.

Sinking back into my stool, I let out a deep breath. Holy c**p. She built something like that when she wasn’t even 10!

“Well, I must say that it is an honor to be in the presence of a genius such as yourself.” I give her a smirk, bowing my head in mock fealty.

“Oh, please. Don’t you start now too! Besides, you’re quite famous too, you know!” She gave me a smirk as her glasses reflect the classroom light, making her look like an evil scientist.

“Really? I’ve tried very hard to lay low. I guess that didn’t work.” I leaned my head on my hand.

“Pfft. Well joining the disciplinary committee as a first year sure didn’t help.”

“There are other first year students in the committee as well,” I refuted.

“But not humans! You and Princess Kathyln are the only ones, and the Princess has been hailed as a prodigy since she awakened. That leaves you, a mysterious human freshman that has a bond with a white fox-like mana beast and no background, also able to overwhelm and completely demolish a professor that is a veteran adventurer at the light yellow core stage.” By this time, she was leaning closer and closer to me.

“What? How do you already know about what happened with Professor Geist?! That literally happened fifteen minutes ago!”

“Kyu!” Sylvie echoed in protest at being called fox-like, although that essentially was what she was.

“Don’t be so surprised! This is a magic academy, after all. News travels fast and gossip travels even faster. I bet you some people in this class already know what happened.” She smirked while wagging her finger.

“Oh God... You know, I noticed you’re awfully talkative now compared to when you stuttered your greeting when you first came in.” I couldn’t help but realize the change in her personality.

“Shut up! I s-s**k with strangers, okay? Besides, I don’t usually get along with new people this easily. You’re different, though! It was easy to get comfortable with you since we’re really similar.” She harrumphed, crossing her arms over her undeveloped chest.

“Similar in what way?” I raise a brow.

She grinned broadly, “We’re both freaks!”

I rolled my eyes at her conjecture but realized that, because of how high her intelligence was, I was more comfortable with her than other kids my age.

As I was about to respond to her statement, the classroom door swung open and I saw a familiar face.

“Greetings, plebeians! Please feel honored to have me, Professor Gideon, as your teacher for this class!” The crazy scientist skedaddled his way onto the podium while the pair of goggles that were hanging from his neck bounced up and down.

As he gazed through the classroom with a condescending eye, he eventually reached Emily and me.

“AH! Well, if it isn’t Arthur. I had no idea that you would be in my class!” He clasped his cheeks in an obviously fake way, making me shake my head.

“And my oh my, getting along with Miss Watsken! I must say you two would make quite the team! Good good! Let’s begin the first day of classes by a little introduction of myself!” He smiled, writing his name in big letters behind him.

The lecture continued on with Gideon rambling on about how remarkable he was for the following hour and a half. Most students, myself included, were half asleep but Emily’s eyes sparkled as she absorbed every bit of information that came out of Gideon’s thin lips. I guessed even a genius like her respected Gideon in the field of artificing. Made me almost want to admire him.

Meanwhile, Sylvie was curled up on the desk in front of me, using my arm as a pillow, when an olive green owl suddenly flew in from the window, landing on my shoulder.

“Kyu!” Sylv jumped up in surprise and growled as the owl just calmly grooms itself.

“Well, it seems like Director Goodsky is beckoning you, brat!” Gideon walked up to me, massaging his hunched shoulders.

“You shouldn’t keep her waiting. Shoo! Off you go!” He slapped my back as he continued on talking about how great he was.

Emily leaned in, not surprised. “I told you not to underestimate how fast news travelled!”

“Yeah, yeah...” I walked out of the classroom, hearing some of my classmates begin their discussion about what happened.

“Now... where was Director Cynthia’s office again?” I scratched my head.

As if he understood, the owl flew off of my shoulder and began flying towards the right, gesturing us to follow.

“Kyu!” ‘Papa, he’s dangerous!’ Sylvie warned me, her fur standing on end.

The campus was fairly empty as most of the students were either in class, training on their own, or in their dorms. Getting caught up in the beautiful scenery of this campus, I realized a little late that the owl had landed on a statue in front of a building that I assumed was the director’s office, waiting for me to enter.

Opening the door, I headed inside while the horned owl perches itself on my shoulder again, making Sylvie hiss and throw paws at it in warning.

“I see that Avier has personally guided you here. Odd... I have never seen him get so comfortable with a stranger before.” Professor Goodsky, who was sitting behind her desk, rested her head on her hands as she looked at me but studied Sylvie in particular.

“Is there something you needed from me, Director?” I take a seat in front of her desk as Avier, the green owl, left my shoulder and perched on the window ledge behind Cynthia.

“Yes. I called you here regarding the little ‘demonstration’ in Professor Geist’s class.” Her expression remained unfazed as she mentioned the trouble I must’ve caused her.

“Ah... There were some situations beforehand regarding that, actually...” Before I could explain, Director Goodsky lifted up her hand to interrupt.

“We’ve just dismissed Professor Geist from our academy. Princess KathyIn personally stepped forth and explained, telling me what exactly happened. Of course I had to get some people to verify her testimony but everyone agreed that the professor was a danger to students.” She nodded, placing a couple of documents in front of me.

Wow, she worked fast. This incident happened less than two hours ago, but she already managed to handle and fire that professor.

As if she knew what I was thinking, she smiled and added, “It helps move things along when you get the final say in all matters regarding this academy. I have to say, though, that I have never seen the princess so worked up as she was today. When she came in, she had a slightly angry expression on her face, which, by her standards, is quite serious. You must understand how surprised I was. Hoho!” Director Goodsky covered her mouth with a hand as she chuckled softly.

“Really now? I didn’t think that princess could even show emotions.” I grinned as well.

“Yes. You must’ve made quite an impression on her, because she defended you quite fervently, leaving Professor Geist no room to defend himself.” She gave me a wink.

When I shook my head helplessly, Director Goodsky just laughed, responding, “You’re quite the ladies’ man, Arthur. It’s going to be a problem if you steal the hearts of both princesses! Who knows, you might be the cause of our next civil war! Hahaha!”

She seemed quite amused by something that could devastate the thin balance that this continent had. I wanted to just dismiss the thought, but when I imagined the two princesses fighting it out, I shuddered. I didn’t have the mental capacity to handle even one of the princesses, let alone both of them.

“You know, it’s not really considered young to get married at the age of fourteen or fifteen. I’m sure Tessia will have developed into quite a fine young lady by then.” She teased me even further.

“No thank you. I don’t see myself becoming romantically involved anytime soon. Besides, they’re still just kids. Maybe I’ll start thinking about it when the girls my age become a bit more mature.” I shrugged.

Leaning forward, the director studied me. “Hoho, the way you say it makes me think that you’ve already matured, Arthur.”

“Well, even you must admit that I happen to be a lot more mature than people my age,” I responded, leaning back into the chair.

“True, but women do tend to mature faster than men,” Director Goodsky stated matter-of-factly.

“I’m still wondering why I got called in here. I’m sure you didn’t just bring me here to tell me that everything was settled and to get married.” Sylvie hopped off my head and chased after Avier, who was grooming itself on the window.

“Arthur! I feel like you’re becoming to see me as someone who always has an ulterior motive at hand.” She gave me an offended look.

“Haha! I do, because we’re awfully similar in that way, Director.” I gave her a wink, making her smile as well.

“Dear me. If that is the case, then I believe I’ve made the right decision,” she responded.

“What do you mean?”

“Arthur, what do you think about being the professor for your class, Practical Mana Manipulation?” She clasped her hands, studying my expression.

My eyes widened at this. “You’re not serious, right?”

“Oh, I’m quite serious, Arthur,” she said, her expression unfaltering.

“Is that even allowed? I’m a student not even finished with his first day of school. Can I be a student and a professor at the same time? What about my other classes?” I began shooting out arguments as to why this wouldn’t work.

“Please, no need to get so worked up. It’s quite simple, actually. Is it allowed? Yes, as long as I say it is. Although this specific situation has never occurred, there are cases of highly qualified upperclassmen

that teach basic courses. As for your other classes, your schedule wouldn't really change. You would just be teaching that one class, for that period." She gave me a business-like smile.

I began thinking. Director Goodsky wasn't doing this for her benefit. She would be sure to get a lot of complaints from noble parents protesting why a first year was teaching a class. I, on the other hand, would have a lot more time on my hands, because teaching the course would require a lot less work outside of class.

"I don't understand why you're doing this, Director."

"Well, a spot just opened up and you were the one that defeated the previous professor. Doesn't that give you enough qualifications to enter? Besides, I'm really not doing this for some ulterior motive, Arthur. You don't have to be too suspicious. This is up to you. I won't push you into this, but I believe that it would be a good opportunity to build a sort of standing for yourself without having to go around conquering professors. If you wish to further enjoy teaching after this semester, I can give you more classes to teach! I'm sure there are a very limited number of classes that would be of use to you anyway" she chuckled.

Standing up, Goodsky laid a gentle hand on my shoulder. "The choice is yours."

The Beginning After The End – Chapter 54: It's a Pleasure

Pondering what the director had said, I just sat there, my eyes blankly staring at something off in the distance. Like she'd mentioned, there was no real benefit for her to hire me as a professor, which is why I found it so suspicious. It was so ingrained in me to be wary of other people's motivations no matter who they were. I guess as a figure of authority and power, you naturally become suspicious of everyone around you, which was why I couldn't fathom why she'd asked me to do this.

Practical Mana Manipulation was a class that didn't have any extra work to grade, which would make it even easier for me to just teach the class. Even if it wasn't easier, it would help build a good position for myself and would be a lot more interesting. Seeing as how I probably couldn't escape attention from the students anyway, I might as well do things a bit differently. Of course, I didn't plan on revealing my full set of skills to anyone just yet, but I didn't see the point in trying to be completely inconspicuous anymore, especially after today.

"...Arthur?" I snapped out of my thoughts to see that Director Goodsky was looking at me with a rather worried expression.

"Ah, yes. Although I'm not sure how competent I'd be in that kind of role, I'd like to try my hand at being a professor." I looked over the document stating my duties and responsibilities as a teacher.

"I'm sure you'll do an excellent job," she smiled.

Looking at her, I asked, "Were there any other classes that Professor Geist taught besides mine?"

"Fortunately, no. We hired him this year after he retired from being an adventurer. For this semester, the other professors and I decided to only have him teach one class, as a sort of test run." She shook her head at the pitiful results he'd produced.

"Before I sign, I have one last question," I stated as I read over the final paragraph of the document.

“Go on,” she urged.

“Wouldn’t it be counterintuitive that I’m not allowed to hurt students while being part of the disciplinary committee?” I quizzed.

“Ah, good question. The ‘not hurting students’ rule is for inside the classroom. While the situation is always investigated for every case, as long as it is for the safety of other students, such as using a certain degree of force to quell a fight or suppress a rampant student. As for outside of class, during your disciplinary committee duties, I’ll trust your judgment on that.”

With that, I nodded and signed the document. “I expect great things from you, Arthur, and I’m sure I’m not the only one.” She gave me a gentle pat on the shoulder before ushering me to go eat lunch.

CYNTHIA GOODSKY’S POV:

“Whew, what is it about that boy that always keeps me on my toes? Negotiating with him is more heart-straining than dealing with the royal families. What is your take on him, Avier?” My bond gently landed on the arm I held out, his intelligent eyes pondering what to say.

“He is... different. Do not view Arthur Leywin as a child. Whether it is mental acuity or emotional maturity, there is much more to him than the eye can see.” The clear words that came out of my bond didn’t seem natural from the movement of his beak.

“What makes you so certain?” I leaned back in my seat.

“His bond. That white fox’s true form should be that of a dragon...”

I bolted up from my seat. “What?! How is that possible? How do you know?”

“It is because we are of the same kind. I may be of a lesser species of dragons but Wyverns are still the dragons’ descendents.” Avier went back to grooming himself.

“Are you saying that bond of his is more powerful than you?” I couldn’t help but be utterly baffled by all of this.

“No, that child has yet to mature. She shouldn’t have hatched more than a few of years ago. However, I suspect that when she does develop, my strength will not be even comparable to hers,” he stated matter-of-factly.

I couldn’t imagine anyone stronger than Avier. The fact that he was my bond was only because he grew a liking to me when I happened by him, deep in the Beast Glades. He usually did his own thing and I didn’t dare treat him like pet, but the fact that Arthur’s bond was actually a dragon and that it seemed so subservient to him made me wonder what that boy really was.

“Do not make him your enemy, Cynthia. If treated with trust and respect, he will become the greatest ally, but if betrayed, he may be the cause of this continent’s demise.” With that warning, Avier flew off.

I leaned forward in my seat, rubbing my throbbing temples as I recalled what happened a couple hours back.

