

The Beginning After The End, Chapter 7: How I Wished

Just from what I could see, there were at least thirty bandits. Our current situation was unfavorable at best, as both our path forward and our retreat back were blocked off by bandits wielding swords, spears, and other close ranged weapons. On the mountainside to our right, there were archers positioned atop a cliff, their bows aimed at us, while only the steep edge of the mountain with the looming fog beckoned to our left.

Jasmine, Durden, and my father seemed to be fine, with no visible injuries, but Helen had an unhealthy pale complexion that seemed to be a result of the arrow jutting from her right calf.

A bald man with multiple scars deforming his face and a body of a bear carrying a giant battle axe spoke out. "Look what we have here. Pretty good catch boys. Leave only the girls and the kid alive. Try not to scar them too much. Damaged goods will only sell for less," he snorted with a smirk that revealed a nearly toothless mouth.

Damaged goods...

I felt my body temperature rising; tensing from a smoldering anger I haven't felt towards someone in a while.

Being sheltered in the bubble of my home had almost made me forget that any world has its own share of trash like him.

I was ready to rush towards this brute, almost forgetting the fact that I was now in a four-year-old's body when my father yelled out, "There are only 4 mages and none of them seem to be conjurers! The rest are normal warriors!"

Faint mana fluctuations around a person's body made mages distinguishable compared to normal humans, only apparent if studied closely. As for whether they were an augments or conjurer, making an inference based on physical structure and the weapon they were holding gave me a pretty solid idea.

I could visible see how quickly my father reverted back to his former adventurer days when he had once led the Twin Horns as his expression held the wisdom that could only come from experience. He donned his gauntlets, shouting, "Safeguard Formation!"

Adam quickly arrived behind us as he faced the back of the road, spear pointed, while Jasmine and Helen came to our left with both of their weapons unsheathed, facing ahead. My father and Durden faced the mountainside, positioning themselves to protect us from the archers overhead. Meanwhile, Angela maintained her position, preparing another spell as she kept her wind barrier active.

"Gather and guard my allies O' benevolent Earth; do not let them be harmed!"

[Earth Wall]

The ground rumbled as a four-meter earthen wall transmuted up from the ground curving up in front of Durden.

Using that moment, my father burst forward, raising his gauntlets in a guard position against the arrows towards the enemy archers.

Moments later, Angela finished her spell and unleashed a torrent of wind blades, aimed at the front and back of the path. That was apparently the cue as Adam and Jasmine shadowed behind the wind spell, arriving in front of our distraught enemies that were covering their vitals against the flurry of blades. Helen remained, her arrow nocked and bow drawn, imbuing the tip with mana that shined in a faint blue light.

It didn't take a genius to realize that this arrangement was ideal for protecting valuable goods or people. With two layers of protection from the conjurers and an archer mage ready to snipe anyone who managed to cross the assaults of Adam, Jasmine, and Father into the defense line, it was a standard, yet, well thought out formation.

"Warrior coming your way, Helen!" Adam shouted as he dodged the swing of a mace, delivering a precise swipe to the jugular of the unfortunate bandit. His eyes widened as he dropped his weapon, desperately trying to seal the fatal wound with his trembling hands as blood spurting out through the gaps between his fingers.

Mother was holding me firmly in her bosom as she tried to shield my eyes from the scenes of gore happening around us. Fortunately for me, she wasn't looking down at me so she didn't realize that I could see fairly clearly.

Meanwhile, a scruff, middle-aged man wielding a machete lunged towards Angela, hoping to disrupt the spell. Although the wind blade spell didn't seem all too powerful, it provided a painful distraction that was keeping us on equal footing, despite our lack in numbers.

I tried to free myself to block the man before he got in range to attack Angela, but before I could pull myself away from my mother, it was already over.

The fierce sound of the show came only after the arrow had done its job. Helen's shot had carried a force powerful enough to pierce through the armored chest of the machete-wielding bandit and lift him up and back a half-dozen meters, nailing him into the ground.

I took a brief moment to take a mental note: wise men ought not to p**s off Helen.

Helen's eyes narrowed as she nocked and drew another arrow. Focusing, I could faintly see the mana gathering into her right eye as she shut her left. Soon, another reinforced

arrow streaked through, followed by a sharp hiss, ignoring all opposing air resistance as it closed in on another enemy fighter.

This man vaguely resembled a smaller Durden, except more muscular and more angular of a face. His brows furrowing in concentration, his giant sword, which was the his height, had somehow reached the arrow in time, generating a sound of a bullet hitting metal. The enemy fighter slid back, but wasn't harmed as he anchored his greatsword into ground, using it to balance himself. However, before even had the chance to smirk in content, a second arrow pierced through his forehead. It was a grim sight, seeing the light drain from his eyes.

Jasmine was engaged in an intense duel against an augments, whose weapon was a long chain whip. It looked like Jasmine was at a disadvantage since the range of her two daggers was lacking. She was doing all she could to dodge the erratic movements of the whip.

