

# Grand Ancestral Bloodlines

## *Chapter 56: Kill*

"STOP!" Ryu roared, standing as swiftly as his concussed body would allow. "Imperial Doula Miriam's twin sister is an Immortal cultivator! Killing her is a mistake!"

The six froze. It didn't sound like Ryu was lying despite the fact such a desperate situation was conducive to one, oddly enough. However, this pause was only for a moment.

Prince Atticus' lewd laughter filled the night air once more. "I was wondering how an old bat seduced such a young man. Did you woo him with your fanciful stories of grandeur? What a joke."

As for Prince Silas, his lazy expression upturned into a slight smile before it disappeared.

Ryu's body shook violently, the pain in his head doubling, then tripling as his veins pumped with rage. It was then that he thought of the spatial ring. Not only was it a rare treasure, the space within it was large enough to hold enough rations for years. From what he knew, this was impossible for a normal treasure. Shouldn't this be proof enough?

However, before he could make the attempt, the weak voice of Imperial Doula Miriam called out.

The frail old woman was forced to kneel to the ground, her greying hair held back by the Tor Clan Death Guard, Bhishak. It didn't seem to matter to him who his victim was. His black cloak simply continued to whip in the air like the call of the reaper, waiting for the Imperial Censor's execution order.

"Little Ryu, that's enough." Blood flowed from Miriam's scalp as clumps of her hair were pulled too far back. Although she was a Pulse Opening expert, how could the Death Guard of the Royal Clan be any lower than the Qi Refinement realm? "You were right to never call me Granny Miriam, it's not a title this old woman deserves."

Ryu's brows furrowed, his figure stumbling as he struggled to orient himself. He was already blind to begin with, trying to use his senses while his ears were ringing and his mind was aching was too much for him. In the end, he fell to his knees, grasping his head, unable to make sense of much of anything.

"Whoa, whoa. Hold on." Atticus waved the Imperial Censors off as they prepared to order Bhishak. "Can't you see a touching drama is playing out. Grab some snacks and enjoy."

The Imperial Censors who were about to give the order froze, unsure of what to do. Although they were high ranked, they were still below the Princes of even other Kingdoms. They couldn't simply ignore the Prince of the Lantes Kingdom because they wanted to. Unfortunately, when they turned their gazes toward the First Prince for help, he only shrugged. It didn't matter to him one way or the other.

"You mustn't shed tears for me." The old Doula's words croaked slightly, but she tried to remain firm. "I'm only a hypocrite who facilitated your suffering."

Little Ryu shook his head fiercely, trying to get rid of his concussion by sheer force of will. But, he was a mere mortal, how could he do such a thing? No level of Mental Realm would allow him to succeed. His body was simply too weak. He was too weak.

"No... No." Ryu mumbled, trying to speak coherent words.

"Yes." The old Doula said sadly. "I am indeed guilty of the crimes they've accused me of. Although I wasn't involved with this so-called Meridian Severing poison, did you believe you were born blind?"

Ryu froze before his body shivered from head to toe. Tears uncontrollably fell from his eyes. A young man who had never cried – a young man who suffered through the hate of his father, the disdain of his mother, and a humiliation of a lifetime – unleashed a flood of emotions he could no longer control.

His stomach heaved and crawled, his whole world upturning with a single sentence.

"It was I who blinded you Little Ryu. Hate me. Burn your memory of a kind old lady in the pit of your stomach. Replace it with rage – make me a devil. But, never shed tears for me... I don't deserve it..."

"Aaaaannnndd scene." Atticus clapped. "See, wasn't that perfect?"

Almost as soon as Atticus' words fell, so did Imperial Doula Miriam's head. Ryu's shrill cry shook the Palace grounds, quaking the earth and reaching toward Tor City. His anguish was so fierce that vessels within his eyes ruptured, causing a murky red-black to coat his cheeks.

The First Prince looked down at this younger brother. All throughout his early life, he had always thought that Ryu would grow to be greater than him. His mother had constantly pushed him to avoid that future, but look at the state of things now. He would one day rule a quarter of an entire Plane while this younger brother of his had become this pitiful mess.

'Your time to die isn't just yet.' He thought to himself. He didn't waste his words on Ryu, nor did he go out of his way to humiliate him. By now, he felt that it was far beneath him. Ryu simply wasn't worthy of even his disdain.