“Director Goodsky, I request that you remove the boy named Arthur Leywin from my class!” One of my professors slammed the door open as he stormed inside.

“Professor Geist, you look shaken up. What’s wrong?” I was taken by surprise by the sudden intrusion.

“The boy has no respect for me, his professor! Please do not listen to any of the rumors that you may hear. I’m being framed!” The man’s wide face was filled with desperation and anger.

Two brisk knocks sounded from the door.

“Please come in,” I stated. At least this person had the decency to knock.

“I apologize for the intrusion, Director.” The petite Kathyln gave me a small bow before walking up next to the now pale-faced professor.

“What’s the matter, Kathyln?” I leaned forward, taking a look at the both of them.

“This sorry excuse for a professor needs to be fired,” she said expressionlessly.

Professor Geist grabbed Kathyln by the arm, pulling her close to him. “How dare you! ‘Sorry excuse’? Me?”

“You dare touch me with your filthy hand?” Her expression didn’t change, and she somehow seemed to be looking down at Professor Geist.

“Professor, I suggest you immediately remove your hand or else, whatever the case may be, it will not be in your favor.” I stood up at this point. Using force to get your point across was deplorable.

He immediately let go of Kathyln’s arm before talking. “Ahem... as I was saying. Please do not take to heart the rumors that you may hear. I swear that this was all a misunderstanding and that I’m being framed.”

“I have not yet heard of any rumors. Do you mind indulging me, Kathyln?”

“This scum dares to pick on students to feel good about himself. Even ignoring the fact that he utterly humiliated Feyrith, if Arthur didn’t step in, I would’ve...” Without finishing her last sentence, she glared at the professor.

I turned to Professor Geist, who was desperately denying this accusation. “I’m telling you that it was a misunderstanding. I simply wanted to demonstrate in front of the class the level the disciplinary committee is at; you know, for the other students to know.”

“If that was simply what this was, then there would be no reason for you to come into my room and insist that Arthur be removed from your class.” I couldn’t help but sigh internally at the thought of handling this dilemma.

I turned to my secretary, who had peeked in to see what the fuss was about. “Tricia, please gather information for me from Professor Geist’s class regarding this incident.”

My brunette-haired assistant bowed before running off.

“Now, please be patient as this is sorted out. I will do my best to be just about this.” Before I was able to dismiss the two of them, Princess Kathyln walked up to me.

“I trust that you will handle this fairly, but just know that, if it wasn’t for Arthur, you wouldn’t be handling this professor’s ethic case but a student’s injury case. MY injury case. I bid you good day, Director.” She turned around, completely ignoring Professor Geist, who was taken aback by her last statement.

Recalling the testimonies I received, it seemed like Arthur completely overwhelmed Professor Geist. While this professor’s personality never did sit well with me, his skills were more than enough to teach a basic mana manipulation class. Even while being a light yellow core augments, and a quite capable one at that, he had been completely defeated by a twelve-year-old.

I let out a sigh in regret that I didn’t measure the level of the boy’s core while he was just here.

A twelve-year-old defeating a veteran adventurer using only his wind and earth attribute mana, which I remembered him mentioning were his weakest, and who also had a bond with a dragon. What more was there to him? If I asked, would he tell me?

ARTHUR LEYWIN’S POV:

“Art! Over here!” I saw Elijah waving at me across the dining hall.

I noticed he was sitting with a girl when I came over.

“This is Charlotte! Charlotte, this is my best friend and roommate, Arthur Leywin.” He stood up, gesturing the both of us to shake hands.

“Hi Arthur, I’ve heard a lot about you.” She gave a coquettish smile while twiddling her hair.

“Mmm... It’s a pleasure,” I responded brusquely before focusing my attention on Elijah.

“How were your classes?” I asked my friend while I fed Sylvie a piece of broccoli.

“Kyu!” ‘Noo!’

“Aww~ your little mana beast is so cute! Do you mind if I pet it?” Charlotte got awfully close to me, almost leaning on me while she reached for the top of my head.

But before she got the chance to pet the growling Sylvie, I grabbed her wrist.

“Sorry, she doesn’t like strangers touching her.” I looked her dead in the eye, making her blush by how close her face was to mine.

“O-Oh, I’m sorry!” She shrank back, focusing back on the food.

Seemingly ignorant of what was happening, Elijah responded, his mouth full of food. “Classes were great! I especially like my basic chain-casting class and mana utilization class. Although for mana utilization, I feel like the professor that’s teaching is going over the exact same thing that you told me to do. By the way, I met Charlotte in my chain-casting class! She’s really good!”

“Haha, please, you’re making me blush.” Charlotte put on a bashful face as she squirmed in her seat.

“...”

“Anyways, how were your classes?! I heard you already beat up a professor! What happened to keeping it cool, man?” He gave me a smirk while he pointed his fork at me accusingly.

“Yeah, about that, so I ended up becoming a professor for that class,” I responded coolly, shoving a piece of meat in my mouth while avoiding Sylvie’s attempts at trying to steal it.

Elijah spluttered the food he was chewing towards us as I instinctively leaned back, trying to get out of range.

The girl named Charlotte screamed as received the brunt of my friend’s attack.

“Elijah, that’s gross.” I wiped some of the stray food particles that I couldn’t manage to avoid from my face.

“Sorry, sorry...what? You’re going to be a professor?” He wiped his mouth before trying to wipe Charlotte’s face, but Charlotte rejected the offer.

“Mm... I ended up replacing the professor that was teaching the class. So you may now call me Professor Leywin.” I smirked at my friend.

“Professor, my a*s. But maybe I should ditch my class sometime and go to yours. It’d be interesting to see you teach,” he retorted.

As we continued talking, I grew annoyed at the flirting attempts from Charlotte, and even more annoyed at the fact that Elijah was clueless about it all.

“Oh yeah! Charlotte and I were going to go to Downtown Academy to do some shopping. Do you want to join us?” he asked nonchalantly.

“Yes! Arthur, you should join us.” She leaned in closer again. There was a small strip on the corner of the academy where fancy restaurants and cafes, along with shopping booths were located for the rich nobles to spoil themselves. With that, you could imagine how enormous the academy was.

“I have three more classes, remember? I’m taking the upper division classes after lunch.”

Elijah just shrugged at this. “Oh yeah, I forgot. No big deal! I guess it’ll just be me and Charlotte.”

Charlotte smiled awkwardly at Elijah’s happy-go-lucky face and responded, “Ah, sorry. I totally forgot that I had other plans today. I’m so sorry! We should definitely go next time, though! All three of us! Bye.”

With that, she walked off, leaving my friend and I alone at the small dining table.

“I guess she was really busy.” Elijah looked a bit disappointed.

Oh, Elijah...

Leaning close, he asked me in a serious voice. “So, what did you think about Charlotte? She’s pretty, huh?! Do you think I have a shot with her?”

Oh, Elijah...

"I think you can do better, buddy." I patted my clueless friend on the back as we walked out of the dining hall together.

Elijah decided that he wanted to go to the library after his plans suddenly washed away, so after walking him there, I made my way to my first upper division class, Team-Fighting Mechanics I.

The classroom, or should say field, to be more accurate, was on the other side of the academy, where all of the upper division classes were held.

The "room" consisted of a huge grass field with several obstacles placed randomly, encased by high walls with runes engraved in them. On top of one of the walls was a separate little room protected by a glass encasing. I assumed that the room was used as a viewing platform for the rest of the students.

I saw some students had arrived before me, talking to each other, and I immediately noticed some familiar figures.

"Ah! I didn't know you'd be in an upper division class, Arthur." Curtis Glayder waved at me as soon as he realized who I was. Grawder, Curtis' bond, was lying with his eyes closed right next to him.

"Yeah, I didn't think I'd have a class with you. Please take care of me." I grasped his hand.

"Good to see you again, Arthur!" Claire Bladeheart put her arm around my neck while smiling brightly. "We have to do our best not to embarrass the disciplinary committee, right?"

"Haha, I'll do my best. Is this everyone that's going to be in the class?" I replied, turning back to Curtis. I heard that this class had a fairly small number of students, and that it was one of the most popular classes.

"Hmmm, there should be a few... ah, there they come!" Looking back, I saw several more students and I couldn't help but smile wearily.

"Princess Tessia is as beautiful as always, isn't she?" I heard one of the students murmur.

Walking this way amongst the small group of students was Tessia Eralith, my childhood friend, and Clive Graves, the student vice president.

She noticed me and I could tell she was about to greet me but she noticed that I had an older woman's arm around my neck, so instead, she shot me a glare before snapping her head away, pouting.

Clive, oblivious of why she got angry, straight up gave me the death glare as his narrow eyes became even sharper.

"Good afternoon, Princess Tessia!" Not bothering to remove the arm around my neck, Claire smiled and waves at Tess.

"Pleasure," she responded, her expression fierce.

After she walked past us, she secretly snuck in a pinch to my side, jolting me up.

"Hmm, I wonder if she's in a bad mood today," Claire pondered.

It's because of you!

As Claire removed her arm from my neck, I turned to see someone behind us in the back of the group. As soon as I recognized who it was, my face started burning in anger while my clenched fists turned white. It was Lucas Wykes.

The Beginning After The End – Chapter 55: Match Start

My body couldn't help but tremble in suppressed anger at the thought of being in the same class as that brat Lucas, and of all classes, a team-fighting class. The sick irony of having that traitor in a class focused on learning team cohesion in battles almost made me want to laugh.

Our eyes met but he looked at me apathetically, like I was an insect on the ground.

"Good! Everyone's here!" a loud voice suddenly booms over the field. As all of the students started turning their heads to locate where the voice had come from, I looked straight up to see a massive hawk-like mana beast hovering over the field.

This beast was at least 4 meters long and its wingspan was well over 8 meters. With its sharp talons tucked underneath it, the beast slowly made its descent, revealing a well-toned woman with a giant sword strapped to her back, standing up on the back of the hawk.

"Welcome! My name is Professor Glory, and I will be the one teaching all of you brats! This Flare Hawk is Torch, my precious bond."

The first thing I did was measure the stage our professor's mana core was at, but upon trying to inspect her level, I felt a sudden sharp pain in my head as Professor Glory whipped her gaze at me. Giving me a confident smile, she gazed down in my direction. Hopping off of her Flare Hawk, she made her way around the group of students in her class. Studying each of the students she passed, she took a closer look at some of them before making her way towards me.

It wasn't unusual for mages to build defenses around their core stages, especially the higher level ones. It was also a lot more difficult to hide which element they used, since the mana particles of their element naturally surrounded them. Most don't find the need to hide their elemental attribute so it wasn't a big deal even if they couldn't, but needless to say, it was surprising to see how strong Professor Glory's defenses were.

I couldn't tell what her core stage was or even her elemental attribute. While I got the hang of masking my core stage level, I needed to use seals in order to completely hide my elemental attributes. I wasn't sure whether she used seals like I did but one thing was for sure: she knew I was the one inspecting her.

"I have to say, you guys have set the bar pretty high for all of the other classes," she announced after inspecting Lucas. She took quite a bit longer to inspect the disciplinary committee and the student council members, nodding every once in awhile.

"Well if it isn't my newest colleague, Arthur Leywin. It's a pleasure to meet you," Professor Glory gave me a playful grin, as if she was itching to tease me.

The students started murmuring amongst the group in confusion.

One of the male upperclassmen raised his hand. "Professor Glory, what do you mean by colleague?"

“Ah! Most of you probably saw him at the commencement this morning but this boy is a freshman disciplinary committee officer. A real prodigy if I do say so myself. He’s also a newly appointed professor for the Practical Mana Manipulation class that you guys all took during your underclassman years.” She gave me a firm pat on the back.

“WHAT?!!”

“You can’t be serious, Professor!”

“If that brat is a professor then I’m the king of this continent!”

“What has this academy turned into, to accept a freshman as a professor?”

“How is that even possible? Even the best upperclassmen these days don’t get picked to be professors, but that first year did?”

The various noises of protests made me sigh. They were bound to find out eventually but it would’ve taken the upperclassmen a bit longer to find out this news, considering they didn’t really get much information about the lower division classes.

“GRRRR~” Sylvie’s fur stood on-end as she growled warningly at the group of students. ‘Papa is stronger than all of you combined!’

Everyone had seen Sylvie by now, whether it was from passing through the academy or at the commencement ceremony earlier today so no one really cared much about the tiny mana beast on my head that could turn big enough to swallow them whole.

“Now, now! Before we jump straight into complaints, we should have more faith in the director’s decision. He has qualified to some degree by beating the professor that taught the class previously!” She shot me a wink.

“But Professor Glory! The underclassmen professors aren’t all that great anyway! I bet some of the upperclassmen students here could beat most of them!” Another round of complaints issued on, making me grow sleepy. Must’ve been the food coma setting in from lunch.

