

Grand Ancestral Bloodlines #Chapter 51: To Run - Read

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Chapter 51: To Run

"Come Little Ryu, you've spent too long sitting in one place. You must exercise your body." Imperial Doula Miriam's once soft and lovable features suddenly became stern, surprising Ryu. He couldn't see her face, but he could very clearly hear that she was leaving no room for objection.

Ryu's brow furrowed slightly. He was too intelligent to not pick up on the fact that something was wrong. But, he somehow felt that asking now was useless. The old Doula had become used to his intelligence long ago, so he lost the ability to corner her with words anymore. Whenever she felt like he would succeed, she would simply break whatever rules of engagement he lay by using her seniority.

Smiling triumphantly, Imperial Doula Miriam helped Ryu stand. "Look at you, you're even more frail than before. You've lost what little muscle mass you had before.

"We need to start slowly, overdoing it will only harm you. How do you expect to bring me little babies to play with like this? Up you go."

Thus, just like this, Little Ryu was forced into a training regimen he wanted no part of. Still, the old Doula was right, his body really was too weak. In fact, his muscle atrophy had only gotten worse in recent months due to the fact he sat in silence for such long periods of time. This was a good change of pace for him.

In the beginning, simply walking around his courtyard would cause Ryu to gasp for breath. Despite being ostracized by his family for reasons still largely unknown to him, he still had more than a hundred acres of land to himself. Just a single trip around was just slightly under two kilometers. Heaven knows how he covered the distance between the Palace and the Agnes Clan.

However, even throughout his "torturous" walks, Ryu discovered something interesting. His ability to delve into his world of dreams became greater the more he pushed himself. Could it be that it was possible to train one's Mental Realm through physical exercise as well?

A new world was opening up to Ryu. What had begun as an effort to appease the only person he cared for in this life had suddenly become something he strove to do even without her persistence. Some mornings, Imperial Doula Miriam would come by to find that Ryu had long since awoken. Although she was used to the young boy being awake by dawn, he would usually be meditating. But who knew that hell would have frozen over and the fourth prince would have found a love in physical torture?

Over time, Little Ryu progressed from only being able to walk, to briskly quickening his pace. Eventually, he could just barely manage a light jog for a few minutes before collapsing. It wasn't long before Ryu learned that there were ways to push his body to its limits without physical training. Sometimes he would see how long he could go without sleep, other times he would wake up before the moon set to jump into the ice-cold waters of his property lake. As though this wasn't enough, he would even fast for weeks at a time, wondering what limits his body could endure.

Truth be told, if it wasn't for Imperial Doula Miriam's care and experience in the medical field, Ryu would have long since passed the point of no return. The kinds of things his mind was prepared to do, weren't the sorts of things his body could survive.

"You must understand, Little Ryu. Growing stronger is just as much about rest as it is about work. A body can only grow with time. In the same vein, there needs to be a balance between all things. Strength is just as importance as flexibility."

Under normal circumstances, Imperial Doula Miriam would have stopped Ryu at all costs, even if it meant tying him up. But, she suddenly realized that if she didn't allow him to punish himself now, there was only death waiting. She had to prepare Ryu... It wasn't that she had any faint hope that he could survive the Coronation Games. In fact, she had no such hope at all. She only wanted his body to grow strong enough so that he could run... He needed to run.

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"There you go, reach down as far as you can. Your elastic and well-stretched muscles will thank you later. Always emphasize this balance. What is the use of big muscles you can't make proper use of?"

Little Ryu reached toward his toes as best he could, grasping a hold of his feet. The strain on his face was clear, but he continued to persevere, making use of the breathing technique the old Doula taught him. Another one of her sayings was about the importance of oxygen, but that just made Ryu wonder if he could train his Mental Realm by holding his breath for extended periods of time as well.

By now, it had been almost three months since Ryu had begun his training. He made about as much progress as one could expect in such a short period of time. Still, he had begun to fill out his immature body to a certain extent, at the very least, his spine didn't protrude from his back like it once had.