The group of six left one by one, Prince Atticus and Silas walking with content expressions on their faces, as though they had just finished watching a five-star play. As for the decapitated body of the old Doula, none cared for it. Eventually the servants who handled the upkeep of the Fourth Prince's courtyard would handle it. Why would they dirty their hands?

Ryu didn't seem to notice their departure, in fact, he couldn't feel much of anything. He was completely broken.

He tried to crawl toward what remained of the old Doula's body, but his hands ended up sinking into a thick and pungent crimson liquid. By the time he steeled himself and made it to the side of her now cold and rigid body, the morning sun was already high in the skies and the courtyard servants had already run away with scared expressions on their faces.

"Granny Miriam..." Ryu had no more tears to shed. Whatever remained of him had dried, crusting over in a coarse salt. He tried to call out the name the old Doula had wanted to hear so badly, the name even he couldn't explain why he had never used, but no matter how much he said it, she didn't come back...

For the past three years, Ryu had done whatever he could to sink into another reality, to forget whatever this life was and live another. But, now, he understood that this was his only life.

"Kill." Almost a week later, sitting by the foul stench that remained of his Granny Miriam, these were the first words he spoke.

"Kill." He said it again, a slumbering giant trembling in his mind and soul.

### *Chapter 57: Awakening*

Ryu's head tilted backward, unleashing a roar akin to a dragon awakening from a deep sleep. Tor Palace shook violently, unable to withstand his unbridled rage.

The dye that coated Ryu's hair incinerated to nothingness, revealing a streak of pure white that blinded those who looked directly toward it. At the same time, Ryu's bare and frail chest seared red, pumping with grotesque lines of blue-green that wiggled along its surface as though alive.

Spiritual Qi, for the first time in Ryu's life, rushed toward him like a fiendish hound. Blood vessels within his brain bulged with impunity, making Ryu feel that his mind was splitting apart into shredded chunks of meat.

Without knowing it, Ryu had stepped along a path of incomparable danger. He had just attacked a Pulse! Although he had failed to open it fully, the process of doing so, even partially, was a great detriment to his body as things stood now.

One had to understand that the opening of Pulses was something only to be done after completing what were called the Nine Rites of the Awakening Realm. Of course, this so-called Awakening Realm was the very first step a martial warrior would take into the world of cultivation. When one completes their meridian awakening ceremony, they would be considered to have completed this first, and easiest, Rite.

Obviously, cultivation realms were meant to build upon each other slowly. However, Ryu had taken a third step before even taking a first – a mistake that was only possible due to his blind pursuit of a higher Mental Realm!

The Pulse Ryu had stepped upon was known as Spiritual Entrance Pulse. It was the opening of this Pulse that allowed the cultivation of Spiritual Qi in its truest form. In fact, this wasn't a Pulse those of the mortal Planes ever bothered with because it was completely separate from Qi Realm cultivation. Instead, it was solely anchored in Mental Realm cultivation! Although it was possible to wield Spiritual Qi before entering this realm, it was to a finite extent decided by birthed talent and not hard work.

Without even realizing it, the Mental Realm accumulation of two lives had pushed Ryu to this point. Whether it was him leaping over his final mental hurdle to kill himself for the sake of others in his previous life, or the constant humiliation and the death of his Granny Miriam in this one, both had coalesced to push him onto a rarely explored path.

The issue was that now, Ryu's unawakened body was now dealing with the opening of a Pulse it wasn't prepared for. Even so, the momentum of his partial breakthrough alerted every soul in Tor Palace!

Ryu was in no position to care. His blood vessels pulsed with an added vigor, having partly removed a blocker to its enraged flow. At this point, it was no longer just his head, but every portion of his body that was ravaged with this unceasing pain.

His jaw clenched to the point where blood began to flow between his teeth even as his fingernails dug into the skin of his palms. As Ryu's skin grew redder, his body heat skyrocketed, shooting past levels of a normal fever and into a range that should have meant death to a mortal.

It was at this moment that Ryu's slumbering soul stirred.

No one knew what the true Phoenix God trial was. Even Ryu, who labored over millions of Folk Lore couldn't piece it together in its entirety. The only thing he became certain of in the end was that it was only possible to leap over this trial barrier by experiencing three forms of quintessence... Life, Death and Reincarnation.