“Haha! To be honest, I’m itching to test how strong you really are, boy! Unfortunately, Director Goodsky made it clear for us to not do that. So! These students here will test you in my place!” She put her hands on her hip, grinning in anticipation.

By now, I noticed a sudden raging fire burning in some of the male students’ eyes as they looked at me. I could almost see the words they were thinking etched into their face.

‘I’m going to kill this b*****d.’

‘Who does this brat think he is?’

‘Murder, murder, murder, murder...’

‘I’m jealous. Why is he good looking too? He needs to die.’

The female students, on the other hand have a look in their eyes that scared me even more. Their stares remind me of hyenas looking at fresh meat as they almost drooled over the 'goods' that I suddenly became to them.

Taking a glance at Tess, I notice that she has a surprised look on her face, her lips curling slightly in pride, but when she noticed that I was looking at her and quickly glanced away, her ears a little red.

Sigh, you know... it's not weird for you to talk to me.

Clive, on the other hand, scowled in contempt while Lucas looked at me with his brow raised in renewed interest, as if I had gotten promoted from an insect to a mammal.

"Director Goodsky told me to take it easy on my upper division classes until I adjusted to school. This is my first day, after all," I tried to ease my way out of this. Fighting against these hormonal teenagers wasn't going to end well.

"Oh, come on! That's no fun now, is it? In order to get proper respect, a certain amount of skill needs to be shown, you know? It's just to prove to us that you are actually capable of being in this upper division class. Isn't that right, class?" she shouted.

"Yeah!"

Was this a military boot camp or something? Why was there always a reason to prove myself in whatever situation came up?

"Sigh... What did you have in mind, Professor Glory?" I said in defeat. This wasn't going to end and I didn't want to waste my breath in arguing with people who didn't want to hear logic.

"Fear not! I am a just and fair woman!" she harrumphed.

Just and fair, my a*s.

I felt as if she had just read my mind because she wrapped her well-built arm around my neck and squeezed. Unlike the Twin Horns' Angela's chest, hers was muscular and hard, not much different from a man's.

"We will start off this semester by playing a little game! Aren't I so nice?" By the look on her face, she was the most excited about this. Continuing on, she said, "So! What kind of game should we play... a mock team battle? War?"

"How about having the three disciplinary committee officers on the same team, Professor? I feel like that could be a good way to let us work on teamwork as well," Curtis raised his hand as Claire nodded in agreement next to him.

"Hmmm, not a bad idea!" she responded while rubbing her chin.

"But Professor, both Curtis and Claire are top students in this academy! It wouldn't be fair to have both of them on the same team as him," a tall, black-haired teen argued.

"That's true.... Aha! I got it! For the DC team, we will have Arthur play the role of king, the match resulting in an immediate loss if he gets put out of battle. I think that should be fair. Now, what about

the other team?" As if she was talking to herself, she started muttering off possible candidates when a hand raised.

"Professor. How about having the student council president and I as their opponent?" Clive suggested.

"What?" Tess turns her head to Clive in surprise. But before she had the chance to object, Professor Glory clasped her hands.

"OHH! Now things are getting interesting! But it would be unfair to have only the two of you against the three of them." She looked around the group of students.

"I think the president and I will suffice if the immediate loss rule affecting Arthur Leywin is implemented," he said seriously.

"I'll volunteer to be on the Student Council Team," Lucas Wykes said calmly while leaning on his staff.

"Hmmm, Mr. Wykes, our other genius freshman... Very well! It would be a good chance to see your abilities in action as well!" I could tell she had a twinge of doubt. Maybe she'd heard some rumors about him.

Some of the other students groaned in disappointment that they didn't get the chance to beat me up and be on the same team as the student council president but everyone was clearly excited to see the match.

"The match will have a time limit of 30 minutes, where we will have a short discussion and a breakdown of it afterwards. Please gear up!" With that, a pile of what looked like exercise gear dropped to the ground out of Professor Glory's dimension ring.

Turning serious, she began explaining. "This is special equipment designed by artificers to measure the amount of damage that is dealt. This equipment will activate, releasing a shrill noise, if the damage it takes passes the threshold that's encrypted into it. If anyone chooses to ignore this warning and continues to fight or cast spells, it will lead to immediate expulsion from my class and other possible consequences regarding your stay here as a student. This rule goes for any upper division fighting class in this academy, so engrave it into your guys' brains. All of you are at the level where protecting yourselves with mana shouldn't be a problem. Let me reiterate this but, this equipment won't protect you so don't rely on it as a source of protection," She announced to everyone else in the class as well. Clearing her throat, Professor Glory shouted. "Do I make myself clear?!"

"YES!"

"Good! Now, the six of you gear up." She got back on her bond while the rest of the students headed towards the viewing platform.

Curtis came up to me and patted my back before picking up his gear. "Well, it seems like we're going to have an early practice session! Let's do our best, Arthur. I still remember you wanting a sword back then. Let's see how good you are!"

"We can't embarrass the DC name now, can we? I'll make practice extra hard for anyone who doesn't meet standards!" Claire grinned evilly while grabbing her gear.

Clive and Lucas walked past me, ignoring me as I went after them to pick up my gear. The gear consisted of a tight jacket and a series of straps that I wrapped around my legs and arms.

I was having trouble putting on the arm wraps when Tess silently came up and helped me bind the straps around my right arm.

“Is it okay for Princess Tessia to be helping me like this?” I smirked while letting her help me.

Shooting me a glare, she tightened the straps, jerking my arm towards her. “Can it, Mr. Genius. They’re over there anyways. Sigh...I can’t stand acting like I don’t know you.” Her gaze softened.

“You know, they’re going to find out eventually. Why try so hard hiding it?” I shrugged.

“You mean... you don’t care? Grandma Cynthia mentioned to me about you wanting to keep a low profile so I thought...” Her face lost composure as she started stuttering.

“Pff... Well I haven’t been doing a very good job of that, now have I?” I couldn’t help but snicker, confusing Tess even more.

“It’s okay. There are just a few things I mainly wanted to hide. As long as those remain a secret, the rest doesn’t really matter. For one, do you notice anything?” I stuck out my chest to let her analyze me.

“I don’t get what... Ah! I can’t sense your—mfff!”

She was getting too loud so I had to cover her mouth. Leaning closer to her face, I whispered, “Yup, that, and Sylvie’s true identity as well. I’m keeping most of my abilities a secret for now so you have to do your part as well. Maybe keeping the fact that I visited your kingdom a secret might be a good idea but you don’t have to ignore me, Tess.” I let go of her mouth and patted her head, making her flush and push me away from her.

“Y-You’re too c-close,” Tess muttered under her breath as she’s tilted her head down.

“Are you guys done flirting over there?” Professor Glory’s voice from above surprised the both of us as I quickly finish adjusting the straps.

“Ah! Arthur. I suggest you leave your bond in a safer place if she’s not capable of assisting you during the battle like Curtis’ bond.” She pointed towards the viewing platform.

“Kyu!” Sylvie cried in protest.

“I think it’ll be better for you to sit this one out, Sylv,” I said while patting her small head.

‘Aww... Okay.’ She jumped off my head before scurrying off out of the field.

Tess just finished putting on her gear as I went up to her. “Let’s both do our best. I want to see how much you improved.”

Giving me a confident smile, she said back, “You better watch out then,” before running off to the other side of the field where Clive and Lucas were.

I headed towards Curtis and Claire. Claire was stretching while Curtis mounted on top of his World Lion, Grawder.

“Even with Grawder, we’re still at a disadvantage because they have two conjurers and Clive is a long range augments. The fact that it’s an instant loss for us if your gear activates gives us a seriously limited set of options.” Claire leaned on her unsheathed sword while stretching her leg back.

“You’re right. Claire and I don’t really know anything about your fighting style so we’ll match your pace. We’ll take priority in protecting you while we get in range to do some damage.” Curtis responded while petting Grawder.

I looked for Tess, Clive and Lucas and spotted them a few dozen meters away. Seemed like we were going to be target practice for them until we got in range. This would be fun.

I couldn’t help but grin as my blood boiled. It would feel good giving Lucas a few good blows during the match, although I could only imagine that both Lucas and Clive were thinking the same thing.

I took out Dawn’s Ballad, making sure to not take out its sheath, as both Curtis and Claire readied their weapons as well.

“That’s a beautiful sword you have there, Arthur,” Claire whistled as she stared at my blade. Then she released a fierce battle aura as she infused both wind and fire attribute mana into her body.

I had to admit that Curtis also looked pretty d**n impressive wielding his dual double-edged swords while mounting his bond.

I turned forward as well, imbuing wind and earth mana into my body and sword. My hair and clothes fluttered as the ground beneath me pulsed to my command.

Professor Glory’s powerful voice echoed through the battlefield, signaling us to begin.

“LET THE MATCH COMMENCE!”

The Beginning After The End – Chapter 56: This Is Going To Hurt

On Professor Glory’s signal, the three of us dashed forward. Curtis, who was mounted on top of Grawder, was to my left and Claire was to my right, both a bit ahead of me.

Tess, Clive and Lucas all split up as soon as we charged. Tess circled around the left side as she prepared to take on Curtis, while Clive dashed around the right side to confront Claire before she reached him.

Straight ahead, I saw Lucas calmly waiting for me, his face twisted into a haughty sneer that seemed to say ‘I don’t need to get ready for you.’ Whether it was at the Dire Tombs or even now, Lucas’ arrogance had no limit. I still remembered when he betrayed us by using us as live bait so he could escape. Even then, he had the same sneer he had now.

Tess was probably going to beat Curtis and I wasn’t sure who was stronger between Claire and Clive but I’d worry about that later. Wind and earth bent to my will as I infused more mana, activating mana rotation as well. Lucas wasn’t weak. His mana pool was bigger than mine, but that didn’t mean he was stronger than me.

“Will you be alright by yourself against Lucas?” I heard Curtis shout as he dashed towards Tess.

Claire looked back at me in slight worry as well until I gave them a silent nod. She nodded back and focused on the student vice president.

Lucas sensed a bit of the killing intent I purposely let out to shock him out of his pedestal as he began quietly chanting a spell while dashing backwards to get more distance between us.

Soaring up ahead, I felt Professor Glory's keen eyes studying me as I closed the gap between us. I took a deep breath and blocked out everything else. As far as I was concerned, this was a fight between Lucas and me. Narrowing my eyes in utmost concentration, each powerful step I took created small craters in the ground as the wind whistled around me.

Lucas let out a chortle before he released his spell. "Inferno's Cage!"

The spell reminded me of the Ember Wisp spell that both Lucas and Ex-Professor Geist had used, but it was a lot bigger. The orbs scattered and floated in place around the both of us, creating a dome made of fire.

Don't tell me...

With a confident smirk, he snapped his finger and uttered, "Activate."

The orbs glowed in response before spewing out bullets of fire. If it was a spell on the level of Ember Wisp, I would be able to close the gap while dodging the fireballs, but this was insane. Dozens of fire blasts were locked in on my position and fired at a constant rate, coming from all directions. If I hadn't train my body and fighting techniques during my time as an adventurer, I doubted that, no matter how fast I was, I would be able to dodge everything. Without even giving me a chance to take a step closer to my target, I was forced to dodge and block every incoming missile constantly bombarding me.

Inferno's Cage...whoever came up with this spell deserved a sword up the a*s to feel what a pain it was to deal with. On top of the constant fireballs and streams of flames that locked in on me, the heat inside this dome was wearing me down. Without my fire attribute mana or water attribute mana, there was no direct way to counter the heat inside. Using fire attribute mana to make my body more immune to fire or even using water attribute mana to directly cool my body were both out of the question.

"Keep running around, monkey. Do you think it's even possible for the peasants of the mages to actually have a chance against someone like me? I can't wait to step on you to crush whatever speck of confidence you had just because you became a DC member and a professor. I thought this class would be a waste of time but now I know why I was brought here. It was to crush you." His little pretty boy face was wrenched in an ugly expression as he sneered.

'Are you okay, Papa?' Sylvie's concerned voice echoed into my head after feeling how frustrated I was at the moment.

Yeah, I'm fine Sylv. Don't worry about me. How's everyone else doing? I send back.

'Mama is winning against Curtis and Claire is winning against that serious-looking guy,' she responded.

Okay, just tell me if something unusual happens. I turned my focus back to the fight. Dodging the flame bullets and the occasional streams of fire was easy but I couldn't get closer to Lucas. I would release a

wind blade and some spikes of earth at Lucas but either the orbs that made up the dome destroyed it or Lucas just blocked the spell with one of his.

