

Grand Ancestral Bloodlines

Chapter 46: Punishment Grounds

Ryu didn't know how he had expected those matters to conclude, but what he did know was that it was far worse than he imagined. He had barely taken a single step out of his grandfather's study before he found himself flying backward after a hand grabbed the back of his collar.

His grandfather's rage reached a fever pitch, causing him to punish Ryu by the strictest laws allowed by the Clan Texts.

Ryu was stripped to his barest undergarments and dragged to the Clan Punishment Grounds. With the Sun burning high in the sky, the earth beneath his feet crunched with a coarse heat, burning the soles of his feet. His frail, ice-white skin took the brunt of the punishment, facing the beading streams of light without protection. Ironically, the only thing that protected him from a next day filled with red, painful blisters was the crimson blood that soon flowed from his wounds.

The sound of a cracking whip violently tore through the ambience of the Clan Gathering. Confused expressions colored the faces of those attending, many of whom didn't understand how to properly react to this abrupt change. Whenever there was punishment to be doled out, proper announcements would be made, and crimes would be listed off as a deterrence. But, clearly, none of this had happened this time around.

Crowds of Agnes Clan main and branch members hurried to follow the source of the noise, putting down what they were doing for the sake of curiosity. However, none of them expected the sight they saw upon reaching the sand and dirt field of the Punishment Grounds.

Ryu's small wrists were bound tightly by blood-soaked ropes and then attached to a short pole before him. His bare knees were scraped by the earth beneath them, having been forced to kneel by the position of his tied hands. By now, his frail and delicate back was nowhere to be seen. Instead, its view was replaced by what looked like a fresh carcass, torn apart by the teeth of ravenous wolves.

His face was partially covered by his black-dyed hair, sticking to his face due to some sick sweat and blood mixture. In the end, the only thing that left him the slightest bit of dignity was the pair of loose, now reddened underwear that could hardly cling to his skinny waist.

Many gasped in the horror of what they were seeing. A hesitating servant brandished a thorn laced beast tendon whip, too scared to swing once more, but even more scared of the glaring Clan Patriarch that stood to his side. In the end, his fear of killing Ryu was

outweighed by what he feared Patriarch Agnes would do if he tried to back out of his duties.

The whip continued to crack forward, snapping through the air with a ferocity that made those who witnessed every flesh and blood connection cringe.

It was at that moment that the Garis Clan entourage also made their way to the Punishment Grounds. How could the former General miss a chance to poke fun at the Agnes Clan? He still had some built-up anger toward Patriarch Agnes for his negotiating tactics, but he was even more angered toward Ryu for so blatantly disrespecting him.

At first, when he noticed that it was Ryu, he almost laughed. In fact, the four guards who always followed him and his granddaughter actually did. They found it hilarious that the kid who was acting as though he had the whole world in his palm just minutes earlier was essentially being spanked before the eyes of everyone. However, Patriarch Garis somehow didn't find this scene funny at all.

To his side, Yaana nearly fainted in horror. If it wasn't for her grandfather's palm stopping her fall backward, the frail beauty would have collapsed entirely.

The sounds of the cracking whip didn't cease even as the crowd grew. Maybe it was only after ten whips became twenty, and twenty whips became thirty, that those watching suddenly felt that something was off. What could a Clan Heir have possibly done to earn such a severe punishment? It simply didn't make any sense.

Even for the worst crimes committed by those of the main branch – things like thievery or **** – would only result in ten lashes at the most. Of course, matters were different if you were of a branch family, but this was the young heir they were talking about! Plus, he was a young man that only came back to these ancestral grounds once a year for a week at most. Up to now, he had only been here for a few hours. What crime could he have possibly committed in this time frame?

Tears fell like torrential rain from Yaana's small face. "Grandfather, help him!"

Her voice was drowned out by the sound of the cracking whip, but it was obvious what she wanted by how she tugged on her grandfather's sleeve.

Patriarch Garis frowned. He came here to laugh, but it wasn't his place to interfere in the matters of another Clan. Even if their trajectories were different, the Agnes Clan was still far more powerful than his Garis Clan, especially within the capital city. The truth was that even if Patriarch Agnes wanted to kill his grandson right before him, he'd still have no right to interfere.

Still, it was clear that the old man had lost his mind. Even if Ryu's mother was an Agnes, Ryu's last name was still Tor! You couldn't simply whip a Prince like this in public without facing consequences. What do you think would happen to the Cedar Clan if they

suddenly found out that the First Prince was punished by his mother's Clan? All hell would break loose.