Ryu's trial hadn't ended the moment he reincarnated. What he had to prove was that even when born into an entirely new life, he could make the same tough decision twice.

In his first life, he resolved to improve the lives of his Clan and parents by any method he could before ultimately deciding to sacrifice himself for the slim chance that he could help them more.

In his second life, he tempered himself through a decade of pain before finally resolving himself to fight against Fate once more. Whether it cost him his life or not, it didn't matter. He would seek revenge not for himself, but for his Granny Miriam.

The true Ryu had begun to awaken. Memories of a life he had thought was nothing more than a dream etched into his mind as though he himself lived it. In the next moment, he awakened fully, understanding that that life he had pined for, the one he thought he would never deserve, was actually his own!

He had a true Father and a kind Mother. He had grandparents who viewed him not as a tool, but as a child to be cherished. He had a wife. A beautiful, loving wife – one that was waiting for him even now! His promise, he remembered it, he remembered it so clearly that it was as though it happened yesterday!

Blood roared through Ryu's veins, pumping through with such a vigor that it was audible even from the outside of his body. In response, his clothes burnt to ash, revealing his scarred back and the faint etchings of a once bloody cross over his heart.

The moment Ryu's former soul awoke from its slumber, his Spiritual Foundation shook. As though calling the Sky Gods from above, clouds rolled over Tor Kingdom, blackening out the sun and sinking the capital city into a dense night the likes of which they had never experienced.

Ryu's body began to glow. First, it was his skeleton, shining as though it was carved of the most precious gems. Then, it was his meridians. Their complex inner workings layered atop each other, widening and strengthening with each passing moment. Then, the cycle completed with his blood once more. Four separate but wholly amazing bloodlines awoke from their sleep, quashing and destroying the inferior Tor blood that ran in Little Ryu's veins.

However, each and every one of those awakenings completely paled in comparison to the beast hidden deep within Ryu's Spiritual Foundation. A sea of white flames danced, growing fiercer as the seconds ticked by. Suddenly, they surged upward, shattering a barrier that had held Ryu down for not one, but two lives.

Ryu's eyes flashed opened, the disgusting scars that had coated his back falling away to reveal an incomparably smooth figure. His muscles rippled with vitality, his eyes shone with killing intent, and his frame had grown another size.

His white hair fluttered in the wind behind him, his expression no longer like a little boy lost in the world, but rather like an expert who had lived more than a thousand years. With a thought, a pool of spatial energy bloomed from his silver eyes, causing a black cloak to wrap around his body. Then, he disappeared.

### *Chapter 58: Regret*

The experts of Tor City converged onto the Palace. Each and every one of their souls were shaken. Never in their lives had they felt so inferior.

One had to understand that until now, the fiercest awakening these so-called experts had ever experienced was that of a Heaven Grade talent, and even that occurred several dozen generations ago. On the day that occurred, the auspicious signs lasted for but a few minutes before dissipating into nothingness. Still, it had a profound impact on them all.

However, Ryu's awakening made that moment seem like a story retold in a children's book – petty, shallow and uninteresting. Even hours later, the dark clouds showed no sign of revealing the rays of the sun. In fact, Ryu's courtyard was in absolute shambles. How could the momentum of a talent meant to be born on the highest Immortal Plane be contained by the likes of a mortal Plane?

The King, his Imperial Censors, the Pillar Heads, the Princes and even the King's wife and concubines stood in the vast wasteland that had once been Ryu's home. Aside from a stain of pungent, rotting blood that sat unscathed at its center, just a few paces from a now evaporated lakebed, there was nothing left. Not even Ryu's shadow could be seen.

Of those in attendance, the only one who hadn't paled in fear was Second Prince Jedrek who had his usual lazy expression plastered on his handsome, but lanky, features.

Ryu had left without a word. There was no note, no promise of revenge, not even a cold glare to hang their hats on. The only thing that replayed in their minds again and again was the enraged roar that shook the capital. It wasn't a roar of a defeated man, it was the roar of a man who had woken up, one that would destroy everything in his path for the sake of his goals.

Not a single soul here didn't understand just how talented Little Ryu was, but should it matter how talented a young man was if he was suppressed since his youth? How could he grow?