Truth be told, the old Doula was shocked by Ryu's recovery ability. But, this realization only made her sigh. He had such a good constitution for cultivation, but it had been barred from him.

"Are you ever going to tell me why you had me start training my body?" Ryu's question was perfectly timed, spoken just as Imperial Doula Miriam displayed a slight mental

weakness and pity toward him. It was a bit underhanded, but Ryu felt like he needed answers.

The old Doula sighed. She knew she couldn't keep this from Ryu forever, but she felt like telling him would have no use. What would happen? Wouldn't he just hate his family more? Disdain his life to an even greater extent? Lament his misfortunes and scorn the heavens? What good would that do?

Ryu shook his head, realizing Miriam had no intention of telling him. "What about the reason why this is my life? Can you at least tell me why my father hates me? Why my brothers don't treat me as one?"

Imperial Doula Miriam trembled. This was yet another story she withheld from Ryu. The truth was that she wasn't born on this Plane, so its history wasn't at the forefront of her mind when Little Ryu was born. But, when she found out the truth, she couldn't help but hold a deep disgust for the methods of the royal family. At first, she had wanted to spare Ryu this pain but... If Little Ryu succeeded in running away from this depraved life, he needed to know the truth so that he could protect himself.

"You're very good at cornering this old lady..." A breath escaped Miriam's wrinkled lips. "I don't know how you'll react to this story, but you must stay strong, okay Little Ryu? Never blame yourself for the narrowmindedness of others."

The old Doula paused, collecting her thoughts. "As you know, many years ago, the Mortal Planes were embroiled in war. What many don't know is that this war was a trickle-down affect of matters that occurred in the highest Immortal Plane..."

Chapter 52: White Devil

Like this, Imperial Doula Miriam's story progressed.

Several cycles of several one hundred million years ago, a world changing event took place on the highest Immortal Plane: The Shrine Plane. In an instant, a world that had been awashed in peace for so long became embroiled in war.

The details were unknown to those of the lower Planes, but the Shrine Plane essentially became sealed before being replaced by a new highest Plane. As matters stood now, there were still three Mortal Planes, but the Immortal Planes had become four – three open, and one sealed.

Of course, if there was a war, there was a victor. This winning army marched on the lower Planes, uprooting the previously laid foundations of Fate and building their own. In the end, old factions fell, and new ones rose up. However, this army never bothered to step onto the Mortal Planes. Considering it beneath them, they allowed mortals to wallow in chaos.

Without the familiar structures of Fate above them, mortals lost their belief systems, essentially becoming cut off from the world above. Although those with stronger foundations raised their families and Sects to the higher Planes to escape, the weak had no such option and could only bask in their own inferiority.

With this pain and strife came more, starting a vicious cycle of plains bathed in blood and gore. Since the Immortals had abandoned them, they had no choice but to forge their own paths, leading to masochistic wars for supremacy. Unfortunately, they were naive to believe that they were in control of their own destinies.

The structure of Fate in any world was highly important. In the same way mortals benefitted from Immortals, the opposite can also be possible. It was because of this truth that while some Immortal Clans and Sects couldn't be bothered to care about those of the Mortal Plane, others had eyes that flashed with greed, realizing that there lay an untapped reservoir of potential.

This shift in thought came with a time the competition within the Immortal Plane had reached a new height. With so many scrambling to enter their realm, the concentration of Clan and Sects far outweighed the concentration of resources. As a result, the Mortal Plane became a potential breeding ground.

Stories of virgins with special skeletal grades being whisked away became a matter of daily life. Often times, cults and religions would be formed, forcing devotion upon large groups of weak people in order to propagate Faith. At the same time, those who were arguably the most vicious made empty promises of grandeur, only to destroy the hopes and dreams of those unlucky enough to believe their words.

