

Act II - Ryun

Ryun stood in the small training room in the Wolf's Grove town. He had arrived only a few days ago, accompanied by the leaders of the other two territories of the Twilight Melody Sect and the newest sect recruit, Nayra. Territory Leader Embesh, along with his farmers, and Territory Leader Reon with a couple of his warriors. Both were Lord Realm Cultivators, but while Embesh focused on farming, Reon focused on combat, or rather hunting monsters. His territory was filled with monsters that they hunted, and the sect relied on selling the ingredients that they harvested. Ryun had gathered them both because he wanted to speak with the leaders about the future of the sect. That meeting was going to take place in a couple of days, once Embesh had the chance to take a look at the farming area and Reon and his warriors had the opportunity to visit the dungeon.

But right now, Ryun had something far more important to take care of. In his hand, he held a Path Stone, containing the knowledge of his Path. Next to him stood Tali, her hands grasped behind her back just over her tail. They were alone, and waiting.

"Are you sure that you want to do this?" Tali asked, not for the first time.

Ryun had had this discussion with her before, and he knew that she was uncomfortable with it. Ryun wasn't going to change his mind, he had made a decision to run this sect differently. But the reason why he was doing this had nothing to do with his plans for the sect. This was something else, a gift for someone who deserved it.

"Yes," Ryun answered. The old Ranker was... uncomfortable with this kind of thing, with the sharing of power. With giving out power for free. Just like all other people in the sects she believed that a purpose of the sect was to make the leaders strong so that they might protect the others. Her question concerned not only what they were about to do, but his future plans, which he had shared with her.

"You are preparing to spend a lot of resources and share a lot of knowledge with someone who is not a part of your family. These resources

would be much better spent on the other sect leaders, you could ensure their loyalty with just a small donation.”

“I don’t want to give them any help, I have given them the opportunity and I will give them knowledge, that is enough,” Ryun told her.

“Why is that not enough for the child?” Tali asked.

“If it makes you feel better, you may think of her as the heiress of the sect,” Ryun answered.

“So, you plan on adopting her in your family? I didn’t think that there was anything going on between you and the mother, but perhaps I was wrong.”

Ryun would’ve rolled his eyes if he still had them. “No, there is nothing like that between us. That doesn’t mean that they are not important. In a way they are my family,” Ryun said.

Tali didn’t comment again, but he knew that the things that he wanted wouldn’t be easy to accept by people who had grown used to doing things one way. Despite that, she was misunderstanding why he was doing this. It was because he felt like he owed it to the first person in this world who had treated him like a person and not a monster. The first person that hadn’t been afraid of him since Melody died. That was enough.

Two people walked into the training room, Anrosh and Kri. He could feel the girl shaking with excitement, and he couldn’t help but smile. In her mind, this was the real start of her life. But Ryun knew the dangers that came with having power. He was not going to give her everything, but he was going to make sure that she had the best possible start that he could offer.

The two of them walked over and stopped two steps away from Ryun and Tali.

“Are you ready for this Kri?” Ryun asked.

His senses told him that she nodded, but then she realized that he couldn’t see and spoke out-loud. “Yes, I am.”

Ryun had spoken at length with Anrosh about what they wanted to do for Kri, about what path they wanted her to take. Ryun had felt a bit out of place in the conversation, making a decision for Kri who wasn’t his daughter, but Anorsh had asked. She wanted what was best for her daughter, and Ryun

wanted the same. He went to Tali for advice and together with Anrosh they had come up with a plan for Kri's advancement.

Ryun extended his hand and offered her the Path Stone that he had used to record his Path. According to Tali, it wouldn't matter if he taught her his path or had her learn it from the stone, she would still need to master the techniques if she wanted to advance beyond Foundation Realm.

Kri took the stone in her hand and looked at it.

"Use it," Anrosh told her.

Kri nodded her head and then the stone cracked and turned to dust in her hand. Ryun couldn't see anything so he didn't know if there was any other indicator of the stone's use, but Kri's face suddenly turned into a smile. Ryun pulled out a crate containing Essence Crystals, the last of what he had from his cycling before he gained an aspect. It wasn't much, but it would be enough to push her through the Mortal Realm, the amount needed for that was nothing to someone like him.

"Remember what we told you," Ryun said and Kri nodded again as she sat on the ground and started taking the crystals from the crate.