By now, it was evident the enemy had realized how much she was struggling as he jeered while licking his lips. "I'll make sure to treat you real well before we sell you off as a slave, little missy. Don't worry, by the time I'm done training you, you'll be begging to stay with me," he hissed, followed by another lick of his lips.

The very thought made me shudder, but, at this point, all I could do was clench my fists in frustration. Against a fighter, I had a chance; against an adult augments? I didn't have the confidence in winning.

It pained me to stay in the protection of everyone while they risked their lives? I tried to come up with ways to help, but, so far, none came to mind. I could only grit my teeth and endure.

Surveying the battle, I saw that the earth wall was holding strong, none of the arrows being able to penetrate through. Focusing on Durden, I watched his left hand that was directed towards the earth wall as he maintained a constant flow of mana to keep it from collapsing. He formed a narrow slit in the middle of the wall to gain vision on my father and the archers scattering, trying to run away.

"Take heed, Mother Earth, and answer my call. Pierce my enemies. Let none of them live."

[Rupture Spike]

After a brief delay, a dozen spikes began shooting up from the ground at the bandit archers. While a few managed to dodge, many of the bandits were impaled, their screams only lasting a couple of moments before dying.

Durden looked recognizably drained from that spell; his jaw clenched as beads of sweat ran down his pale face..

It was at this moment that I noticed my mother had taken out a wand. Her her trembling fingers were fumbling with it before she shook her head and stuffed it back into her robe. In the wand's stead, she held onto me tighter.

There was no one from our side injured besides Helen, who had bound the wound on her calf. Fortunately the arrow wasn't lodged in too deep, thanks to Helen's mana reinforcement; by the time she wound it, the bleeding had stopped, but throughout this whole time, my mother had a constant look of paranoia, her face pale with worry. I couldn't help but notice that her hand kept reaching for the wand in her robe until she decided to draw it back, last minute. Her eyes never stayed fixed to one place, always turning left and right, trying to look out for anything that could harm us.

While a little confused at first, I dismissed it; mentally concluding that, since she wasn't an adventurer for too long, unlike my father, she was simply not used to situations like.

The battle was coming to its peak. The bandit group had not suspected that every one of our group members would be a capable mage. Because of that calculation error, all of the melee fighters were dead, the only ones alive being the four mages and a couple of scattered archers on the run.

Jasmine was still having trouble with the perverted chain user, but the arrogance on his face was wiped clean by this time, with a couple of nicks and cuts on his body dripping blood.

Adam was engaged with a dual-sworded augments. His fighting style reminded me of a snake, with his flexible maneuvers and sudden attacks.

He should be considered one of the rare elemental augments with a water-attribute style.

Reinforcing the shaft of his spear to be flexible, his attacks were a mirage of quick thrusts and fluid swipes. The battle looked to be in his favor; the dual wielder had wounds that were profusely bleeding as he desperately tried to parry the onslaught of attacks.

A thundering crash shifted my attention away from Adam's battle. My father had been knocked down against the debris of what was now left of the [Earth Wall] spell and was struggling to pick himself up as blood dribbled down from the side of his lips.

"Dad!!" "Honey!"

I rushed out of the wind barrier, kneeling in front of Father, my mother following immediately behind. I could see the panic written on her face as she nervously contemplated what she could do.

I didn't know why she wasn't healing him, maybe because she was so startled, but just when I was about to suggest it, my father cut me off.

"Cough! Alice, listen to me. Don't worry about me. If you use a healing spell right now, they'll realize what you are and try that much harder to capture you. They'll be willing to sacrifice a lot more if they know!" he stressed, his voice in a low whisper.

After a brief, trembling hesitation, my mother took out her wand and began chanting. I would've assumed that her stammered chanting was caused by seeing her husband injured, but for some reason, it felt like she was almost... afraid of using her magic.

Father turned to me after giving up trying to persuade his wife.

"Art, listen carefully. After the healing spell activates, they're going to try to capture your mother at all costs. After I'm healed enough, I'm going to engage the leader and try to buy more time. I think I can beat him, but not if I have to worry about protecting you guys. Take your mother back down the road and don't stop; Adam will open up a path for you."

"No dad! I'm staying with you. I can fight! You saw me! I can help!" Consideration for being mature eluded me. It seemed like at this moment, I was really acting like the four-year-old I was on the outside, but I didn't care. I wasn't going to leave behind my family whom I've grown to love and friends who I've bonded with so much this past week and a half.

"LISTEN TO ME, ARTHUR LEYWIN!" Father agonizingly roared. This was the first time hearing his voice like this; the kind of voice that one would only use for desperate measures.

"I know you can fight! That's why I'm entrusting your mother to you. Protect her and protect the baby inside her. I'll catch up to you after this is over."

His words shook my mind like thunder.

Protect her and protect the baby inside her...