What is with this kid's mana pool? Does he not have a limit to how long he can keep this spell up? No, calm down, Arthur. You don't want to be impatient. Think. How can I use wind? Wind? What is wind? It's the movement of air, right? What is air? Oxygen? Nitrogen? So am I able to control oxygen and nitrogen as well? If so, how?

I was growing frustrated at my lack of comprehension in my wind and earth elements. Now was as good a time as any to try and comprehend. It wasn't just enough to shoot wind bullets or wind blades because Lucas had already prepared several levels of fire shields around himself.

I wasn't thinking outside of the box when I used wind. Even with mana rotation, I didn't have the necessary mana to form a tornado big enough to swallow the fire shooting at me, and even if I did, I didn't think I'd be able to last longer than Lucas. What was I missing?

"Keep squirming! I'm sure I can get away with it if a couple of fireballs land on you, even after your gear activates. You know, since I can't cancel the blasts from the orbs once they've been released," He shrugged nonchalantly as the shields around him block any spells I fired at him.

Think, Arthur. Let's focus on fire. What does fire need for it keep burning? It needs oxygen. Could I get rid of the oxygen around me so that the fire couldn't reach me? Then what would happen to me? Would I be able to breathe?

PROFESSOR GLORY'S POV:

Hmmm... Lucas... he's better than I've heard.

Inferno's Cage was a pretty tough spell to master, yet he was able to cast it while running backwards. Seriously, he was barely thirteen and he could already use a domain type spell. Haa... the world sure was coming to a change, with a half-elf like him using fire attribute magic, and even Princess Tess—they were all monsters. I got shivers down my back imagining how strong they'd become by the time they graduated from here.

But that brat, Arthur... What the hell was he? Lucas Wykes, since he awakened a few years back thanks to his elf lineage, I could sort of understand the level of control he had with his spells. Tessia Eralith, her being of pure elven lineage from the royal family guaranteed that her skills were a few levels above anyone anywhere near her age. But Arthur?

As soon as he flashed through the field to confront Lucas, I felt cold sweat. The way both the wind and earth naturally gravitated and danced around him—he wasn't controlling the elements to his commands like typical mages did. No, he was in perfect harmony with the mana surrounding him, as if the elements were mere extensions of his limbs.

Seemed like that brat Lucas was taking Arthur seriously. Good thing too, or he probably would've lost instantly. Currently, the spell Inferno's Cage encompassed both Arthur and Lucas in a large dome of fire. I could tell Lucas was a bit worn out after using it, but this was a continuous spell that he could leave activated until he ran out of mana, which I didn't feel would happen anytime soon. The dome made up

of tiny orbs of fire was like a death trap used by conjurers to gain the advantage against augmenters or agile mana beasts.

The tiny orbs could shoot out beams and bullets of fire anywhere inside the dome, leaving the augments occupied enough so that the conjurer could cast more spells, uninterrupted.

I focused my gaze over to Curtis Glayder and Tessia Eralith. As expected, Curtis was having a hard time. I had the chance to observe the elf princess practicing with our director once, and I had to say, the way she battled was exquisite. She was a conjurer but her staff was actually a sharp blade made of a special wood that was lighter but harder than most metals. Casting buffs on herself and using spells in sync with her movement, she danced around the vines she conjured with a speed faster than even some trained augmenters from the wind aiding each motion and action.

She fought in a mixed style of both conjuring spells and using close combat so she had no notable weakness. Compared to my masculine way of fighting, I could only admire how graceful and beautiful her style was.

Claire Bladeheart, on the other hand, was gaining the advantage on our student vice president. Clive was a rare long range augments that wielded a short bow capable of firing arrows at an almost unbelievably fast pace. Usually, he would be at an advantage against most augmenters but Claire was a bad match-up for him. Miss Bladeheart's style mimicked that stick, Kaspian. With her dual elements, she created spears of wind and fire from her rapier. She had yet to reach his level but with constant training, I was confident she could surpass her uncle.

I turned my attention back to the most intense battle, which was definitely Arthur and Lucas'. I noticed that most of the students were watching their fight as well, in awe from both of their abilities.

"Hmm?" I couldn't help but raise an eyebrow at what was happening. That was strange. Arthur was getting hit by the fireballs now. At this rate, even with protection from mana, his gear was going to activate.

He had dodged them so effortlessly just a minute ago too. I focused more mana into my eyes to get a better look. The dome of fire surrounding them blocked a lot of the view but I could still sort of make out the fight. It seemed like Arthur was trying to do something. Was he holding his breath? What was he trying to do in this situation?

"Torch! Fly down a bit lower!" My bond descended as he angled his massive wings to keep himself level.

As we slowly circled around the huge fire dome that surrounded a third of the field, I began noticing some changes. Around him, for every three or four fire blast that scraped or hit him, one would completely extinguish before it reached him.

"No..." A smile crept up on my face as I continued observing him. "Don't tell me he's actually trying to learn how to manipulate air in this situation right now..." I covered my mouth as I continued to smile in wonder. "That little monster... he has guts, I'll give him that."

Air manipulation was a variation of wind magic, albeit a much harder one. Breaking down the components of any element and trying to directly manipulate it is something only the most keen and sensitive mages can do, and that's while meditating in a perfectly calm and peaceful environment. After

years of practice through meditation, the mage might begin experimenting in real life situations like incorporating it into spells.

The blue fire technique was a perfect example of that. It took years of meditation to reach the stage of stably summoning blue flames and even longer to do it fast enough for it be of use in actual battles.

This little beast was skipping a few steps and trying to incorporate a completely new technique in the middle of a battle? My hands trembled in excitement at the thought of being able to witness the development of a mage that can perhaps become the pinnacle of power in this school—no, maybe even this continent!

“GROOOOAAAAAARR!” Turning my attention at the sound, it seemed like Princess Tessia and Prince Glayder’s battle was reaching its climax.

Curtis Glayder’s uniform was full of small gashes and nicks. I must admit that Curtis had done fairly well against the only disciple of our Director Goodsky, although it was most likely because of his bond that he was able to last this long.

“You’ve forced me to do this, Princess Eralith! Please be careful! PHASE ONE! KING’S WRATH!” I heard Prince Glayder roar as his body glowed.

Oh! He activated the acquire phase of his beast’s will. Curtis rarely chose to use his beast’s ability because he didn’t really consider it his own power. I had to hand it to him for having the right mentality. It was said that some beast tamers chose to only use their unique powers instead of honing their own. Because of that, while still strong, they never really improve themselves in the long run. In order to utilize the most of the beast will, the user himself needed to strengthen his own power.

As he activated his beast will’s first phase, a noticeable transformation occurred in him. While the amount of visible change differed by the person, Prince Glayder’s change was visibly apparent. Both his deep red spiky hair and eyebrows became longer and messier while the straps that wrapped around his arms tightened from his muscles expanding. His extended canines became visible as he roared.

I whistled. This sight never failed to impress me.

When I shifted my gaze to Princess Tessia, though, who was standing on top of a series of vines, her face looked unnaturally pale. That’s odd, it didn’t look like she took any damage.

I was quite a bit away from Tessia and Curtis’ battle since I was encircling Lucas and Arthur’s, but with mana-infused eyes, I could make out even the beads of sweat rolling down the princess’ face.

“This is my most powerful attack. If you can take this on, I’ll admit my defeat! Please prepare yourself!” Prince Glayder’s voice became a lot louder and huskier after activating his beast’s will. He was a ferocious sight to behold on top of his bond, Grawder.

“WORLD HOWL!” A serious amount of mana gathered in front of the mouth of Prince Glayder as he invoked his breath attack. The world lion had a powerful move that they used as a last resort against enemies more powerful than them. It was a beam of condensed earth attribute mana that could shred anything in its way if not blocked properly.

A little worried, I looked at Tessia again, and I could see her mumble an incantation when the worst case scenario happened.

ARTHUR LEYWIN'S POV:

Goddamn it! This is frustrating as hell! I could only grimace and try harder as I continued to try and manipulate the air molecules surrounding me. I had little success so far but I felt like I was onto something here. Lucas, noticing this, clicked his tongue and started chanting spells again.

"Flame Guardians!" he shouted.

I let out a small grin as I realized he was reaching his limit. Then again, so was I—or more accurately, so was my combat equipment. I wasn't sure when this thing would start screaming its alarm so I had to finish this fast.

As the flame soldiers gained on me, Sylvie's worried voice boomed in my head, 'PAPA! Something's wrong with Mama! She's going to get hit by a powerful attack and she's not doing anything! This is really bad! Should I go help, Papa?'

Dammit!

'NO! You can't do anything while you're in that form!' I shouted back in my head.

I could sense the feeling of desperation from Sylvie, making me all the more anxious.

"NOOO!!"

I took a quick glance up to where I heard Professor Glory's scream and noticed she'd gone full speed to where Tess and Curtis was.

'Papa! She's not going to make it in time!' Sylvie echoed back, sounding even more worried than before.

Dammit!

[Dragon's Will, Phase One. Static Void.]

My knees almost gave upon activation of the first phase of Sylvia's beast will as the color of everything became inverted. This ability to shift myself outside of the world's time and space came with a limit. I couldn't affect anything outside of myself unless I chose to bring it in here with me.

"I don't have time," I said to myself.

As I dashed through the gap between the orbs that made up the dome created by Inferno's Cage, I passed by the frozen professor on top of her mount, Torch.

Quite a bit ahead I saw Tess, already fainted and falling from the conjured vine she was standing on, clutching her abdomen as a massive breath attack released by Glayder was almost upon her.

Sylvie was right. If I had left it to Professor Glory, she wouldn't have made it in time. I could only purse my lips in dread as I imagined my precious friend dying.

I sped up, my vision growing blurry as I ran out of energy. I was almost at my limit.

F**k. Hold on, Arthur. You can do this.

I made my final dash towards the area where Curtis and Tess were fighting and as I jumped off a crumbled vine, I wrapped my body around Tess and create a barrier around the both of us with the little mana I had left.

Haa.... This is going to hurt.

I released my first phase and as the world reverted back into its original color, I felt a tremendous searing pain on my back. But before I could even scream, my vision faded, and the last thing I heard before passing out was the shrill sound of my gear activating.

The Beginning After The End – Chapter 57: Family Gathering

PROFESSOR GLORY'S POV:

I'm too late! D**n it! What happened to her? Why did she suddenly collapse? Is something wrong with her mana core? Why now?

I could only watch in horror as Prince Curtis' breath attack made its way towards Princess Tessia. With absolute no defenses around her, would she live? If so, would she even be able to continue being a mage? Forget mage—she might have to live crippled for the rest of her life!

I could feel tears well up in my eyes as I desperately made my way towards them, but I knew I wasn't going to make it. What would the consequences be? I would be happy if it just ended with me getting fired. I was more concerned that this would start a civil war. During this important time in the continent, was I going to be the cause of the split between the three races?

As Curtis' World Howl engulfed the princess, I screamed in dread. A look of shock crossed Prince Glayder's face as he realized after releasing his attack that Tessia was already unconscious. There was no way, though. There was no way to stop the attack.

After what seemed like hours, the beam slowly dissipated, and what I saw shocked me even more than the worst possible scenario I imagined.

In utter incredulity, I just stammered. "A-A-Arthur Leywin?"

How the hell did he get there? Just moments ago, he was occupied with Lucas inside Inferno's Cage. Instant teleportation? Was that even possible?

No... no no... no... that wasn't possible.

I jumped off of Torch as soon as I got close enough and rushed towards Arthur and Princess Tessia. Arthur was in bad shape. Most of his clothes were disintegrated, with only patches of his uniform intact and a strange bandage around his left arm. He was b****y all over and I could see deep gashes near his sides where a rib bone was visible. His body was wrapped around the princess and from what I could tell; he'd used most of his mana to protect her. Thanks to that, she was almost unscathed.

The rest of the students all rushed out of the viewing platform and made their way here. Fortunately, the princess was okay, but Arthur needed immediate attention. But as soon as I got close enough to try and help them, Arthur's little bond stopped me in my tracks.

“Grrr...” Normally, I’d find the small white fox that rode on top of Arthur’s head cute, but right now, the killing intent it was giving off was anything but. The amount of pure menace radiating from that little fox was no joke. It seemed to be protecting its master and Princess Tessia.

“It’s okay little buddy, I’m only trying to help.” I tried to slowly ease my way closer but its growl only got louder. Torch, who was normally unafraid even in the chaos of battle, held me back with her beak clutching the back of my shirt.

“P-Professor, I-I didn’t mean to. I mean, I didn’t think Princess Tessia would suddenly faint.” Curtis ran to me, his face pale in fright.

“It’s alright, I know. I don’t know how, but Arthur managed to protect the Princess. His bond won’t let me get close to them though.” I clenched my fists in frustration. Arthur needed immediate attention. Why was his bond risking his master’s life by doing this? What was it trying to protect?