Time and time again, they had stamped out his will to live. They tormented him, humiliated him, pushed him to the edge without regard for familial ties of love. Now, they stood trembling in fear. Cold sweats matted their backs and panic shook their souls. Not a single one of them could bring themselves to say a word even after several hours.

At some point, the two Princesses who had been preparing to head back to the Sect, hoping to never have to come back and face their young brother, had no choice but to rush back. When they saw the scene before them, they instantly paled. They too had heard the roar and they too were members of the cultivation world. Did they need any of these things explained to them?

It was in that moment that Patriarch Agnes lost his mind. "WHAT DID YOU DO TO MY GRANDSON, YOU BASTARDS?! WAS HE NOT A CRIPPLE?! WAS HE NOT UNABLE TO CULTIVATE?! WAS HE NOT USELESS?! WHAT DID YOU DO?!"

The old man's words were like a puncture through an already unsteady dam, unleashing a wave of pain and blood. Third Concubine Leilani could only fall to the floor, grasping her frail head as she seemed to age several decades in a mere moment. She could do nothing as her father was beaten savagely by the Death Guard Bhishak.

They hadn't believed in the little boy before, but now an incoherent regret caused them to lose touch with reality. If old man Agnes hadn't been restrained by the former General, it was certain that this matter wouldn't have ended with a mere beating. He was allowed to live simply because of the rarity of the matter and the fact the King was truly wrong. But he didn't escape several broken bones and a pain his old bones could hardly withstand.

Patriarch Cedar, an older man with olive skin and bright white hair glanced toward his daughter, Queen Tor. But, he only received her glance toward the ground. At such a moment, she couldn't find it within herself to meet her father's eyes. This matter should have ended when she poisoned Ryu, but it hadn't. She had believed that the Sky Gods were on her family's side after Ryu was suppressed irrelevant of her actions. Yet, the concept of destroying threats from the root shone through fiercely now.

Imperial Censor Digby sighed, his long white beard trembling along with his slight frame. "Karma is an endless current... No matter what roadblock it may meet, it will break through in due time. If it wasn't this generation... It would have been the next..."

"Your majesty, we must take action as quickly as possible! Even if the Fourth Prince has awoken his talent, he can't have become an Immortal in a single leap! He's still a blind young man with no knowledge of the world. With our resources, we'll definitely be able to find him!" Imperial Censor Orson's snake-like eyes darted. He refused to allow Censor Briggs the initiative again. But, who knew that his words would have been met by the opening of the King's reddened eyes.

King Tor's fury reached the high heavens. This had all started because of them. It was because of their schemes and tricks, their stupid talks of Fate and Faith. It was they who made him abandon his own son. If not for them, wouldn't his Tor Kingdom have gained an immovable pillar?!

"DIE!" The King's rage could not be sated. His palm shone with a bright light, barreling through the Censor Orson's chest and shattering his heart in an instant.

Imperial Censor Orson looked down at the bloody arm that had pierced him before looking up at his King with an unending regret. His eyes dimmed as he fell. Never had he expected that all the years he had built himself to this peak would end in a mere instant, and all over a boy he had thought nothing of.

So what if you're royalty or nobility? These were words he thought to himself all the time when he lay his schemes. Before his intelligence, what did your rank mean? Only now did he understand that he had never held any true power at all.

Would there be revenge for him? Would the King face punishment? Of course not.

Imperial Censor Briggs looked at the fallen body of his former comrade. 'Fool...' He muttered to himself.

"FIND HIM!" The King's enraged shout shook the Palace for the second time that day. Under the cover of the perpetual night, dozens of shadows blanketed the skies.

The darkness that blanketed Tor Kingdom wouldn't dissipate for several years.

#### *Chapter 59: Elder Brother*

First Prince Amory walked steadily into his own courters, ordering the servants to bar anyone from interrupting him as he sat at a wide desk, calming his breathing. If one looked closely, it became clear that Amory's study was identical to his father's. Even the decorative vases weren't even a centimeter out of place.

After the initial shock of the matters, his mind state had finally begun to rebalance itself. What was the use in panicking or throwing a tantrum? What was done was done. His goal now was to find a way to move forward.

His Third Brother was a cultivation maniac who had no interest in the throne. He believed it would only slow his progress to become King. In fact, the only reason Cayden would participate in the Coronation Games at all was for the sake of the Clan Texts that could not be disobeyed.