Upon much discussion, they had decided that the best way for her to proceed was to reinforce her core by cycling the Essence in one large burst instead of doing smaller ones. Ryun had done half and half, but he too was thinking about focusing on his core now. The more Qi had the more power he could put into his techniques and the longer he could last in a fight. His Qi conduits seemed to be reinforced enough that he had enough speed in activating his techniques, for now at least.

All three of them watched in silence as Kri pulled in the Essence and advanced, entering the Early Mortal Realm, and then she started cycling. As Tali had advised, she cycled six times on each stage, until Peak, and then Anrosh pulled out her own Essence Crystals, the cycled Essence that she had created by cycling the aspect of the Absolute Cold. Kri took her mother's crystals and then cycled six times again. Ryun kept all his senses on her, trying to see how the cycling affected her. This was the first time that he had the chance to observe the process from the start, and he wanted to see if he might be able to glean something from it to help him on his Path.

But not only that, this was also a chance for him to steer Kri in a better direction than he himself had taken. With all of his experience now, he could advise her to take better perks than he himself had. But her power was not going to be the same. For one, Tali had convinced them that Kri shouldn't take a Class, saying that spreading her too wide could inhibit her growth as well as make her have mental issues. In the end, Anrosh and Ryun had agreed. Even though he thought Class could be useful to her, Tali had managed to convince him that it would be dangerous for a child. That she might take on more than she could handle in order to grow stronger faster, and get herself killed by fighting monsters that were too much for her to handle.

Ryun did agree that children could be rash and irrational, and no matter what Kri claimed, she still was only a child.

She finished cycling the Absolute Cold Essence, and looked up from the floor.

Then Tali instructed her to advance into the next Realm. Kri took a deep breath as she pulled in the Essence from her mother's crystal. Anrosh had enough to raise her daughter far. As she had cycled several times in the Lord Realm, and since most of what she had cycled was Ryun's pure and the Essence that she had drawn in, the resulting Essence held just her own aspect. It was perfect for Kri.

Kri filled her core, and then Ryun felt the transformation. Her Qi surged through her body, making her stronger and pushing her into the next Realm. And then, the Qi retreated back in her core, and she sighed, cold sweat soaking her body.

He could tell that just this was tiring Kri out, but he knew that Tali didn't want her to stop here. The blind woman turned her head in Ryun's direction and spoke. "It's your turn now."

Ryun nodded and sat down on the ground across from Kri.

"Alright Kri, use your base technique," Ryun said as he focused inward and did the same.

In order for her to be able to advance beyond the Lord Realm, she needed to change achieve a breakthrough, or inspiration. The requirement for that was for her to change her own techniques. It was something that Ryun had done on his own, and he had done it in the Foundation Realm as

well. According to Tali, the earlier someone had an inspiration and changed a technique, the stronger it would be when it evolved on its own once Kri gained an aspect.

But the Path that Ryun had gifted her was what he had now, an Epic Path with developed techniques. It wasn't something that a child could improve on her own. But inspiration didn't need to always come from within. Ryun changed his breathing form and triggered **{Null Mantle}**. Kri's version of the technique would be **{Tranquil Mantle}** the base form of the technique without an aspect. Her branch and fruit techniques would therefore be **{Silent Breath}** and **{Final End}**. Ryun had ideas on how to change them as well, but he wanted to work on them more, and Kri didn't need to change all three right away.

A technique, according to Tali, was a blueprint, a framework for an effect. He could change it, alter it, but never too much from what the original technique was. He could build upon it, but he couldn't change his **{Null Mantle}** from an enforcing technique to something that expelled Qi from his body.

Ryun looked at how his Qi moved through his body. He had been planning on improving his techniques for a while, ever since his first conversations with Tali, and he had been thinking about how to do it and what he wanted to achieve. His base technique had his Qi seeping into his body, spreading a portion of it equally over it. He could feel like he had six points in his body where his Qi could pool, and each increased one of his stats. Two were in his chest, one on each side, increasing strength and dexterity, two around his navel, just to the sides of where he could feel his core, and those two increased his vitality and endurance. The last two were in his head, increasing intelligence and wisdom. When he switched focus from all of these points to just one or more of them, he switched his Qi bonus around. But this he achieved by funneling the same amount of Qi into less points. He had tried to increase the amount of Qi he could use with a technique, hoping that that would let him increase his stats further than the 70% that it was currently, but that didn't work.