At this thought, the former General hesitated. Would the Royal Clan really react the same way for this Fourth Prince of theirs? Who would ostracize such a powerful Clan for a useless Prince? If it was a lesser Clan, it could be justified to protect the prestige of the royal family, but the Agnes Clan was no normal family...

By the time the fiftieth crack resounded through the Clan's land, even those who had been laughing began to feel their smiles freeze. Wasn't this too far? Come to think of it, they hadn't heard this boy make a single sound from beginning to end... Could it be that he was already dead?

The mixture of sweat and blood dripped from Ryu's body. Eventually, the dye that coated his hair couldn't withstand the onslaught of tortured liquid, causing a dense blackness to join them. The darkness colored the ground beneath his lowered head as his hair's true whiteness began to slowly shine through.

"Stop." It was only then that Patriarch Agnes called for the servant to stop. He didn't do this to protect Ryu's dark secret, but rather didn't want such a stain to attach itself to his Agnes Clan. "Toss him into the dungeon."

47 Bloody Cross

When the former General heard these words, his frown deepened. "You don't think this is too far, Old Man Agnes?"

A rage prickled the old Patriarch's brow. "It isn't your place to question the matters of the Agnes Clan!" This roar was filled with such a deep anger that Patriarch Garis said no more. There was simply no point. He had clearly already made up his mind.

The servant stepped forward, untying the ropes from Ryu's wrist and being perfectly prepared to have no choice but to carry the young heir's body away. But, before he could, a bloodied hand connected to a contorted wrist of blood and mangled meat pushed his hand away.

Under the astonished gazes of those present, Ryu slowly stood. His legs wobbled beneath him, nearly collapsing more times than they cared to count, but in the end, he raised up to his full height.

An ugly bruise of purples, greens and blacks covered his chest, making it obvious at a glance that several of his ribs were broken. His back was so mangled that pieces of whole flesh fell from his exertion, leaving a path of meat chunks behind him.

His lips formed a thin line, but his jaw somehow remained relaxed. His eyes remained closed without a hint of tears or quivering. Even his steps were far steadier than they

should have been. A deep pride and disdain for the world followed his slow pace. He didn't sweep his head left or right, he simply followed a singular straight line. However, this straight line wasn't to the dungeon as his grandfather said, instead, it was very clearly toward the outside of the Clan.

"Where do you think you're going?!" Patriarch Agnes roared.

Ryu's steps paused. Pressing his thumb firmly against the side of his pointing finger, he caused his nail to protrude as far out as it would go. Without a hint of hesitation, he stabbed this thumb over his heart, drawing a cross upward before crossing back once more to form a bloody X.

There were no more words needed. The reddening then subsequent blackening of Patriarch Agnes' face was all that was needed to understand the gravity of what Ryu had just done.

In the martial world, there was no fiercer symbol than this bloody cross. It signified the cutting of ties to the deepest level.

Without a look back, his steps continued forward, crossing a sea of spectators unable to withstand his steady steps. Still, his grandfather's rage reached a fever pitch. The eyes of those spectating could only widen as a sword appeared in his hand.

"YOU UNFILIAL ... DIE!"

"You fool!" The former General stepped forward, slapping Old Man Agnes' attack away. "Do you even understand what it means now that he's cut off ties from the Agnes Clan?! He's solely a member a of the Tor Clan now! Do you think the Imperial Censors could allow you to trample on that truth?!"

Before Old Man Agnes could even understand the gravity of his own actions, Ryu's back view had disappeared from the eyes of many. The events of today... It was impossible for them to remain hidden.

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"Your Majesty, this has gone too far!" The Imperial Court had once more descended into chaos. The last time it suffered such a tsunami of complaints was just after Ryu's birth, and now, ironically, just eleven years later, it was facing another dispute surrounding the very same young man.

King Tor sat on his throne with yet another deep frown on his face. As much as he'd like to summon Ryu here to explain himself, the boy had slipped into a coma the moment he closed his courtyard door. He spoke to no one, he made no sounds, and in the end, it was just a few hours later that the news spread like wildfire.

To think that not only had he cut off all ties to the Agnes Clan, he had made his way back to the Palace by walking the streets of the of the capital city. A matter that would have already been terrible became even worse by the news of a bloodied, half-naked Prince bleeding through the streets of Tor City!