The concept of Fate and Faith was vast. But, the simplest truth was the it heavily relied on strong feelings of emotion. This said... Which was easier? To elicit feelings of true loyalty and love? Or to provoke feelings of deep animosity and hate? The answer was obvious.

With the previous structure of the martial world, those on the above Immortal Planes placed restrictions on the abilities of higher Planes to influence lower ones in this way. Instead, higher Immortal Planes usually created subordinate Clans to slowly foster feelings of loyalty and steadily grow a sustainable source of Faith. However... The Victor of the war didn't care for such things.

The Victors believed that the martial world was an inherently cruel world. How had their ancestors defeated the Ancient Beasts? Was it not through absolute strength?

The stars foretold of a great calamity, the likes of which humans wouldn't survive unless the weak were weeded out. This Star Reading wasn't a new one. The return of the Ancient Beasts had been telegraphed for several Eras already. The problem was that no one knew when it was coming. Still, that didn't stop The Victors from approaching the matter in their own way.

How could anyone refute them? Had they not overthrown the previous system with their own power? Had they not single-handedly ended the Golden Era to usher in the Martial Era? Their power was undeniable, their fists were the largest, so was it not logical that they were also correct? If the previous system was so great, why did it crumble so easily?

With these new beliefs in place, the mortal Plane had no choice but to suffer. However, this new philosophy brought about an unexpected change. After several billion years of being suppressed, Mental Realm Masters finally made a reappearance. Now that the stigma around foul methods had been removed, at least when they occurred out of sight, they came back in full force, establishing some of the most powerful Clans, Sects and Factions the martial world had to offer.

As could be expected, one of these Clans wreaked havoc on the Mortal Planes. Their cults and religions shone the brightest. After all, they could manipulate the very minds of their victims, making them truly believe that the bad done to them was actual good, while the vile will of their Clans would actually be beneficial to them.

Even to this day, stories of their horror still survived. Tales of daily public executions and tortures, of live mass burials, and of families turning on one another in murder and bloodshed.

Some said that the various cults became incestuous hubs, birthing deformed children to display as though they were some sort of circus act. Others said that these deformed children were actually taken as newborns to be tortured. Their limbs were slowly pulled apart, causing grotesque contortions. Their eyes were gouged out and placed into newly cut and unnatural holes in their bodies, then reconnected via disturbing medical techniques. Certain few even recollected stories of such newborns being sown together to forcefully live the rest of their lives conjoined.

The reality of the matter was that not just one, but all of these stories were true. These were the dark days of the Mortal Realm, a darkness that pervaded all three Planes. Some believed their remnants still remained in the form of small factions and abandoned ruins...

"These scum were known as the White Devil Cult." A sad expression colored her features as she gently grasped Ryu's hand. "Aside from their overwhelming Mental Realms, their only markers were their white hair and silver eyes..."

The answer was now obvious. If the people came to know that a Prince of their Kingdom looked like those who took the head during the darkest times in their history, how would they react? Maybe they'd start to question if those dark days were back, maybe they'd think that his mother had had an affair behind his father's back... Along with a myriad of other things, there was no way their Fate could survive this...

Ryu couldn't help but release a sad laugh.

Chapter 53: Run (1)

After listening to Imperial Doula Miriam's tale of the history of the Mortal Planes, Ryu put the thought of ever reconciling with his family to the back of his mind. If they could treat him like this for the sake of a history so old it was practically more legend than reality, then he had no interest in ever treating them family.

In truth, Ryu knew that his ostracization was related to his appearance, but he had always framed it in a fashion that placed the blame on his shoulders. Maybe he had a disease that wouldn't allow him to live for long, so despite his talent, it didn't make sense for him to become King. Or, maybe his mother had fallen in love with some unknown man who passed on the genes to give him this appearance. The Imperial Censors would have likely hidden the truth for the sake of saving the King's face. Although that also wouldn't be his fault, at the very least he could understand the concept of a child bearing the sins of his parents. But this? This reason was unacceptable to him.