So, he had tried to do the reverse, to funnel less Qi and get a smaller bonus. His **{Null Mantle}** was powerful, but it also drained a lot of his Qi,

and he had found that with all of his Qi draining powers he was emptying his core too fast for his liking. The first thing that he had figured out in his experimenting was that he always needed to activate the base form of **{Null Mantle}** and increase all his stats first before switching that bonus around. But, now, he started lowering the amount of Qi he was funneling from his core through his conduits and into these points. He paid attention to his stat screen in his head, and noticed that his bonus was getting smaller with the amount of Qi he was supplying. He smiled as a notification pinged inside his head. He ignored it and turned his attention to Kri.

“Can you feel what I am doing?” Ryun asked.

“A bit,” Kri said.

Ryun had her start her Tranquil Mantle, he knew that her version couldn't shift bonuses, but the base version was the same. He slowly instructed her on how to lower the amount of Qi her technique was drawing from her core, guiding her through her inspiration. He felt her struggle, losing her breathing form a couple of times. It wasn't a surprise, since she had just started using techniques. A breathing form wasn't a requirement, but it helped a lot. He had to teach her how to change her breathing form first, how to slow down the intake of air, how to shift her body as she exhaled.

It took her several hours to get it right, and by then she was completely exhausted. But she did manage it. Ryun sensed Tali shake her head, and he knew that it was in disbelief. When Ryun had told her that he wanted to try teaching Kri, she had told him that it would take him weeks if not months of daily attempts to achieve it.

But Ryun had a feeling that Kri was going to be good at it. He didn't know how he knew, or how to explain it other than instinct, but he had learned to trust them.

Kri was barely holding on, but Tali didn't let her rest.

Tali cleared her throat and then spoke. “Now the aspect,” Tali told Anrosh. Ryun admitted that she seemed to know a lot. He never would've thought to have Kri cycle Essence with the aspect without first drawing it in. But apparently preparing the core before taking on the aspect was beneficial.

Kri took the aspect globe from her mother and started drawing it in. Ryun felt the Qi inside her body moving to her core, changing as she drew in

the aspect. He sensed her shiver from the cold, the power of the aspect making her weak body nearly collapse. But she endured. She didn't have a core large enough nor were her conduits developed enough for the aspect to really hurt her much. But she would still feel the effects every time she used a technique, her body would get cold from its power. At least until she reached Mid Lord Realm.

Barely hanging on, Kri looked around as Anrosh put more Essence Crystals in front of her. Ryun could tell that Kri wanted to ask for a break, that she needed it, but Tali had made it clear that stopping during the process would be a mistake. A Cultivator gained strength by pushing themselves, and they gained inspiration by pushing to the brink of what they could handle. Kri started taking the crystals, cycling slowly, almost collapsing several times.

But the three of them kept pushing her. They raised her to Mid Foundation, and then to Peak Foundation. As soon as she advanced, her eyes rolled in the back of her head and she dropped to the ground. Anrosh knelt down and scooped her up into her arms.

It looked like they would have to wait for her to wake up to see all the benefits that she had gained as well as have her choose perks. They also had to have her consume potions and elixirs that they had secured for her.

"Incredible," Tali said. "What we have done with that child will make her very strong in the future, if she continues advancing properly."

Anrosh didn't say anything, and Ryun wondered just how hard it had been for her to watch her daughter go through that. But he thought that she understood. She was a Cultivator, and she knew that power required pain.

Tali shook her head and spoke again. "I suggest you keep her at that stage for a while. Have her train with her techniques and take her to face monsters. If she is to gain the most benefits, she needs to reach the Lord Realm by cycling only the Essence that she herself drew in at least three times."

"We will make sure of it," Anrosh said, looking down on Kri in her hands.

"What about skills?" Ryun asked. Their plan for Kri, on Tali's insistence was that they choose only two ways of power for her. Ryun had voted for a Class, while Anrosh and Tali voted for skills. Ryun wasn't sure, but he

thought that Tali had a big dislike of Class for some reason, but still he knew that Skills could be powerful too.

“I suggest |**Combat Mastery**| and an evasion or movement skill since her Path has none of that,” Tali said.

Ryun agreed with that, and he would seek out Anrosh to discuss it with her later. He used his sense to take in the state of Kri’s body. Even unconscious, she was shivering from exhaustion and the cold, and yet he couldn’t help but smile.

This was what made Cultivators dangerous and powerful. In a single day they had raised her from no Path to Peak Foundation. A sect couldn’t do this for everyone, it required too many resources. And from what he had seen so far the people in the sects were for the most part selfish. Still, it was incredible, and he couldn’t wait to see where Kri would end up.