Suddenly, everything clicked. Why she was acting so paranoid. Why she was clutching me and making sure nothing got even close to us. Why both Durden and Angela were guarding us with defensive spells, instead of just one of them.

My mother was pregnant.

"I was planning on telling you when we arrived in Xyrus, but..." Not finishing his sentence, father just looked at me sheepishly; still pale from the blow he received from the bald, axe-wielding boss.

“Okay, I’ll protect Mom.”

“Atta boy. That’s my son.”

My mother finished her chant at this time and both she and my father glowed in a bright golden-white light.

“Sonova— One of them’s a healer! Don’t let her get away!” the leader roared.

I quickly grabbed my mother’s arm with both hands and tugged at her to move while reinforcing myself with mana.

We reached the area Adam and the dual-wielder were battling a dozen meters down the road.

“Art, hurry down, I got him!” Adam barked as he kept his opponent at bay.

The dual-wielder was obviously frustrated by the inability to neither reach me nor mother because of Adam. We hurried down the slope when I heard a faint *wizz* sound to our left. Acting on instinct, I jumped up, bringing my wooden sword up and reinforcing my whole body and the sword to withstand the blow of the incoming arrow.

A splintering crack resonated as the arrow met the wooden sword. Fortunately, the arrow wasn’t reinforced with any mana so, even though the force pushed me back, I was able to regain balance mid air by using the force of the shot by rotating my body and redirecting the arrow away. I landed on my feet a bit less impressively than I wanted to, throwing away what was left of my wooden sword.

“What the— Ugh!”

...Was all I heard from the assailant before he was promptly impaled by an arrow fired by Helen.

“GO!” she exclaimed, nocking in another arrow and firing it at the leader of the bandits to support my father.

That was weird.

Currently, Jasmine, Adam, and my father, along with Helen, were each fighting a mage.

Wasn’t there four?

“Damien! Forget the plan, don’t let them live!” The leader barked out.

Who was he commanding?

“... respond to my call and wash all to oblivion!” a faint voice finished chanting.

[Water Cannon]

From the mountainside, one of the scattered “archers” had his hands brought together, aimed at me and mother. We were tricked. He had camouflaged himself during the chaos. He wasn’t an archer or even an augments. He was a conjurer!

S**t!

I didn’t have much time to react as a huge sphere of pressurized water, at least three meters in diameter, shot towards us, increasing in size as it neared.

My mind raced trying to come up with options.

To my immediate right was my mother, and to my left were Adam and his opponent not far off; and behind me, of course, was the edge of the mountain. Even if I could dodge this, mother wouldn’t be able to and she’d be forced off the ledge of the mountain.

What should I do?

“Dammit!” I let out a roar unfit for a four-year-old!

Willing all of the remaining mana left in this cursed body, I tackled my mother, propelling both of us out of the way.

I quickly realized my forty-pound-body didn’t carry enough momentum to push both of out of range of the water cannon.

No choice!

If I was going down, I was going to make sure to take that b****d down with me!

I channeled mana into my arms and pushed my mother farther down, out of range. In that moment, everything seemed to be moving in slow motion as my mother’s eyes slowly widened in panic and disbelief. She might get a pretty bad bruise from the push, but minor bodily injuries were the least of my problems at that moment. If she didn’t want to get hit with another spell I had to get rid of this conjurer.

Unsheathing the knife Jasmine gave me from my waist, I imbued it with mana. What I was trying to do I had only done with ki in my old world, never with mana.

After willing mana into the knife, I threw it like a boomerang, aiming it at the conjurer, who was still concentrating on the water cannon. Barely curving around the edge of the giant cannonball of water, I heard the firm thud of the knife meeting skin.

The mage let out a shrill howl of pain followed by a string of curses indicated that the mage wasn't dead.

Losing concentration, the mage's water cannon lost shape, but unfortunately, there was still a surge of water strong enough to push me off the cliff.

Time for plan B.

Plan B was just in case my initial throw couldn't kill him. I managed succeeding in the gamble of Plan B, and that was creating a thin string of mana attaching the knife, currently engorged somewhere in the conjurer's body, to my hand.

I tugged back on the mana string just as the spell rammed against my body like a brick wall, knocking every ounce of air i had in my lungs and most likely breaking my ribs. Like a fish caught on the line, I could hear the mage's scream over the gushing tide of water as he was helplessly dragged down with me by the force of his own spell.

Even as my vision began darkening, I was able to see the battle coming to an end. Father and Helen had just managed to kill the leader. Angela, providing Jasmine with backup, allowed them to put the whip-user on his last stand. Meanwhile, i spotted Durden as he was desperately conjuring a spell in order to save me, but I knew it was too late; the spell had knocked me too far away.

Still, I was comforted in the fact that everyone will be okay. Maybe the only thing I would regret being unable to see my baby sibling.

With that, I felt the cold grip of sleep steal me away.

D**n... I had always wanted to be an older brother.

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