To bear the sins of not his own mother or father, but the sins of disgusting, vile human beings of an era long past? How could you subject a child to such a thing? For the sake of your Kingdom? What was a Kingdom worth if it was built upon a foundation of foolishness?

Ryu channeled all of his frustrations into deepening his Mental Realm. Every bit of emotion and rage suddenly became a rushing fall of energy that fueled his training. Even without truly understanding what he was doing all of this for, he still found himself wholly willing to give his everything, if for nothing else but to forget his own cruel life.

Over the next two years, although Ryu was nothing compared to cultivators, he had diligently trained himself to a top percentile of mortals his age. In addition, as his thirteenth birthday approached, his frame began to fill out as well. He stood at just over 1.85 meters tall. His back and shoulders had widened, and his legs had a slender, but explosive strength to them.

By now, he could consistently run a mile in under four minutes, something that should have been impossible for a normal mortal who hadn't reached full maturity. It was clear that his disposition for cultivation was shining through even without his meridians being awakened. However, aside from physical feats much like this one, Ryu was more enamoured with his ability to conquer mental barriers. Accomplishments related to how long he could hold his breath, go without sleep, or meditate in total stillness were still matters he placed above all else.

During this time, by his side, Imperial Doula Miriam remained his ever-caring helper. It was her who reminded him of the importance of rest, and it was also her who diligently planned his meals. The Palace chefs raised eyebrows when the Fourth Prince, who had always eaten so little, had suddenly become akin to a ravenous beast. They even

thought that the old Doula was hoarding food until it was confirmed that the Fourth Prince truly did eat it all.

Although his family was terrible to him, it luckily wasn't to the point of starving him. The King didn't care for such small matters related to the Palace food budget, nor did the Imperial Censors dare to step over their bounds any more than they already had. They could already feel that King Tor was losing patience with them more and more by the day. It was clear that while they thought they were being clever in their slow power grab, the King saw right through them.

Just like this, Little Ryu continued a lifestyle that would have been monotonous to anyone else. However, it was his escape.

As the days passed, his dreams became clearer. The once vague faces became etched in reality, while the names he hadn't been able to label before were now all he could refer to them as.

Subconsciously, he began to detach himself from reality. He could no longer see King Tor and Third Concubine Leilani as his parents. Their, albeit small, places in his heart were replaced by a valiant red-headed man and a gentle white-haired beauty.

During dark nights when Imperial Doula Miriam would come to check on him, her old heart would break when she heard him mumbling 'mother' and 'father' in his sleep. Still, she could do nothing for him but tuck him in a little tighter and stroke his hair.

On the day Little Ryu learned the name of the pink-haired beauty, he smiled the first genuine smile of his pitiful life. He almost berated himself. How could he forget her name? The name of the woman he loved most in the world.

It wasn't until after Ryu had that thought that he blinked himself back into reality and chuckled bitterly. He had almost thought that that dream was his real life for a moment. How could such a perfect woman fall for him? He was a mess.

Another year passed and Ryu approached his fourteenth birthday. Like they did every year, he expected his elder sisters to visit for that day, but this didn't liven his mood. For the past two months, he had reached an insurmountable bottleneck. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't improve any of his personal bests. It was as though he had reached the limits of his mortal body.

But, he felt like this was nonsense. Although he didn't know what skeletal grade he was born with, he was certain that it was at least of the Black Grade. This essentially meant that even without cultivation, his body should be able to withstand far more than a normal mortal. So, why were his so-called 'personal bests' still within the normal limits of reason?

What Little Ryu didn't know was that it was impossible to improve his Mental Realm any further with his current mind state. How could a person more invested in a fake reality than his own be considered of strong mind? Ryu wanted to deepen his Mental Realm to delve further into the dream, but it was exactly for this reason that he was weak. Although his approach had worked for some time, there was no further path to be followed along it...

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Like this, Ryu's fourteenth birthday approached. He sunk into a helpless void he was unable to climb out of. Even in continuing his daily training, he found little to no joy in it. It was as though he was an addict who could no longer deepen his high.