Curtis tried to get to Arthur and Tessia but failed as well, so we all just stood around the two of them. Every attempt at getting even a step closer to Arthur and Tessia resulted in the bond lashing out at us. “Someone get Director Goodsky!” I barked out. Some of the students regained their senses but when they were about to leave, a loud screech filled the air.

From above, a green owl soared down and landed in front of Arthur’s bond.

“Kyu!”

“Hoo~”

“Kyu kyu~”

“Hoot!”

“A-Are they communicating?” Prince Glayder couldn’t help but stammer out in confusion.

“I-I think so?” I scratched my head at this. Could mana beasts of different species communicate with each other?

As we all stood there, watching a white fox and a green owl ‘talk’, a couple of minutes later, Director Goodsky arrived looking quite flustered.

“Oh my.” She kneeled in front of the two of them but this time, Arthur’s bond didn’t do anything to stop her.

“Director Goodsky...” Before I had the chance to tell her what happened, she stopped me.

“Please. I’ll hear what happened later. Taking these two to the infirmary is top priority. I will take them myself. Go contact Guild Hall and have them send over their top healers,” she said while levitating Arthur and the princess.

I gave her a nod before getting on top of Torch.

ARTHUR LEYWIN’S POV:

“COUGH! COUGH! Aughh...”

I woke up to a jolt of searing pain throughout my side, causing me to erupt in a fit of coughs. My whole body felt immersed in a concoction of different kinds of pain, from the stabbing pain to the burning pain to the throbbing pain with the occasional tearing pain radiating over my entire body.

Without the strength to even scream, I was left gritting my teeth as I clenched the side of the bed I was lying on.

They really needed to hurry up and invent anesthesia.

A few minutes later as I got a little more used to the agony my body was in; I feebly turned my head to see Sylvie sleeping next to me.

“How are you feeling, Arthur?” Director Goodsky’s familiar voice came from the other side of the bed.

Without the strength to turn my head again, I whimpered, “Never better. Why do you ask?”

“If you have the will to answer sarcastically, I’m sure you’ll be okay,” she chuckled

If I had the strength to roll my eyes at her, I would have.

“How’s Tessia?” I asked, my voice hoarse.

“Well, good news is, Tessia is in a much better state than you.” She let out a sigh.

“...Her body can’t handle her beast will, right?”

“How did you know?” Director Goodsky came around so she could face me completely.

“Because I was the one that gave the beast will to her.” I tried to sit up but the pain from my body made me stop almost immediately.

Continuing what I was saying, I gritted my teeth to bear the pain. “Make sure no one knows that Tessia has a beast will, at least for now. I’d help Tessia with the assimilation myself if I was able to but I’ll leave her to you.” I could tell she wanted to ask more questions but she held back for my sake.

“Once I got you both back into infirmary, I didn’t let anyone else see either of you besides the healers. I contacted the royal family, as well as your own, though. They should be coming soon. I assumed that she acquired the beast will from Virion but to think it was from you...Get some rest, Arthur. Though your body is unusually strong and I don’t think there will be any repercussions from moving around soon, it’s better to be safe than sorry.” She headed to the door but turned back before leaving. “Thank you for saving Tessia.”

I gave her a weak smile as I slumped back to sleep.

The next time I stirred awake was from Sylvie licking my cheek. ‘Papa, are you feeling better now?’

I must’ve been having a nightmare because I was drenched in sweat.

“Honey! Art is awake!” I heard my mother’s voice to my left.

Turning my head was a lot easier if I ignored the pain.

“Hey Mom, when’d you guys get here?” I gave her the best smile I could muster up.

“Are you okay? Director Goodsky didn’t really tell us what happened yet. How did you get hurt so badly on the first day of school?!” I could tell she wanted to hug me but she held herself back after realizing I probably wasn’t in the best state for that.

My sister rushed to the other side of the bed and leaned forward. “Brother!! Are you okay now? Does it hurt?” My eyes widened in horror as I noticed that she was about to place her hand on my body to probe me but before she was able to, Mother stopped her.

“You’re already getting into fights, Son?” my father smirked.

“You should see how the other guy looks,” I grinned back, making him laugh.

My mother just gasped at this and started actually imagining what the other person must look like.

“He’s only joking, Mrs. Leywin.” Coming in through the door was Director Goodsky with the whole Eralith family, including Tess, who was looking a lot better.

“Th-This...” My father took a step back in surprise as my mother gasped, covering her mouth.

“Pleased to finally make your acquaintance, Mr. and Mrs. Leywin,” Alduin Eralith, Tessia’s father and the former king of Elenoir, grabbed my stunned father’s hand and shook it.

“We have always wanted to meet the parents of Arthur. It is such a pleasure to meet you in person.” Merial, the former queen of Elenoir and Tessia’s mother, Merial Eralith hugged my mother, who still had her hands over her mouth in disbelief.

Merial then went to Ellie and patted her head gently. “You must be Arthur’s little sister. You’re so adorable!”

“I-I saw you guys at the announcement a couple of months back...” My father’s speaking skills seemed to drastically decline in front of them, which I found surprising since they didn’t react this much even towards the king and queen of Sapin.

“Greetings. I go by Virion Eralith, and I am your son’s former teacher.” He shot me a cheeky grin as he grasped my father’s hand.

Without the energy to even retort, I just smiled helplessly back as my father and mother’s gazes switched back and forth between the Eralith family and me.

“H-H-H-Hello! My name is Tessia Eralith. It’s a pleasure to m-meet you! Please take care of me! I’m Arthur’s childhood f-f-friend and I’m not sure if he talked about me with you but I really am!” Tessia bowed so her body was at a full ninety-degree angle, her voice a mixture of respect and panic. She quickly got back up with her hair draping over most of her face and as she tried to fix her hair, I could see her face becoming more and more red.

At this, my parents became a bit more surprised, but my mother looked at me with a coy smile that suggested she was onto something and knelt in front of Tess.

"I see. Well aren't you the prettiest girl I've ever seen. Please take good care of my son. As you may know, he's the type to get into trouble a lot, so it'll really help me if I know he has someone like you next to him, now and in the future." My mother shot her a wink as she stroked Tess' hair.

I wasn't really sure what Tess really heard but she was definitely overthinking everything. Eyes widening as her already red face turned a shade brighter, she responded in a voice that was an octave higher than usual. "Y-YESS!!!" she beamed while nodding vigorously.

My father was still clueless as to what was going on but I could only internally groan. Leave it to my mother to instill misleading thoughts like this in a thirteen-year-old girl.

After getting back up, both my mother and Merial broke out into a fit of giggles while my sister began pouting, presumably because our mother said that Tess was the prettiest girl she'd ever seen.

"How are you feeling, brat?" Virion took a seat on the edge of the bed as he gave a pat to Sylvie who went back to sleep. Tess, regaining her senses, walked up to me too with a worried expression.

"Heh...I can beat you in a fight right now, Gramps." I tried to hold in the coughs that were about to come out but I couldn't.

"I'm so sorry, Art. If it wasn't for me, you wouldn't have been..." I stopped her mid-sentence and poked her gently between her eyebrows with my finger.

"Don't furrow your brows, Tess. Your face will turn ugly." As the strength in my arm gave out, I slumped back down and took a deep breath.

"Gramps, did you take a look at Tess' mana core? How's everything looking?" I couldn't help but be worried since I knew exactly what she was going through.

He gave me a soft smile. "Luckily, her body seems to be a lot more compatible with the beast core than your body was when you first integrated. By the way... How the hell did you manage to pick up an elderwood guardian's beast core?" He leaned in forward and spoke in a hushed voice.

"By killing one, of course." I gave him a weak smirk.

"You're joking...no...you're joking, right? You're telling me that you killed an S class mana beast?" Grampa's usually stern face was round in astonishment as he got even closer, our faces almost touching.

"You're too close, Gramps. I can smell what you had for your last meal...wait. How long have I been out for?" I couldn't get a grasp on how much time had passed.

"From what Cynthia told me, it's been a bit more than a day since you passed out. You missed your second day of class." He let out a sigh.

"Oh no... I guess I can forget about shooting for perfect attendance..." I gave a weak elbow to his arm, making him chuckle.

Tessia giggled as well as she took a seat on the bed too.

"I'm telling you! I'm Arthur Leywin's best friend! We're like brothers! If I can't visit him, then who can? I'm telling you, it's true!!" I heard a familiar voice echo in the distance and I couldn't help but chortle at my friend.

Director Goodsky, hearing this as well, signaled to the security to let him through.

"ARTHUR! You okay, man?" He rushed towards me, totally oblivious to the other people in the room.

"You're late. And you didn't even bring any food with you?" Letting out an exaggerated sigh, I just slightly shook my head.

"Haaa... I guess you're fine if you can talk like that." Elijah let out a sigh as relief washed over his face.

I started smiling as his head came back up and recognized who the other people in the room were. My friend's face contorted from relief to terror as he realized that, besides my family, the Director of the academy and the whole Royal Family of the Kingdom of Elenoir were also in the room.

"Uhh...oh my..." His slack jaw failed to form words.

"Pfft, Hahaha...oww...haha!" My stomach felt like it was being wrangled as I couldn't stop laughing.

"Gramps, Mr. and Mrs. Eralith, I'd like you to meet my closest friend, Elijah."

"P-Pleased to meet you! Sorry for being so rude just now!" Elijah immediately bowed, almost dropping his glasses.

After everyone got acquainted with each other, my parents continued to chat with Tess' parents at the other side of the room. Gramps finally left me alone and started catching up with Director Goodsky after wringing me of all the details and telling me to make time for him once I'm better to further discuss everything else.

"Brother. Who's prettier, me or her?" Ellie pointed at Tess and gave me a serious look.

"You guys are both pretty ugly to me." I just shrugged helplessly but I regretted it as soon as the words left my mouth.

"OWW! That seriously hurts right now!" I groaned as the both of them pinched and twisted the skin on my arm.

"Tess, like I said, Elijah is a close friend of mine. You guys should get along." I said through gritted teeth, my arm still throbbing, moreso from the state of my body than the power of my sister and Tess' pinches.

"Sorry, I never formally introduced myself to you. I'm Tessia Eralith, Arthur's closest friend." She stuck out her hand and as Elijah accepted her handshake, he responded, "I'm Elijah, Arthur's best friend. Nice to meet you." Sparks flew between them as they glared at each other in competition.

I just rolled my eyes as my sister giggled. I was getting tired from being awake for even this long, my eyelids beginning to weigh down heavily.

Director Goodsky, noticing this, announced to everyone, "Now! I think we should give Arthur some more time to rest. His life isn't in danger but he should be very tired right now."

“Son, come visit home after you’re all healed up, okay?” My father grasped my hand and gave it a gentle squeeze before herding my family out.

“Get plenty of rest. Okay, dear?” my mother said as she headed out. Tess’ parents said their brief goodbyes while patting me softly on the arm before following out after my parents.

“We’ll catch up soon, brat.” Virion ruffled my hair, making me wince, and towed Tess and Elijah out with him.

“Haa...” I looked at Sylvie, who was still fast asleep.

As I was about to close my eyes, the door squeaked open once more.

“Did you leave something, Tess?” Spotting from the corner of my eyes, I didn’t bother turning my head.

“Hey Arthur...” She arrived next to me and glanced back at the door.

“Hmm?”

“You said you couldn’t really move your body, right?” I could see in my peripheral view that she was fidgeting a little.

“I can probably only turn my head and lift my arm for a little bit, why?” As I turned my head towards her, my eyes widen in surprise as I realized that Tess’ face was just inches away from mine. Her eyes gazed at me with an expression I’d never seen in her ever and before long, I felt her lips as she closed her eyes.

The soft, warm sensation of her lips on top of mine caught me by surprise but my body didn’t let me react. Instead, I spotted a small mole in the outer corner of her left eye that I’d never noticed before.

As she pulled away, her eyes locked onto mine. Then she quickly turned her head and ran out of the room, leaving me more dazed than when I had first woken up.

The Beginning After The End, Chapter 58: Feelings and Old Memories

TESSIA ERALITH’S POV:

I kissed him... I k-kissed him!

As I ran out of the room, I could feel the temperature in my face rising rapidly. That was my first k-kiss! I wonder if he liked it? Did I do it right? My face didn’t look weird as I kissed him r-right?

I stopped in the hall and looked at my reflection in the window. I stood right in front of it and pretended to kiss Art again to see how I’d looked.

“EEK! NOOO!!” Banging my head on the window in embarrassment, I could only groan at the thought of how weird I must’ve looked to him. As I looked outside through the window with my forehead still glued against it, I touched my lips with my fingers.

His lips sure were soft. They were a bit chapped since he was so hurt but it felt nice.

“Hehe...”