"Shouldn't you look into why the Prince is in a coma before your start complaining about his actions?!" A Minister who stood in a minority faction retorted. He and his colleagues had long been dissatisfied with the way the Tor Imperial Court functioned. The Prince comes back to the Palace half dead and your first reaction is to scold him for cutting ties to the Clan that likely did this to him?!

"You naïve fool!" The other Ministers pounced on this man like a fresh piece of meat. "How many miles are there between the Agnes Clan grounds and the Royal Palace? Over a dozen! You expect me to believe that a critically injured blind boy without an ounce of cultivation made his way such a distance alone?!"

Imperial Censor Orson sneered. "This is obviously another temper tantrum being thrown by the Fourth Prince! He doesn't understand matters of importance and can only act like a selfish and petulant child! He'd rather see the Tor Clan burn to the ground than face the fact he simply isn't as good as his elder brothers."

This matter of the Agnes Clan was no joke. In fact, it was quite serious. This meeting was called immediately after everything was brought to light.

What was the purpose of the King marrying the young mistresses of the pillar Clans? Was the purpose not to solidify ties for future generations? If a Prince unceremoniously cut off ties with the Clan his mother had married into the Royal Clan to connect them with, then what was the point?! Ryu's actions could cut off an entire generation's worth of carefully planned politics.

Although they didn't say the words aloud, many Ministers couldn't help but look forward with an 'I told you so' expression. If they had killed Ryu at birth, how could this mess have happened?

Seeing his moment to shine, Imperial Censor Brigg's round belly rippled, swooping in at the key moment once more.

"I believe that with these events, we're justified in accepting the proposal of the Lantes and Viri Kingdoms, Your Majesty... We've given the Fourth Prince enough leeway and he's responded by slapping our faces. There's no need to stall the very first Co-Kingdom Coronation Game for his sake."

Imperial Censor Digby sighed, his old frame shaking while a flash of killing intent emitted from Imperial Censor Orson. A moment of silence washed over the court as they all looked toward the King.

Chapter 48: Death Date

The King sat silently, his forehead practically glued to his hand as he stewed.

Just days ago, news of the destruction of the Natural Order Sect took the Kingdoms by storm and was obviously not a matter that could be ignored. Although the various Clans and Sects were hesitating with the Immortal Plane in mind, everyone was very much aware of the fact everything was now working on a very fast timeline, one that was taking them all for a ride.

When the Kingdoms learned of the reason behind the Natural Order Sect's destruction, they felt emboldened. Not only did this news likely mean that their other Sects weren't in danger, but it also proved that it wasn't their fault that the Ores Kingdom lost their backer.

With these reasonings in hand, the Kingdoms felt justified in splitting the resources of the Natural Order Sect among them, but there were a few problems that still lay in wait for them.

For one, although they dared to split the resources of the Natural Order Sect, they didn't dare to do so while stepping outside the rules set by the Immortal Plane. Since the Natural Order Sect had been destroyed, this meant that the matter of splitting their resources was entirely left to the 'Secular World'. This was because it was Ores Kingdom – a secular world construct – that was defending this now abandoned land. Essentially, this meant that remaining Sects could only have minimal involvement in the coming events.

Secondly, they were on a timeline. King Ores was already very close to the Spiritual Severing Realm. The moment he stepped into this realm, all of their planning would be for naught. As for the reason this was true, it was simple. If the resources of an entire Sect were suddenly funneled into the Secular World, not only would the three remaining Sects be unallowed to retaliate, but the Ores Royal Clan would suddenly become far stronger than their respective Kingdoms. Although it was true that even if this came to fruition, the Ores Kingdom would never take the initiative to attack three enemies, it would be more than enough to hold them off until the Sect could be rebuilt.

Simply put, if King Ores succeeded, the Ores Kingdom would gain great power while still following the rules imposed by the Immortal Plane. At the same time, the Sects would be unallowed to interfere since Ores Kingdom would still technically be part of the Secular World. The only caveat would be the King Ores also wouldn't be allowed to interfere directly. If these events occurred in this way, it could actually become a blessing for Ores Kingdom.

Thirdly, and maybe most importantly, if they wanted to band together to deal with Ores Kingdom now, they had to minimize as much infighting among them as possible. The only way to do this was to decide a method of splitting their treasures without causing

internal disputes. And this, this was where the Co-Kingdom Coronation Games came into play.

