

## Preparation

“So much is changed,” Selia said.

The three of them were in their home, in the wing of Consequence. Well, one of their homes at least. Ryun and Erdania had moved to Ven’oran, which they had built into a sprawling estate for themselves.

Selia’s portal from the afterlife had seemingly opened to the person who remembered Laqrud’s Legacy, or at least name. In this case, Ryun. They had spread that knowledge a bit, there were records of what Ryun and Selia had learned in the Sect archives, mostly in so much as it pertained to Cultivation or Aspects, but some simply for the sake of history. So, the knowledge was not likely to be just lost. Still, Ryun was the one who knew the most, it did make sense for the portal to open near him.

Her tales of what the afterlife was like were... incredible. And Ryun had many questions. What was that wheel that she saw? How did different afterlives differ from one another. How did a soul’s domain come into being? But, he put all of his questions on hold. There would be time later for them to theorize.

“And not that much at all, I see,” Selia bent and picked up a sword from the floor.

Ryun winced, it was one of his failed experiments. Now that he took a look, he realized that their quarters were a bit of a... mess. Neither he nor Erdania were particularly concerned with appearances.

Erdania's hand rose to scratch the back of her head as she smiled. "What can I say? We barely survived without you."

Selia rolled her eyes and put the sword on a nearby table. "So," she started as she took one of the seats. "The dome?"

Ryun and Erdania exchanged a look.

Erdania stood. "It is good that you returned now, we were starting to get worried that you wouldn't make it."

"You would've done fine without me," Selia said.

Ryun shook his head. "It isn't about the dome. We were waiting for you for another reason."

Selia tilted her head.

Erdania answered her silent question. "Eternal."

Selia blinked, she looked from her to Ryun, then back again. "The two of you..."

Ryun nodded. "We haven't cycled our last cycles, but we are confident."

Selia shook her head. "I... I don't know. I did what you asked, what we talked about," she told him. Ryun had given her some hints, or rather passed on what he had learned from the memories of the Eternal Cultivator, as well as his own suspicions. It clearly had something to do with the Soul and Body. "I tried, and I do feel more in tune with myself. And what you said about *meaning* does ring true to me. Back there... my Soul was easy to perceive. And Laqrud's presence was such that it

almost pressed down on my Soul. I had to learn how to keep myself steady in his presence. But... I don't know if I can."

Ryun could see her losing confidence in herself, again. He gave Erdania a look and she took a step to get closer to Selia and put a hand on her shoulder.

"We know that you can. After everything that we've been through, you should trust yourself more."

Selia closed her eyes, then nodded.

"You cycled there?" Ryun asked.

She opened her eyes and met his look. "I, yes. Laquud is... like a source of my Aspect, his whole mountain was." She moved her hand and pulled out a box filled with gemstones. "I used the formations, I filled all the gems I had."

Ryun tilted his head. "Enough to reach Eternal?"

She glanced down at the gems, then nodded. They had sent her to the afterlife as prepared as they could.

Erdania straightened. "Then, we shouldn't delay much longer."

"You want to do it now?" Selia asked.

"Yes," Erdania nodded. "Well, not now now. But we should head back to Ven'oran."

Selia frowned in confusion. "Ven'oran?"

Ryun answered her. “We’ve been preparing for this step for the last decade. There is much that we’ve learned. Dani is right, we should head as soon as possible. We don’t have much time before we are needed against the dome.”

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“Where are we going?” Selia asked as Ryun and Erdania led her down the stairs, heading beneath their estate.

“We’ve learned a lot about advancement over the last few years,” Ryun said in lieu of answering. “Inspiration, for example. We’ve always known that there were two parts to it. The physical, tangible or rather an action, like changing the techniques or reinforcing the body, and the more... ethereal, a revelation.”

Ryun looked ahead, but he sensed Selia’s eyes narrow in thought.

He continued. “The physical part we are pretty sure of, and we don’t think that it matters if it is shared. The second part though... It needs to be somewhat in line with the way that you accomplish the physical part, and it has to be personal. Sharing that part will prevent you from advancing further without help again.”

“How did you figure it all out?” Selia asked.

Erdania answered. “We’ve been watching over the Sect for the last decade, we saw and documented tens of thousands of advancements.”

Ryun nodded. “More. Here it is,” he said as they entered a room. It was a medium sized dome, large enough for a few dozen people to enter and be comfortable. It was empty of people, but not even close to empty.

“What is this?” Selia said as she looked around at everything in the room.

“One of the things that we discovered,” Ryun started to explain. “Is that there are ways to improve advancement beyond just simply cycling or having your own inspiration. Environment, state of mind, the type of Essence surrounding you, it all matters.”

Erdania continued. “We’ve started to have people advance in rooms similar to this one. We’ve developed formations that can slowly release Essence around the person about to advance. Surrounding them by high quality Essence of their Aspect has shown results.”

“What kind of result?” Selia asked.

“It isn’t easily apparent,” Ryun answered. “It is easily missed, unless you look at the averages of high numbers. But, people who advanced through this method have some... small benefits. They cycle faster, they are more sensitive to their Aspects and usually improve them faster than average.”

Selia blinked. “That’s... impressive.”

Ryun nodded. “After Zacharia arrived, I’ve started to think about it more. *Meaning*, it matters, an idea is influenced by the *meaning* of things around you. I’ve even managed to crack his soul sense, a little bit, I think. I’ve observed a few more advancements since then and... there is

something there that impacts the Soul. So... this,” he waved his hand at the room.

Selia turned to look at it again.

The room was separated into three sections, one for each of them. Erdania’s room had formations that would increase the gravity, Selia’s had formations that would be able to project any Essence based on the type of source slotted in. Selia had brought enough for them too. Ryun’s sections had the same formations as Selia’s, and all sections had filters that would pull out any other Essence out of the room.

But that wasn’t the most important part, on the walls were... artifacts. Items that he, Selia, and Erdania, had created in the forge. The banners of the Sect. Then there was art, paintings of the important moments in their lives, before and after they met.

Selia walked around the wall and looked at them all. She paused in front of one of the paintings, then glanced at him.

“Our past is the foundation of who we are,” Ryun said. He couldn’t see the painting with his eyes, but he knew which one it was. That one depicted Selia, Erdania, and Terland, their previous partner.

“And this?” Selia moved on, looking at something else. This one had been Erdania’s idea.

“That is for the future,” Ryun said. The painting was of the three of them, Ryun, Selia, and Erdania, sitting in a field with children running around. Both Ryun and Erdania knew that Selia had always wanted a family.

She reached out and placed her fingers on the canvas. “A legacy, huh,” she smiled.

Ryun and Erdania stepped on the either side of her. “Yes, and more,” Erdania said. “We didn’t build this place just so that we can advance together. Though, that is important. We’ve... made an agreement, an oath. We chose to be partners and live this life together, as far and for as long as we can. And that is part of us, not just as people but our power too.”

“Yes,” Ryun nodded. “And it is because of our Souls. This place,” he waved his hand. “We made it so that it makes it easier to get a sense of our Souls. To help us make this final step. And because I want us to do it together. The only question remaining, is if you want to take it with us?”

Selia gave them both a look, then stepped closer and embraced them.

“I’d like that.”