"Elena..." He mumbled in his sleep, tossing and turning.

"Little Ryu!" Suddenly, a warm, aged hand shook Ryu awake, startling him. He knew that the old Doula came to check on him sometimes, but she had never gone out of her way to awaken him. "Quickly, get dressed. Today is the day we leave this place."

Chapter 54: Run (2)

Little Ryu sat up from his bed, shocked at the words he just heard. But, he immediately calmed down. He had been so focused on deepening his Mental Realm for the sake of some fake reality that he hadn't thought of something so obvious. Why else would Imperial Doula Miriam insist that he train for so long and hard if not for this purpose?

"Listen to me very carefully." The old Doula tried to slow her beating heart. She had been consistently coming to Ryu's room like this for years for this very moment. There was no reason for her to feel so nervous now. It was just that she couldn't settle this uncomfortable feeling she was getting. "You're a very smart boy, so I know I only need to repeat myself once. First, here."

Ryu felt the old Doula's hands slip something onto his finger. When he looked down, he couldn't help but be shocked. A spatial ring? On the mortal Planes such an item was almost impossible to come by! Even the Agnes Clan didn't have a single one, maybe only the Cedar Clan or the Royal Vaults would have such a treasure. Aside from that, they were practically all monopolized by the upper echelon of the Sects!

"Inside of this ring, there are provisions for exactly half a year. Don't worry, I've already taken into account your increased appetite and any further increases it might have. I believe that with your intelligence, this is all the buffer you'll need. But, just in case, I've added enough dry rations for an addition three years and enough water for five." The old Doula, despite knowing that they should be safe, spoke incredibly quickly, unable to stop her beating heart.

"The next thing you need to note is that I've written the formula for Meridian Awakening Ceremonies for you and I've also left my cultivation technique within. Although it won't be perfectly suited to you, it will be good enough for now. I unfortunately wasn't able to procure the materials for you because I'm definitely being monitored, but you should know that even poor families can afford such a ceremony. With the money I've left you, you'll be able to pay for thousands if you so wish.

"Fourth. I've left a map of the Kingdoms for you. I know that you are blind, but your senses have always been sharp. The map is within what a Sect would call a 'Memory Jade'. I've told you stories about them before, so you should understand how to use them, correct?"

Ryu nodded stiffly. The old Doula had told him such stories before. These magical jades could hold images and vast stores of memories. Even if Ryu was blind, it didn't matter. The contents would be projected directly into his mind. If he coupled this knowledge with his senses, he'd have an idea of the general directions he should head in.

"Fifth. I've left a mask for you as well as more than enough hair dye to last a lifetime. Never bathe where you might expect to come across people and always make sure to apply it once a day." Miriam heavily emphasized this point. Since Ryu was blind, how could he see when his true color was beginning to shine through? The only way to combat this was to apply the dye regularly.

"The sixth is maybe the most important. You will never be safe on this highest mortal Plane. I'm certain that the Tor Royal Clan will do everything in its power to find you. You must understand how to remain safe. Avoid large cities. Don't trust anyone. And sleep only in places you have multiple avenues of escape from.

"Within this ring, I've left you a letter. If it turns out that we are correct and your ceremony was sabotaged, I am certain that not only your skeletal grade, but also your meridian and bloodline grade will be of the Heaven Grade at an absolute minimum. Such a talent is unconscionable on the Mortal Plane and the Outer Ring Sects of the Immortal Plane will fall over themselves to take you as a disciple."

Ryu's eyes flashed at these words. The old Doula had told him that she wasn't of this Plane long ago, but he had assumed she was from a lower mortal Plane. Could it be?...