I noticed that my face in the reflection showed a perverted grin.

Oh God, I'm turning into a pervert. I wonder if I came on too strong? What if he didn't like it? What if he thinks I'm some sort of pervert now?

"UGHHH!" I slumped down to my knees as my forehead slid down the window.

Wait. How was I supposed to face him now? Things were just getting better too! Did I just ruin everything? What if he ignored me now, when he saw me?

A throbbing ache thumped in my chest as tears started welling up in the corners of my eyes. I wouldn't be able to bear it if Art ignored me like that.

Should I go back to his room and pretend it was all a joke? I imagined myself bursting in the room, laughing and pointing at him. "Got you! Hahaha! You really fell for it!"

Am I stupid? I groaned again at the stupidity of it all.

No! You did the right thing, Tess! Things would never progress if I left it up to Art! He still treats me like a child every time we're together. It was for the best!

"Yeah!" I fist pumped the air to encourage myself but I still let out a big sigh at the thought of him not liking me.

"Tch!" Who cares?! If that stupid Art chooses to ignore me, I can just find someone better than him! He wasn't that great anyway! He's just a teeny bit better-looking than average. He's only slightly better than mediocre in magic, right?

Sigh. Who was I kidding? I couldn't imagine myself with anyone else but Arthur. Sure, over the years, there were nobles that tried to impress me and tried to get close but they didn't come close to Arthur.

That stupid Art! He's such a player! "Don't furrow your brows, Tess. Your face will turn ugly,"

" I said in a mocking tone, imitating him.

Tch! Making my heart skip a beat for no reason! That stupid player!

"GAH! Who cares if he doesn't like you, Tess! It's his loss! What don't you have? You're a talented mage! You're also pretty smart and popular too, right? Not to sound conceited but you're not a bad-looking girl either, right? Arthur is the one that's missing out if he doesn't s****h you up!" I pointed at my reflection as if she's a different person.

I wondered what kind of excuses I could make to talk to Arthur. There were plenty of excuses! His Mother personally asked me to watch over him, yeah! A-And also, the beast core assimilation! I could just ask him to help me with it since he was the one that gave me the beast core! It was only right that he took the responsibility, right?

Sigh...

I took one last look back at where Arthur's room was before I slumped back to my dorm.

ARTHUR LEYWIN'S POV:

I k-kissed Tess...

I kissed Tessia Eralith, a thirteen-year-old girl. Wasn't this a crime? Was I a criminal? No, I had to calm down. I was in the body of a twelve-year-old boy. Why did I feel so guilty then? I shouldn't, right?

She was the one that kissed me after all! I was the victim here! Making a move on me while I was in this vulnerable state...he sure was smart, that Tess. As I stared blankly at the door she'd left through, my shaking hand finally reached my lips and I just lay there, dumbfounded, touching my mouth as my mind couldn't help but recall the soft, moist touch of her lips.

This was wrong. Yes, I was technically only twelve years old, but with the mental age from my previous life and this life combined, I was almost 50! Even assuming that I had kids late, Tess would still be around the age of a daughter if I'd had one.

Goddammit! All of this was because of this accursed body! These raging hormones in my body right now! The reason I was feeling so guilty was because I actually enjoyed it. It felt nice when Tess kissed me. It shouldn't feel nice and I shouldn't enjoy a kiss from a little girl, but I did.

I groaned, half from pain and the other half from thinking about what was going to happen between Tess and I. Knowing her, she was probably over-thinking a lot of things right now and she was going to be really uncomfortable around me.

I almost laughed at the thought of what people might think of Tess when she was with me. If someone didn't know any better, they might even assume that she hated me since she was the type to act cold when she didn't know what to do.

Something told me that if I didn't clear things up with her, there would only be more misunderstandings.

How should I clear things up though? It's not like she confessed or anything. Should we date? No, no, no. Did kids our age even know what dating was?

I looked back and thought of the time when I was twelve in my past life. When I was twelve, my life was filled with only training. Being raised in an orphanage and getting sent to an institute solely dedicated to raising duelists, I couldn't say that I really had any experience dating.

We were too young anyhow, right? I was technically only twelve in this body! Was this body even capable of reproducing yet? Oh God, now you're overthinking this, Arthur.

Haa... it wasn't like I hated Tess. I was actually quite fond of her. She was still immature in some senses, but I shouldn't let that be an excuse right?

"What do you think, Sylv?" I poked my sleeping bond as her body slowly heaved up and down with her breaths. I was surprised she hadn't woken up when Tess kissed me.

As I played with my bond's ears and paws, my breaths began to synchronize with hers, and I soon fell asleep.

Over the past couple of days, quite a few people came to visit me while my body was recovering. Curtis came by and asked if I was okay. I only shot him a grin and said that his move was pretty d**n strong,

making him laugh. Claire Bladeheart also stopped by to check on me and kept me up-to-date committee meetings so I wouldn't be totally lost when I went back.

To my surprise, Kathryn came by herself instead of with her brother. She asked if I was okay and I swore, she had a worried expression on her face. I was more surprised by that than anything else. I could tell everyone had a lot of questions. Curtis looked like he wanted to ask me something a few times but he held back because of my condition. Even Professor Glory came to visit, with basket of fruits in hand.

"I'll tell you now, Lucas has been pretty heated up in class. I can't blame him, though. To him, it must've felt like he was beating you in every sense, but you suddenly disappeared and appeared a few hundred meters away instantly." She paused before continuing. "H-How did you do it anyways? I've never seen anything like that. You should know that even Director Goodsky isn't capable of what you just did. Instant teleportation was always thought of to be a myth. Yet, here you are, a twelve-year-old..."

By this time, I was able to sit up without it hurting that much, so I lifted myself up just enough to be at eye-level with the seated Professor Glory.

"Growth isn't stopped by a lack of talent or a series of unfortunate luck. Growth is stopped once the person limits his own ability to grow. With that said, I believe everyone has a secret or two they wish to keep to themselves." I sunk back down in my bed, leaving Professor Glory confused and without a means to respond.

Director Goodsky visited once. I asked what was happening to the class I was supposed to be teaching and they said that, for now, Professor Glory volunteered to take on the extra class as a substitute until I was better. She didn't stay for long and came mainly to update me on how Tess was doing.

"As her assimilation continues, she's becoming more and more stable. These past couple of days, she has only had one more fit," she stated.

"Thanks for taking care of her, Director." I gave her a smile.

"Don't thank me, Arthur. She is my precious disciple, after all. Ahh, that reminds me. I will be out of the academy for a couple days on some business. Since Virion has gone back, I need you to help Tessia with her assimilation until I am back. Can you do that for me?" she said, not waiting for an answer before leaving through the door, as if the question was a mere formality.

"Uh, yeah. Sure, I can do that." I shook my head helplessly at this. I wasn't sure if Director Goodsky really has errands to run but she was definitely giving me an excuse to meet Tess.

My body's recovery rate was a lot faster thanks to the assimilation of Sylvia's Dragon Will into my muscles and bones. I also spent this time while recovering to meditate and develop my mana core. I was at the threshold of breaking out of the dark yellow stage but it would take a bit more time until I could reach solid yellow. I would still feel a bit weak, but thankfully I planned on leaving the infirmary and resuming normal school life starting tomorrow. My body felt stiff from being in bed for so long.

Hearing a strong knock on the door, I called, "Come in." I turned my head as Sylvie hopped off the bed and padded towards the door.

"I came to visit you!" My father had a wide grin on his face as soon as he noticed how much better I looked than before.

“Hey, Dad.” I smiled back as Sylvie ‘kyus’ in greeting before hopping back up next to me.

Taking a seat, my father caught me up on everything going on at home. We talked for quite a bit of time and I realized how comfortable it was to talk to my father. Family sure was different than anyone else. The fact that he didn’t have any ulterior motives, no plan, no secrets, was comforting. He just wanted what was best for me.

After a brief period of silence, I asked him something that had been bothering me. “Hey, Dad. How come Mom never really uses her magic? I mean, she healed small wounds for me when I was little and stuff, but that was about it. I remember you telling me how great of an emitter she was.”

Looking at my father, I was surprised that his usual bright face turned a little sullen.

“Your mother...she carries a lot of weight in her heart.” Letting out a deep sigh, he continued.

“I know you’re mature enough to know this but I want you to be patient. She’ll tell you when she feels ready, so I want you to wait for her to tell you directly.” He ruffled before we changed topics.

“How’s everyone doing at home anyway?” It hadn’t been that long but it still felt like it’d been awhile since I’d spent some time with my family.

“Oh, you know, your mother is busy mingling with her friends. Your sister, though, she’s becoming quite a handful.” He chuckles to himself.

“Maybe we had it too easy raising you, but I sometimes just don’t know what to do with Ellie.” Scratching his head, I notice some wrinkles that hadn’t been there before.

“Just give her some space. She’ll come around.” Patting my father’s arm weakly, I repositioned myself as I felt my body cramping up.

“I should let you rest, Son.” He pinched my nose softly and quietly left through the door, leaving me wondering what could possibly have happened with Mother that she became too traumatized to use her powers.

“Kyu?” Sylvie asked me what I was thinking of and I just shook my head. “It’s nothing, Sylv. I hope.”

The Beginning After The End – Chapter 59: First Day On The Job

“Easy... take it slow. There you go.” Elijah supported me back up. It’d been exactly one week since I had gotten injured and also since the last time I’d walked. Even with mana circulating throughout my body, strengthening my limbs, I still felt rather sluggish.

“Kyu...” Sylvie looked at me with as close of a concerned face she could have for a fox-like mana beast. She was walking beside me instead of curling up on top of my head, afraid that I wouldn’t be able to hold her up.

Elijah came over to my hospital room as soon as his first period was over. I would be starting off my day as a professor for the Practical Mana Manipulation class and I wasn’t so eager in my current state. With my legs giving out every couple of steps and my back and sides burning, I barely had the strength to get to the class, let alone teach it.

After slowly getting used to walking, I stopped leaning on Elijah for support and used Dawn's Ballad as my walking stick. I couldn't help but chuckle because of the ill-humored irony. I remember how I had thought that this sword was nothing more than a walking stick when in fact, it was a priceless sword. I shook my head at the fact that my assumption back then had actually been a foreshadowing of my current situation.

Elijah wrapped the handle and sheath in a white bandage both for comfort and for safety from suspicious eyes. Here I was, a twelve-year-old, already using a cane to support myself from falling.

"Are you going to be okay by yourself? Maybe I should at least help you out in between classes today?" Elijah's face wrinkled in concern as he stuck close by me, ready to catch me if I stumbled.

"I'll be okay." I didn't have the confidence to say that I wouldn't fall, but I didn't want to keep Elijah constantly by my side.

As we arrived in front of the classroom, Elijah's brows were still furrowed underneath his glasses, and I knew he was hesitant to let me go by myself.

"Arthur. Let me help you."

I turned my head around to see Princess Kathyln run toward me, away from her group of friends. Without giving me a chance to respond, she placed her arm around my waist as she dipped underneath my free hand so I wouldn't just be using on my walking st—sword, as support.

"Uhh... okay. Thank you." I shrugged at Elijah, who stood with jaws agape. He held up two fingers as he mouthed the word 'princesses' but I just shook my head and turned back to make my way inside my room.

"I heard our new professor is finally coming today!"

"Oh really? I liked Professor Glory, though."

"Anyone should be better than Professor Geist, right?"

"You never know, we might get an even more dangerous weirdo this time."

"Hey, isn't that the disciplinary committee officer that beat Geist?"

"Why is he limping?"

The various discussions the students were having all changed to murmurs about me as soon as I walked in.

"I'll be fine now, Princess Kathyln. Thank you." I eased my arm off of her shoulders.

"You need help up the stairs..." Her expressionless face didn't match the concern in her voice. I just shook my head and motioned for her to go first.

Sylvie followed close behind as I walked to the middle of the room, taking small hops towards the moveable podium that was placed in the center of the small stadium.

“Whew...” I let out a deep breath in relief as I put all of my weight on the podium that stood a bit too tall for my height.

Looking up, I spotted Feyrith in one of the desks with a curious expression on his face. As soon as KathlyIn reached her desk, I spotted her looking back, trying to find me. She also gave me a confused look when she realized that I’d never gone up the stairs behind her and instead, moved to the middle of the room.

By this time, the conversations amongst the classmates centered around me diminished as more and more of the young mages began wondering what I was doing leaning against the professor’s podium.

“I’m not sure how many of you know my name, but I believe that most of you at least know who I am. My name is Arthur Leywin, a disciplinary committee member, the only son of two wonderful mages, a dotting brother, and your new professor. Let’s get along.”

I counted down in my head, predicting when the class would erupt. Almost exactly in sync, the entitled students that filled the classroom stood up in disbelief and some in anger as they shouted to stop kidding around and get back to my seat.