According to the plan, the Kingdoms would introduce their Coronation Games together, allowing all of their heirs to compete with one another. This would work out perfectly since all of their heirs would be eighteen long before King Ores was estimated to breakthrough. Plus, with the competition that often occurred between these four Kingdoms, this seemed like a logical next step.

None of them believed the Ores Kingdom would reject this chance either. This was because after the Natural Order Sect was destroyed, their Fate took a massive hit. If nothing was done soon, they would begin experiencing terrible natural disasters in the coming years. However, if they did well during these games, then they'd be able to raise the confidence their citizens had in them and their future.

The final step of this plan simply relied on the rankings. Simply put, they'd give the Opes Kingdom a lane for survival. If they placed first amongst them all, then their Kingdoms would back off and never think of the Natural Order Sect's resources. However, if they placed anywhere but first, the treasures would split four ways based on rankings. This way, a war didn't even need to be fought!

Still, there was only one problem... These events had to take place before King Opes' breakthrough or else it would all be meaningless. And unfortunately for Ryu... He was by far the youngest of the Royal Clan heirs... While all others would reach the eighteen-year-old threshold, Little Ryu wouldn't.

When some Ministers raised this issue, they were received with disdain. So what if the Coronation Games were supposed to happen when one turned eighteen, did anyone here believe that Ryu would be able to improve enough to have any sort of mark with just an extra few years? Raising this point was laughable.

After multiple rounds of debates, many pointed out that the Third Prince was only two years older than Ryu, yet no one was worried about him. Clearly this was a matter of lackluster abilities and not youth. Why would you pity a young man born with everything who decided to do nothing with his life? Such an existence shouldn't be allowed in the Royal Clan to begin with.

Others still argued that the Third Prince was actually closer to three years older than Ryu, having been born slightly more than two years and a half earlier than Ryu. If they went through with the timeline as it currently stood, Ryu would be by far the youngest at fifteen while the Third Prince would have already crossed the appropriate eighteen-year-old boundary. But... These arguments fell on deaf ears...

By the end, King Tor managed to push off such talks until today. And obviously, this now had an evident ending.

Finally, King Tor spoke solemnly. "Tell the Kingdoms that we accept their proposal. Four years from now, the first Co-Kingdom Coronation Games will take place... It's best to not tell the Fourth Prince about this in order to avoid any more mishaps, write it into law if you have to..."

With those words left lingering in the air, the King turned and left.

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While his death date was being decided, Ryu had slipped into what would become a coma of several months. By the time he awoke, he would find only Imperial Doula Miriam by his side.

The old Doula was so excited when Ryu's eyes finally fluttered open that she almost threw a small party for the two of them. It was only under Ryu's insistence that she gave up on the idea.

Still, Ryu felt a comforting warmth. Maybe others would be hurt by this reality, but, at least in the endless cold he faced, there was at least someone who was by his side.

Chapter 49: Dream

Imperial Doula Miriam slowly helped Ryu sit up. "Slowly, slowly. You've been asleep for so long that you're definitely suffering from more than a few bedsores. Also, your muscles have significantly weakened – it's okay to rely on this old lady. I might look frail, but I'm still a Pulse Opening realm expert."

Ryu coughed slightly under the strain, but still managed a small smile. "Aren't there babies out there who need your help far more than me?"

"I'm retired, this old lady can spend her time as she pleases." She spoke dismissively, raising a cup of water to Ryu's dry lips. She had tried to keep him hydrated during his coma, but it was extremely difficult. In the end, she had no choice but to sustain his life with her own energy. She felt gratified that she had given her life to the medical field.

Taking Ryu's weak body into her arms, she carried him into the bath house, meticulously stripping away his dirtied clothes. Ryu didn't seem too embarrassed by this prospect as he had long since treated the old Doula as his grandmother. Plus, if he didn't receive this help, he didn't believe that he could do it alone.

Imperial Doula Miriam sighed when she saw the sight of Ryu's bare back. His spine protruded outward along with his ribs and his skin had become so sickly that thinned veins of blue and green were clearly visible. But, by far the worst part was the visage of terrible scars that ran across his shoulders and back like the trenches of a muddy battlefield.

"Is it that bad?" Ryu said through a pained chuckle. How could a mortal body not scar in the face of such torture? Ryu had already expected as much.