As though reading Ryu's mind, the old Doula shook her head. "I am from the middle Mortal Plane. In fact, both me and my twin sister are. We were born with a special category of skeletal grade dubbed as 'Causal Fate'. It's a bit difficult to explain in a few words, but essentially, unlike others, the actions each of us takes have a direct and obvious effect on the other. But, these effects aren't always predictable. We were both born with Earth Grade meridians and bone structures, however, my choice to pursue the medical field to help others resulted in the first instance of our Causal Fate.

"She ended up receiving my talent as I had no interest in the martial way. This resulted in her gaining a Heaven Skeletal Grade and Heaven Grade Meridians. It wasn't long after that she was recruited by an Outer Ring Sect of the Pedestal Plane. It likely won't be long until she gains a place among the Inner Ring as dual Heaven Grades are very rare.

"If you give the letter I've given you to my sister, I know that she will protect you. Although I've described the story as such, there is no animosity between my sister and I, we simply walk different paths. Remember that the location of her Sect is the Outer Ring and that its name is the Awoken Moon Sect. Bide your time, strengthen your cultivation in hiding, and I'm certain that there'll come a day when you will be capable of crossing the Immortal Barrier. In fact, a Master of the Immortal Plane might find you beforehand in acknowledgement of your talents and bring you up him or herself.

"However, Little Ryu." The Imperial Doula turned serious. "If I am for any reason wrong. If your talent is worse than expected or if your ceremony wasn't sabotaged, you must give up on going to the Immortal Plane. Go to the Middle Mortal Plane and find my family. They are very well off and will be able to protect you for a time. Even if I die, they won't dare to do anything to you because my will is my sister's will. They know this and won't harm you out of fear of her.

"Do you understand everything I've said? Do you need me to repeat anything?"

The quick flow of the old Doula's words had hit Ryu like a brick, but he forcefully soaked them all in. In the end, he could only weakly nod.

Unknowingly, his eyes had started to glisten with unshed tears. All his life, no matter what horrible things he suffered, he had never cried, not once. But, why was it that he felt the need to now? Why was it in all the words she had spoken, Imperial Doula Miriam hadn't said a word about her coming with him? Why?

"Good." The old Doula wiped her tears. "I've spoken to your elder sisters. With their cultivation, they'll be able to take you out of the castle safely. After that, you'll be on your own."

"Wait, what?" Little Ryu froze, his eyes icing over.

"I said I've spoken to your elder sisters. They're the only ones who've still shown care for you."

A mournful croak escaped Ryu's lips, his voice almost sounded like that of a dying animal. "RUN! RUN AS FAR AS YOU CAN. NOW!"

Chapter 55: Run (3)

Ryu grabbed Imperial Doula Miriam's body. He didn't stop to think for a moment that this frail old lady was actually far more powerful than he was. All he could think about was escaping as quickly as possible.

In her confusion, the old Doula didn't even remember that she could easily shake the little boy's hand from her wrist. Completely fallen into a daze, she could only follow as they ran out the back door of Ryu's room, sprinting across the bath hall, through the green house, and into the large expanse of his personal backyard.

It should have been a beautiful scene. With the moon and stars shining in the sky above, the lake just across from them gently flowing in the cool night air... It should have been exactly that. But, it wasn't.

Ryu's senses were immediately blocked by six individuals, four he recognized by their breathing and gait, but the other two, he had never met before – that, he was certain of.

Despair built up within Ryu's chest, a heavy feeling of weakness overwhelming him. No matter how deeply he tried to breathe, it didn't seem like enough. It was as though his lungs had shriveled to a third of their size, blocking him from the sustenance he needed.

His grip on the old Doula's wrist tightened, but he didn't know what to do. No matter how intelligent he was, his experience was nearly zero. He had no real-world knowledge, nor did he have any real training. Even if he did, of the six that stood before him now, four of them had cultivation. For a mortal like him, what chance did he stand?

Suddenly, a lewd laughter came from one of the two Ryu didn't recognize. He was a handsome young man who wore a perpetual slanted smile on his face that tore apart his facade of elegance. His features were also overly pale, as though he hadn't seen the light of day all his life. It was shocking that a person with such an appearance could have any cultivation to speak of at all, yet, he did.