“You expect us to believe that a brat like you is our new professor?” one of the second-years exclaimed.

“Stop messing around and get back up here! Who do you think you are?” one short first-year barked.

I let out a pained breath as I relished the thought of being able to teach this class while lying down.

This would be a lot easier if Professor Glory or Director Goodsky let the class know that I would be teaching beforehand. She should have at least given me an official document to prove that I was the new professor, but knowing her, I couldn’t help but wonder if Director Goodsky did this on purpose.

It, at least, seemed like something she would do.

“Mmm... would you guys believe me if I said that Director Goodsky appointed me to be the professor for this class for the remainder of the semester?”

“Get real!”

“Stop joking!”

“Shut up!”

Another round of protests resounded within the room as the students grew rowdier.

Looking to my fellow committee members, I could see Feyrith’s sharp face, filled with a mixture of incredulity and doubt, while KathlyIn wore a perplexed expression.

“Don’t get so c***y just because you beat the old professor! Do you think you could’ve won if Princess KathlyIn and Feyrith didn’t tire him out?” a different second-year jumped down and landed on the stage with a loud thud.

The student had a pretty big build, and judging from the poor circulation of mana in his body, he was probably at the level of being able to augment only some of his body.

He took long strides towards me, preparing to carry me off the stage. Feyrith stood up, ready to jump on the stage as well to stop the big guy but I just shook my head at him.

Misunderstanding my gesture as a taunt, he roared, "You shaking your head at me now? Who do you think you are?"

Half of the students were a bit nervous, not wanting to get caught up in another drama during class, while the other half was cheering Mr. Brute on.

Shifting my gaze back down at the boy approaching me, I uttered a single word.

"Sit."

Suddenly bombarded with a large influx of mana, the large student crumpled to his bottom with enough force to slightly shake the stage we were on.

The room grew deathly quiet as I hobbled over to the confused and embarrassed student sitting upright on his behind. Standing over him, I remained silent, giving him a moment to let it sink in to the oaf what sort of position he was in.

"Director Goodsky didn't bother giving me any official documents proving my claim, but like it or not, I will be teaching this class."

I stepped over the student and made my way to the other side of the silent room.

"If any of you has a problem with this, you can take it up with this cute little fox here, though I guarantee that she will easily wipe the floor with any of you." I scooped up Sylvie below her armpits and show the entire class.

The students looked at one another, unsure of what to do, so I continued speaking. "For those who want to leave, I won't stop you—in fact, I'll even allow you to be put into another class of your choice. However, if any of you here are even a tiny bit curious as to what this little boy here with a limp can teach you, feel free to stay." I pointed at the door and waited a few seconds, but whether it was because of my little demonstration with the second-year or because they were afraid, none of the students actually left.

"Now... If you'll please go back to your seat, student, I'll begin my lesson." I peered at the second-year that had jumped down to eagerly show off his limited ability.

His face turning beet red, the student quickly got up and scrambled back up to his seat. As he did so, I took my time slowly limping back to the center of the stage and leaned on the podium that Sylvie had jumped up on.

"Since this is a Practical Mana Manipulation class, I'll ask a practical question. What is the best way to utilize mana in the surrounding atmosphere?" I scanned through the seats filled with students when almost instantly, a beak-nosed human student with a ponytail shot her hand up.

"Mana is best utilized by absorbing the mana naturally formed in the atmosphere into the mana core where it can be condensed and purified for use when spells or techniques are cast." She gave me a smug look, obviously proud of her answer.

“Good. Now, as you all know, the difference between augmenters and conjurers lie in the fact that augmenters mostly use the mana in their cores via their mana channels while conjurers directly absorb mana from the surrounding atmosphere via their mana veins. So... why do both types of mages have to meditate and absorb mana if only the augmenters actually utilize the mana they absorb into their core?” I quizzed, not looking at anyone in particular.

“...” The same girl’s confident hand shrank down as she pondered over the answer.

“While augmenters incorporate mana into physical attacks, thus reducing the amount of mana used, conjurers manipulate the space that the spell is casted in directly, consuming more mana. Because of that, conjurers use the purified mana in their mana core as a reserve to avoid backlash,” Kathlyn answered, her face relaxed as she remained seated.

“Correct. Then the last question of the day: is the color of a conjurer’s or even an augments’ mana core a truly accurate way of measuring the level of the mage’s power?” I leaned forward, shifting my weight from my left leg to my right.

I hold in my chuckle as Kathlyn’s usually composed face scrunched in deep thought. “That’ll be your homework for today. Everyone, come down to the stage and line up! I want the conjurers to my left and augmenters to my right.”

After a few grumbles of complaints, eventually everyone made their way to one side of the stadium, all lined up side by side, facing me.

“For this exercise, I want everyone to initiate the most basic spell of your affinity. Conjurers, no wand,” I stated.

For augmenters, the most basic spells taught all came in a very similar form. For fire affinity augmenters, it would be Fire Fist, which was igniting a small ember covering their fist. For wind, it would be Whirlwind Fist. For water, it would be Aqua Fist, and for earth, Boulder Fist. After mages were able to manifest their elements, the augmenters’ first step was learning to integrate their element into their hands, the limbs they were most accustomed to using.

The fact that these royal mages were even allowed to attend this school was because, thanks to their lineage, they had high talent and usually had the ability to manifest their elements early on. It took my father more than twenty years in order for him to manifest an actual flame, but these twelve to fourteen-year-olds were already capable of this. That was the difference in genes, something that even I found to be undeniable.

As for the conjurers, the most basic spell involved gathering a specific elemental mana into a sphere and shooting it. For fire specialists, that would be in the form of the spell, Fireball. For wind, it would be Wind Bullet. For water, Water Bullet, and for earth, Stone Bullet.

Conjurers had it easier since they didn’t have to directly form the element in their bodies, but absorb the specific mana particles around them and use that to invoke the spell. Why conjurers had specializations in different elements had to do with how well they were able to sense the specific elemental mana particles around them and utilize it.

I leaned my head on my palms as I watched both types of mages prepare their spell.

The augmenters in the class all began concentrating with their dominant hands clenched into fists. A few long seconds later, their spells became visible as their respective elements enveloped their fists. The time it took for the augmenters varied but not by much.

The conjurers in the class all began softly chanting as the space in front of their palms began glowing different colors, depending on their elemental affinities. Unsurprisingly, the time it took Feyrith and Kathyln to form the spell in front of their hands was much faster than everyone else.

The only difference between the augmenters and conjurers in their spells was that the augmenters' elements surrounded their fists while the conjurers' elements gathered in front of their palms.

"Now, augmenters, I want you to try and launch your spell in front of you. Conjurers, I want you to try and absorb the spell you conjured into your hand." I gave them an innocent smile as they stared at me blankly.

After a few seconds, they realized I wasn't joking so, one by one, they began their attempts at a concept very foreign to their nature.

I watched as the augmenters all failed in their attempts. Some roared as they flailed their arms while others tried to chant to no avail. It got to the point where it became almost comical as one student thought roaring out 'fire' would do the trick.

The conjurers weren't any better as all of them ended up getting cut, burned, wet or bruised. After about ten minutes of struggling, most gave up and looked at me accusingly; even Feyrith and Kathyln had expressions of doubt.

"This is stupid. We all know that only high level augmenters can cast long distance spells!" one of the augmenters students cried.

"Yeah! And what's the point in absorbing back a spell we prepared and conjured anyway?" an elven student whined as she cradled her hand.

Leaving Sylvie on top of the podium, I hobbled to the opposite side of the stage, away from the students.

Taking a brief moment to concentrate, I aimed at an open space between the conjurers and augmenters.

A gust of wind formed around my hand before shooting out past the students. By the time it reached the metal wall behind them, the bullet of air dissipated harmlessly.

One of the students retorted, "Big deal, but most augmenters can do that once they reach orange stage."

"True, it's not hard to do that, but—" I raised my other arm and shot a stream of compressed air directly out of my palm. The attack whistled as it hit the wall behind the students once more, but this time, the wall caved in at the pressure, forming a small crater. "—have you seen any augmenters do that at the orange stage?"

The students, startled by the impact of the supposedly same spell, whipped their heads back and forth between me and the wall.

“I can’t accurately demonstrate what would happen when conjurers are able to absorb the spells that they invoke, but trust me, it’ll only help you.”

I staggered back to the podium and grabbed my bond. “That’s it for today. Try and come up with the answer to the question and practice what I just told you to do. See you tomorrow.”

I gave them one last wave as I left the room. Once outside, I could hear the students inside erupt in excitement.

“How’d I do, Sylv?” I asked, letting go of my bond.

‘Not bad. But I could do better,’ she replied brightly, walking by my side.

The Beginning After The End – Chapter 60: Confrontation

I took a deep breath as I sat outside on a nearby bench. Realizing that I ended class a bit too early, I noticed the campus was fairly peaceful with most students still in their classrooms. It’d been awhile since I’d felt this weak, but getting up and walking around definitely helped.

I sat idly, watching Sylvie chase after a butterfly through the lawn in front of me when I heard footsteps approaching from the right.

“Is this seat taken?” I turned my head to see Princess Kathyln leaning forward so her face was level with mine.

“No, go ahead.” I said as I slowly scooched a bit to my left to make room for her. She carefully placed her handkerchief over the bench and took a seat on top of it, straightening out her rumpled skirt. We sat there, silently, as both of us just watched Sylvie finally capture the agile butterfly that was now struggling in her paws.

“I heard about what happened from my brother... I’m sorry.” Her voice grew quiet at the end of her sentence.

I kept my eyes focused on Sylvie but responded with a soft chuckle. “Why are you saying sorry as well? Even if it was your brother’s fault, which it isn’t, he already apologized.”

“It’s just... I feel like my family owes you many apologies. For what happened with Sebastian and my father as well. That time at the Auction House... he’s not usually like that but he was shocked as well at the turn of events and he needed to keep his image and...” For the first time, I witnessed Kathyln getting flustered as her usual composed face became flushed, her expression panicked as she tried to make me understand.

“I think this is the first time I’ve seen an actual difference in your expression, Princess. It’s a nice change.” I snickered as she blushed even brighter, turning her body away from me.

“...Please, don’t mock me, Arthur. I didn’t expect you to be this type of person,” she said with her head still turned.

“Oh? What kind of person did you expect me to be?” I tilted my head in curiosity.

“W-Well, when I first met you at the auction event, I noticed you held yourself with much maturity...” she murmured, not turning back around.

“You noticed how people hold themselves when you were barely eight years old?” Reading the posture of a person was something keen adults barely learned how to do later on with years of meeting many different kinds of people.

“Yes... being the only princess of a kingdom, you end up acquiring that skill fairly quickly. Also, with both my father and brother being quite the characters, I felt like my mother and I were the only normal ones at times.” By this time, Princess Kathryn turned back to face me.

“Oh? I didn’t really find anything unusual about your brother. He seemed quite charismatic.” I remembered meeting Curtis for the first time at the Auction House. Compared to then, he’d matured quite a bit.

“Yes, he’s gotten a lot better, seeing as he’s able to apologize to you. That would’ve been very hard for him a while back because of his pride.” She let out a sigh as she both of us spectated Sylvie’s little battle with another bug. “When I first saw you, I noticed right away that you were very different from everyone else. How should I say this? I was very intrigued by you...” Her head lowered a bit as she continued speaking.

“Haha... is that right? I thought the opposite since your face had no reaction or change the whole time.” I let out a soft laugh in reminiscence, remembering the event that happened four years prior.

“I apologize. I-I’m not the most proficient in using my facial muscles effectively.” I found it cute as she pushed her cheeks up and down with her fingers in an attempt to forcefully make different expressions.

“Tell me about it. I was beginning to think you were wearing a mask by how stiff your face was.” I felt her gaze on my face when I smiled, making me feel a little awkward.

“...I will practice.” Princess Kathryn suddenly nodded to herself as I noticed her expression looked slightly more determined than usual.

“Pfft! I’m not sure if this is something you can practice. Just don’t force your emotions down and let your face move the way it wants to according to how you feel. When you feel sad, your face will naturally want to frown. When you’re happy, your face will naturally want to smile. Like this!” I overexaggerated the expressions on my face as I switch from an ugly frown to a bright smile, causing her to suddenly turn away from me.

Oops. Did I overdo it?

KATHYLN GLAYDER’S POV:

I couldn’t show any weakness. As the only girl in the royal family besides my mother, I had a duty to uphold. When males came to visit me, hoping to gain my favor, I wouldn’t show any weakness they could use against me. That was my fight.

I couldn’t read minds, but it wasn’t hard to see that all of the males that came to me, both my age and ones a lot older, had ulterior motives. Royal lineage, superior ability, and physical appearance... the

things that all people believed would make their lives easier were shackles that robbed me of the freedom I wished to have.