"It's bad, but it isn't the end of the world. A man with battle scars is the dream of any woman." Having learned that lying to her Little Ryu would accomplish nothing, she used a different tactic.

"Maybe if the scars were earned on the battlefield..." Ryu said softly. "I'm not sure if there's a market for men who gained scars being beaten by their own grandfather and mother."

A pained expression colored the old Doula's face as she brought a warm, moist toilette to Ryu's back to begin wiping the accumulated dirt and grime from him. Although a sort of phantom pain overwhelming Ryu as he felt each bump of every one of his scars, he bit the inside of his lip to stop himself from crying out.

Maybe in the face of his pride, keeping silent was easier for him. But he had always been the most vulnerable around Miriam.

"Would you like to listen to a story?" Imperial Doula Miriam asked. The truth was that Ryu had been banned from the royal library ever since he was old enough to read. Of course, this didn't make too much of a difference considering he was blind, but there were many sections of the library he was still unallowed to send his own servants to. In the end, much of his entertainment came from the old Doula telling him stories.

Truth be told, it was because of Miriam that Ryu was able to gain a scope of what the world held. He learned about concepts he had never experienced himself, broadening his horizons to new heights. Maybe the only thing the old Doula had never told him was just why he was ostracized by his family.

Still, Ryu was intelligent. Was he really born blind? Why did he have such vivid memories about what things looked like, then? Plus, why was it that his hair was forcibly dyed everyday? Why was it that his third brother had called his mother a whore back then? Anyone with half a mind could begin to piece together the meaning behind all of these things...

Even without knowing the true story, Ryu's guess wasn't too far from the reality. It was a truth he found hilarious if not utterly enraging – but it was somehow his truth, nonetheless.

"How about I tell you a story instead?" Ryu smiled.

"Where did you come by this story?" Miriam said with a surprised expression.

Ryu looked off into the distance. While he was in his coma, he had had a dream so vivid that it almost seemed real to him. But, when he awoke, he was slapped with reality. How could such a perfect life be his own? What a joke.

But, he felt that if he didn't speak this dream aloud, it would disappear from his mind forever. If that happened, Ryu didn't know if he'd survive. Although he hadn't broken down yet... He was akin to a tattered feather blowing in the wind, still unable to grasp his own future.

"Let's just say it was a dream of mine..." Ryu said lightly.

"Oh? The old lady is listening."

"On the highest plane of all of existence, there exists a mountain so tall that even the clouds can only hug its feet. Three moons shine among the stars at night, and three suns blaze in the morning air.

"Within this highest plane, there was a family that stood above the rest. The father could shatter the earth with a single step. The mother was gentle beyond compare, lighting the world with her beauty and smile. The grandmothers were phoenixes who soared through the skies, protecting their family with a feverish might. And the grandfathers could pierce the clouds with a single roar.

"To this family, a child was born. Although he was weak and frail, he was cherished like a treasure. In return, he blessed this family too. They rose to a greater height together, relying on one another as a family should.

"Hundreds of years into this child's life, he met a valiant woman who understood how to fight for her own freedom. She stood before him and demanded his love not only for her sake, but for his as well.

"Over time, these two fell in love. She blossomed into a great expert, while he learned to fight for his own freedoms. They were a star-crossed story that should have never come together, yet they formed a bond unbreakable even through lives.

"Unfortunately, even this heart-felt story had its own ups and downs. The greed of those on the outside caused jealousy to be aimed toward this family. In the end, the child was forced into a corner where he was forced into making a decision he labored over.

"In the end, for the sake of his family, the child took his own life, leaving behind a promise to his beloved."

Imperial Doula Miriam wiped her cheeks with a free hand. How could she not sense the longing in Little Ryu's words? "Call me Granny Miriam from now on, okay?"

Chapter 50: Mental Realm

Soon, time began to crawl forward once more, drying the tears Imperial Doula Miriam cried over Ryu's story. Neither knew the ending to the story, but they both wordlessly accepted its importance.

Over the next few months, Ryu never left his courtyard. Although this was completely by choice, it was likely that even if he had wanted to, he couldn't have.

The situation with the Agnes Clan eventually became a story of old, but the consequence resulted in Leilani being demoted once more to the role of Third Concubine. It was no surprise that Patriarch Agnes threw yet another fit over this matter as well. Everyone knew that the former Third Concubine Selene and mother of both Princesses would be bedridden for the rest of her life, yet Leilani had been relegated beneath her?