"Why do they look like a pair of lovers escaping into the night to elope? Don't tell me your little brother has such a perverted fetish, Brother Amory? You haven't been doing your duty as First Prince if you have such things going on right under your nose." The disgusting, lewd laughter continued. Its sound took over the whole of Ryu's senses. To him, there was only that laugh, that laugh that filled him with a rage he was unable to vent.

"Your jokes are as crude as ever, Brother Atticus. Whether my Fourth Brother is having an affair with this old whore is none of my concern."

By now, the old Doula had frozen completely. Her aged and trusting mind couldn't comprehend just how this had happened. Hadn't she been careful? Hadn't she followed

the same schedule for years, just for this day? What had gone wrong? Even until now, she hadn't doubted the elder sisters of Ryu.

She couldn't comprehend it. As an older sister herself, she would put her life on the line if it meant protecting her younger sibling. She could never imagine that for the sake of some feeble empire, Ryu's two sisters who had always seemed to dote on him would do such a thing.

To make matters worse, they were cowards. They didn't dare to come here to face the despair of a little boy and an old woman themselves. They were pathetic, spineless, worthless shells of a human being.

It was at this moment that one of the four Ryu recognized and cleared his throat. This person was none other than Imperial Censor Orson.

"For the crime of attempting to kidnap a Royal Prince and shirking her duties as the Imperial Doula, it has been decreed by his Royal Majesty that Miriam Varson will be hereby stripped of her title and privileges." Over the years, scheming had turned the black eyes of the Imperial Censor into beady, snake-like ones. Even his voice made Ryu, who was already falling into the pits of hell, feel an added chill.

Clearing his throat once more, the Censor continued. "After a thorough investigation, it's been found that the King's early infertility and inability to give birth to a son was tied to this former Doula's dereliction of duty and horrid malpractice. This increases her sentence to twenty years of seclusion within the Palace's ice dungeons."

Ryu's trembling increased as tears fell from the old Doula's wrinkled face. She seemed to age several more decades in an instant, all her remaining energy leaving her like a fleeting fragrance in the wind.

"The conclusion of this investigation found traces of poison connected to the Fourth Prince's birth. This Meridian Severing Poison is likely tied to the Prince's blindness, his odd hair color, and most definitely his inability to awaken his meridians.

"For the crime of an attempted assassination on a Prince of the Royal Family, the sentence is execution by beheading."

"NO!" The rush of emotions Ryu felt were so fierce that he vomited on the spot. A horrible, gut wrenching stench erupted from his lips, coating the dew-covered night grass with his hatred and animosity.

"Aiyah, he really must love her. What a sad sight. Such a handsome young man falling for an old hag. You really have closed off this little brother of yours to the world too much. You should have at least bought a few women from the local brothel for him."

"Would it really make that much of a difference?" The second person Ryu didn't recognize interjected. His voice was so lazy that Ryu almost mistook him for his Second Brother, but their tones were too different. "He's blind. It's probably all the same to him."

Atticus made an 'aha' sound as though he had finally understood. "As expected of a top graduate of the Four Kingdom's Institute. You impress me more and more everyday, Brother Silas."

"If you please." Imperial Censor Briggs who had been in the background motioned toward the fourth individual Ryu recognized. He was none other than his father's personal aid and Death Guard... His actions represented the King's Will. If he was here... That meant King Tor sent him.

The execution of a person, the only person that Ryu had ever felt something for in this life, had become the sideshow entertainment of three Princes and two Censors. Little Ryu's mournful struggle became akin to an ant fighting a tidal wave.

The old Doula was ripped from his hands. He tried to stumble forward to grab her back, but he found himself flying through the air, having been slapped away by his father's Death Guard.

Nonexistent stars shone in his eyes as the world spun. Before he realized what had happened, he found himself lying on the ground. The only sound other than the ringing of his ears were the muffled struggles of the old Doula.