Yet, here I was, with a boy my age that was so much more talented and sought after, yet still so... bright. He shined with a brilliance that made me want to be like him. What made him so different from me? How was he still able to express his emotions freely without being afraid of how others would view him?

I couldn't control myself from letting out a laugh as Arthur contorted his face like that. He looked so silly.

I immediately covered my mouth after giggling, trying to hide my smile.

"See! That wasn't so hard!" His exaggerated smile turned gentle, comforting me.

"I should teach stuff like this instead of Mana Manipulation, right?" He let out a pained laugh as he leaned down to pet his bond that was sitting between his legs.

"That reminds me. The wind bullet spell that you used to demonstrate seemed almost like a conjurer's spell compared to the second one you used. How exactly did you do it? I am also curious as to why you made the conjurers try and absorb the spell back into their bodies. I have never heard of conjurers doing that." I went on like an excited child about the questions that filled my mind, making me embarrassed.

"Whoa! Is that why you came up to me? Is this what you were after?" He leaned away from me, shocked.

"N-No! Of course not! That was never my intention!" Oh no! I wasn't like the men that came after me with some motive. I just saw him sitting there and wanted to... why did I ask to sit next to him?

I realized my hand was slightly touching his arm so I pulled it back quickly.

"Heh, I was obviously joking, Princess. I'm not sure if I should tell you though. It wouldn't be very fair of me to give you the advantage like that, right?" He gave me a little wink that made my chest feel heavy all of a sudden. What was that?

"I-I guess you are right. It would be unfair to give me answers to the homework you assigned," I responded quietly.

"Mmm... well, I guess I can give a little pointer for a fellow disciplinary committee member. Watch now." I look up to see him concentrate as he lifted both his hands, palms up.

His left hand began to glow as soft winds swirled, surrounding his hand. As for his right hand, only a small portion in the center of his palm glowed. The wind that gathered towards this hand didn't surround his entire hand, but instead, swirled into a sphere just above his palm. With a brief flick of his wrists, he shot out the small gusts of wind in both hands forward.

The wind that surrounded his left hand dissipated after a few meters but the spherical wind that he conjured with his right hand shot out several times farther before dissipating with a soft 'pa'!

"There is your hint for the augments' homework. As for what I assigned the conjurers, think backwards." He got up as I contemplated what he'd just done.

"I should get going now. Let me know if you need more lessons on facial expressions." He gave me an exaggerated scowl, then a perverted smile, making me almost laugh again.

"Aww... you didn't laugh this time. Too bad." He slowly walked off with his bond scampering next to him. I couldn't help but feel a bit empty as I sat alone on the bench that now seemed too big for just me to sit on.

ARTHUR LEYWIN'S POV:

"Psst. I heard you got hurt on the first day of class. Are you okay?" Emily's thick glasses shifted down as she leaned forward next to me, whispering in the middle of class. We were learning about the basic components that made up different types of artifacts.

All of a sudden, a piece of chalk flew straight at Emily, disappearing somewhere into her curly hair.

Gideon gave a light cough, his hand still stretched out after throwing the chalk at her. "Miss Watsken, please enlighten the class on the various components in a basic light-producing artifact."

"The basic light-producing artifact is made up of the basic foundation crystal, Florenite, found abundantly near the outskirts of Sapin and also in the Kingdom of Darv. After Florenite is refined, it will constantly let out a dim light so in order to control the output of the ore..."

"Ok ok, that's enough. Sheesh, I just asked for the material." Gideon grumbled something under his breath as he cut Emily mid-explanation.

Giving a light shrug, she took out some paper to write on while she made futile attempts to scavenge the piece of chalk buried somewhere deep in her hair.

We exchanged notes for a bit, writing to each other about what happened. I tried skimming over the details but that didn't really seem to work with her.

Eventually, because of the lack of details from my side, she wasn't really able to piece anything together, leaving her frustrated and curious.

"Something seems off..." She eyed me as we left class after packing up our things. For homework, we were already assigned some sort of mini project where we had to assemble a light-producing artifact, or LPA for short.

"You're overthinking things, Emily. I'm more worried about the project that Gideon already assigned us. I'm so lost after missing the first week." This was actually true. My critical thinking abilities and vague knowledge of technology from my past allowed me to make connections and understand more than most first years, but everyone was grumbling about how this class was one of their hardest. Leave it to that eccentric Gideon to teach a basic class as if it were several levels higher.

"Meh, I already have a couple LPAs I made lying around in my dorm anyway. Might as well put them to use." She adjusted her oversized backpack and we headed over to grab lunch.

"Wow... you could probably ace this class in your sleep." I shook my head as I picked up a tray and grabbed some food.

"Kyu!" 'Get more meat, Papa!' Sylvie hopped on top of my head in protest when I picked up some vegetables.

"Ok ok." I went back and picked up a few more pieces of meat when Emily looked at me with a weird expression on her face.

"Can you understand what your bond is saying?" She lifted her glasses up in place as she looked up at Sylvie.

"Can't all bonds?" I asked.

"No, not at all, actually. They can understand their emotions to a certain extent but not... verbal cues." Her eyes squinted as she took a closer look at Sylvie.

Pushing her head back with my finger on her forehead, I responded, "That's what I meant. I only felt my bond complaining and I just inferred that it was because I picked up vegetables. You're overthinking things again, Emily."

"Yeah, I guess you're right. She's cute though." She just shrugged and picked up more food for herself.

"Ah! There you are, Art! Director Goodsky wants...Oh, hello." Elijah stopped in his tracks as he realized I was with a friend.

"Hey, Elijah. This is Emily. Emily, Elijah." I said with my mouth half full with a piece of stewed beef.

"Nice to meet you! Emily smiled and stuck out the hand that wasn't carrying her food tray.

"A pleasure to meet you," Elijah responded as he shook her hand, a look of curiosity on his face.

"Anyways, Art. You need to...uh... head over to your training room. Director Goodsky, remember?" He gave me a look, signaling that it was urgent.

"Oh... wait, now?" I looked at my food.

"Yes. Now." He gently pushed me towards the door while I tried to scarf down as much food as I could. Sylvie swept a big portion of the meat with her tongue as we placed the tray next to the trash bin.

"You two get acquainted! I'll be leaving first!" I waved at my friends as they waved back.

I remembered Director Goodsky telling me where my private training room would be while I was in the hospital room. Supposedly, the mana density was supposed to be a lot higher there, making it easier to train.

"I wonder what Director Goodsky wants. I should give her a mouthful about class today," I said to no one in particular as Sylvie and I made our way towards the room.

All of the rooms were underneath the library, where a staff member had to lead you. Usually, upperclassmen were allowed to borrow a room for a couple of hours to train but I was lucky to have a private one all to myself.

There were two entrances in the library building: one to the actual library, the other to a sort of waiting room for all of the training facilities. Opening the entrance to the waiting room, I walked slowly past some upperclassmen before arriving at the front desk. "Hi, my name is Arthur Leywin." I didn't exactly

know what Director Goodsky wanted so I hoped that the lady at the front desk would know what to do once I told her my name.

“Ah, yes! Today is your first time visiting the room, correct?” The lady had a very refined suit, reminding me of a concierge at some fancy hotel.

“Yes.” I nodded in response as she bent down and opened a drawer.

“Please place both your palms on this stone. Make sure all of the tips of your fingers are flat.” In both hands, she held out a flat tablet with various inscriptions etched onto it.

Doing as told, I felt a brief numbing sensation spread over my hands as she activated the tablet.

“Perfect! I’ll show you to your room. Please follow me.” Leading me to a room in the back where a scarred man about two meters tall and holding a spear guarded the door, the front desk lady ushered me forward.

The room that the scarred man guarded was actually some sort of elevator put together by various gears, which I assumed were powered by either mana cores or some other mana-producing ore.

“Wow. This is my first time riding in something like this.” I said in awe, reminiscing the last time I rode in an elevator.

“Fufu, yes. Not many of these exist yet. The genius artificer Gideon, who is currently a professor here, built this device. I’m sure you’ve heard of him?” She said, admiring the elevator herself.

“More than heard of him. He’s actually one of my professors. With the way he teaches his class, I wish he wasn’t such a genius.” I gave her a wink, making her giggle.

“Here we are! Make sure to remember how to get to your room. Since I’ve registered you to your room, you are allowed to come in anytime you wish,” she said while guiding me through the halls.

“That scary scarred man won’t stop me?” I asked, pointing up with my sheathed sword.

“Hoho, no. He won’t stop you. Ah! We’ve arrived.” We reached the end of the hall where there was a large set of double doors without any handles.

“This door seems different from all of the other ones.” I turned my head back to compare.

“Yes. Director Goodsky seems to place quite a bit of precedence in your training.” She gave me a charming smile.

“Yet she doesn’t even bother to tell my class who their new professor is,” I muttered under my breath.

“Excuse me?” The lady tilted her head in confusion.

“It’s nothing. So how do I open this?” I responded while Sylvie jumped off my head and excitedly hopped in place in front of the double doors.

“If you place either of your palms against the door, it will open automatically. If you need any further assistance, there is a communication device inside where you can contact me. If you are hungry, I can also send someone over to bring you some food.” She bowed, waiting for me to open the door.

“Thank you. What was your name?” I turned my head, my hand raised, ready to open the door.

“Please call me Chloe. I wish you a fruitful training session.” She said, her head still down.

“Got it. Thanks again, Chloe.” I turned back and placed my right hand on the double doors. With a loud engine-like noise, the area where I placed my palm glowed as streams of light branched out. Eventually, the light dimmed and the door slid open to reveal a room very different from what I imagined.

I turned my head back but Chloe was already gone. Sylvie ran off before I could even take a step forward and as I looked inside the room, the sudden brightness compared to the dim hall made me squint. My vision soon adjusted and, as I lowered my hand, my eyes spotted a familiar figure, fidgeting in place as Sylvie scurried up her leg.

I didn’t know if it was from the sparkling brightness inside the room or the fact that this room looked more like a huge natural wonder rather than a training facility but my childhood friend looked stunning. Tess, who was cuddling her cheek against Sylvie on her shoulder, stood before me, wearing a very loose, white training robe.

“H-hi,” Tess said with her head lowered and eyes looking up at me.

I stepped forward as the door closed behind me. The floor underneath me was grass, and there was a rather big pond with a waterfall as well. Huge boulders and trees surrounded us, making me feel as if this was a dream. Snapping out of my momentary daze, I scratched my head with the hand that wasn’t holding Dawn’s Ballad.

“Hey, Tess.” I gave her an awkward smile.

“S-Should we get started?” Tess put Sylvie down on the ground before she shyly started removing her robe.

“W-Wait, what? Get started with what?” I almost tripped backwards as I saw her bare shoulders.

“The assimilation! Grandpa told me that it work better if you help me through bare skin!” Her face was bright red as I realized she had her b*****s covered in some gauze.

Ah right... the assimilation...

Wait, what?

Freaking Gramps, what are you making your granddaughter do?!

“Gramps told you that? Y-You don’t need to take off your clothes for the assimilation, stupid! He was messing with you!” I covered my eyes with my hand.

Calm down, Arthur. She’s just a 13-year-old. Looking at her like this is a crime!

“S-Shut up! How was I supposed to—UGH...” Tess fell to her knees before she was able to lift her robe again.

I ran as fast as my injured body would let me as I put Dawn’s Ballad back into my dimension ring. Kneeling down next to her, I placed my palm on her warm, pale back. Her robe was down, revealing everything from the waist up with the exception of her b*****s and a portion of her back, which were

covered by the gauze. As I felt her body tremble in pain, I couldn't help but notice how frail she looked. I guess it was because I knew how strong of a mage she was; I'd forgotten that she was still just a young girl—physically, at least.

Taking off the seal on my wrist, I willed mana into my childhood friend. Using all four elements, I controlled the mana to spread throughout her body, counteracting the mana coming from the Elderwood Guardian's beast will. What Gramps did while I was assimilating was just easing my pain, but by using a balanced mixture of mana from all four elements, I was able to essentially help her body fight against the beast will.

I never tested this but it was based on the same principles I used to help awaken Lilia and my sister.

Her ragged breathing soon calmed down, her trembling gone as she began panting from the relief. As I gently lifted her robe over her frail body, I walked over to the pond and splashed my face with its cold water.

I needed to calm myself down.

After a few moments, I felt my heartbeat slowing down but reacted again when I heard Tess making her way to me, Sylvie trotting behind her.

Sitting down on her legs next to me, she stared at me, her flushed, tired face still sparkling, as if she wanted to say something. After a moment of hesitation, she spoke to me in a firm voice.

"Art, can we talk?"