To make matters worse, Leilani had birthed the King a son. Within the martial world, and especially within ruling Kingdoms, the value of a son far outweighed that of daughters. The act of demoting Leilani was not only a slap to her face, but a resounding one to Ryu's as well... If he cared, that is.

During this time, Ryu was in a world of his own. To those on the outside, looking in, he seemed to have given up on life entirely. He hardly spoke, he would spend days on end meditating without pause, and he even seemed to reject any modicum of love that wasn't from Imperial Doula Miriam.

Of course, his elder sisters visited him every few months when they could, but these visits grew further apart as their children grew. Ryu's little niece and nephew of course went through their own awakening ceremonies, and since this was such an important time for their growth, they could no longer leave the Sect as they willed. Although they weren't born with Earth Grade talents, they both had Black Skeletal Grades, making them far more talented than the average cultivator. In a few decades, they would soon become backbones of the Heavenly Body Sect.

As for Ryu, his days were simple. He would eat, listen to Granny Miriam's stories and meditate.

He had lived a life of darkness until now, and at first, it had been a source of pain. But now? It was an escape.

Ryu felt that the longer and more fiercely he meditated, the more real those visions of his dream became. That huge mountain, that familial piety, that first true love – it all, almost in tragic humor, felt like his.

All of these images made Ryu's own life seem like nothing more than a joke. Could his family even be called one? He suddenly felt that it made sense his heart had never

been swayed by the women here, how could any of them compare to even a tenth of his pink haired goddess?

But the reality was that Ryu was awake now.

When his eyes opened, his heart shattered into pieces he still hadn't found even now. He had never felt such a fierce pain in his life... Not when his mother hurt him, not when his father abandoned him, not even when he was whipped before hundreds of spectators. That heart wrenching, soul tearing pain was unlike anything he had ever experienced.

Him staying indoors became about more than escaping the sneering voices on the outside... It was about settling within an environment he, himself could control. Maybe if he thought hard enough, maybe if he meditated and reached a deep enough state, he could forever sink into that reality and make it his own.

He didn't know what kept him going, but a small voice in that back of his mind kept telling him that this was his last chance... His last chance to make something great of himself.

Ryu couldn't help but laugh at the voice. Even in his fanciful dream, the man who had everything still couldn't fight against Fate. He ended up attempting a second awakening only to die just like millions who had tried before him. If even that lofty figure failed – a man who was capable of far more than him – then what chance did he have?

Still, Ryu kept going. What else could he do?

In truth, he still aspired to be like the man in his dream. Although the man failed, he was still brave enough to fight against his circumstances, something that Ryu himself couldn't boast. Even so, Ryu decided to do what he could.

Through meditation Ryu's Mental Realm unknowingly grew stronger and the memories of his dream grew more vivid. His daily meditation, something he had been doing since he was a toddler, suddenly became the sweetest part of his life. It was only during those sessions that he could relive that Ryu's life – to feel as he did, to love as he did, to smile as he did.

In truth, even Ryu didn't know what path he was headed down, he could only piece things together from what he had heard...

One's Mental Realm wasn't just about seeking out energy like other paths of cultivation. In fact, Ryu didn't even know what Spiritual Qi was at this point. All he knew was that those around him often used the concept of Mental Realms and mental fortitude interchangeably. He could still remember his mother mentioning wanting to cultivate her Mental Realm to the point of Queen Tor's back when he was just three years old... Then, she hadn't been referring to energy, she had just meant a state of mind.

These ideas weren't much, but it was what Little Ryu grasped a hold of. He began to steadily grow his patience, learning to clear his mind for longer and longer periods of time. He had no purpose in mind other to sink deeper into that dream of his...

What Ryu didn't know at this point was that all the hardship he had faced in the life was steadily building a path toward something great, gradually refining and tempering his Mental Realm. Whether he would be able to grasp this opportunity would be entirely left to him.

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As Ryu meditated as he had done all his life, the Four Kingdoms and their citizens were moving around excitedly. The first ever Co-Kingdom Coronation Game had been announced and the banners of national pride had never been risen with such ferocity and passion. Everyone from the poorest to richest man animatedly discussed the odds of victory. Soon, profiteers opened gambling establishments, accepting bets even though the event was several more years away.

However, this was when an old woman the King hadn't accounted for caught wind of the news. Or rather, he had... But, he hadn't accounted for her willingness to risk her life for a child that wasn't her own.