As for his Second Brother, although he didn't want the throne himself, for the sake of protecting his family's Garis Clan, he would fight for it. Amory had to admit that of his siblings, the most potent threat was his Second Brother Jedrek. With his financial capital, even building his own military wasn't impossible.

For the past few years, ever since he graduated from the Institute, he had been building countermeasures. He could count on the support of his Third Brother, but Jedrek's resources were not to be underestimated.



However, just when he thought he had grasped the board they played on, the table had been flipped. A wild card appeared on the field without any move set restrictions. Just how would his Fourth Brother play?

As Amory saw it, there were two possibilities. The first was the approach Amory himself would take. He would bide his time, slowly work his way to the Divine Vessel realm and cross the Immortal Barrier. Once he succeeded, he would join a powerful Sect, cross into the Connecting Heaven realm, before descending to exact his revenge.

Amory reached forward, lightly grasping a black stone with a single white speck at its center. He twirled it between his fingers, closing his eyes to breathe in the fragrant aromatics of the room.

The game before him was the foremost strategy game of the martial world. It was simply known as 'Domain.' Unlike games of its kind, its board wasn't uniform. Not only did it have elevated sections, even its divisions alternated from miniature squares to triangles to pentagons.

Rumors would have it that masters of Domain were capable of cultivating by simply playing the game. Although Amory didn't know how true this was, he had always been fascinated by it. Not a day had passed without him contemplating its board after his Master introduced it to him.

'Master is a mortal, yet doesn't he grasp the world in his palm? How else could a mere mortal build an Institute all four Kingdoms recognized?' Unknowingly, Amory had settled into a deep state of contemplation.

'This first and smartest option... It isn't the path you'd pick, right Fourth Brother?' A light smile played Amory's features.

No matter what rift had grown between them, Amory and Ryu were still blood brothers. Albeit half, it was still true. With this came an understanding for one another.

Ryu's arrogance seeped to his bones. It wasn't a normal, cowardly arrogance – the kind that only appeared in the face of the weak but disappeared in the face of the strong. No. His Fourth Brother disdained the world itself. Before, his tragic flaw had been that while he was prepared to disdain even the ground he stood on, he had never been willing to challenge Fate.

His Fourth Brother had resigned himself to a short life, yes. But he was only willing to die with his head held high. He wanted the world to know that it wasn't you measly humans who broke me, but rather Fate itself. That was how he felt satisfied with himself, that was the type of person he was.

However, the Imperial Doula's death had snapped something within him. He woke up.

The truth of the matter was that his Fourth Brother was inherently masochistic. He was willing to suffer through any pain for the sake of his goals. It was just that he believed that this goal of his was to die with his head held high. It wasn't until he realized that Fate was cruel and flawed that he rejected it.

'What an interesting man you are, Fourth Brother. You don't recognize Fate as cruel for yourself, but you do for others. Since even you are willing to fight against Fate, then what kind of Elder Brother would I be if I covered where my younger brother braved?'

Amory's smile deepened. 'Not only will you not hide and bide your time, you've likely already taken the first step toward your revenge now, haven't you? It's not just that either. You'll make sure that this revenge is on the grandest stage. And the opening you'll pick.... Is the Coronation Games!'

Laughter of a genuine ilk spread through the First Prince's courtyard. "GOOD. This Elder Brother will wait for you. I'll take on your all your hate and rest it on my shoulders. For the Tor Clan to live, you must die. For you to live, I must die."

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Currently, Ryu had no idea what his First Brother was thinking. He simply wasn't focused on such things. However, it was true that he had already taken his first step.

Ryu sat at the center of a slowly flowing river, his naked body almost breathing as he allowed the cool and clear water to wash over his body.

The moment his Spiritual Foundation awakened, his blood surged, and he had distinctly felt several popping noises emit from his forehead, cheeks and eyes. When he realized just what it was, he couldn't help but release a deep sigh.

Ryu had no doubt that King Tor ordered his Granny Miriam to blind him as a child. But, the old Doula was too kind to do such a thing. Instead, she destroyed the ligaments connected to his eyelids and constricted the muscles in his pupils to the extreme. The result was Ryu's inability to register light or open his eyes.

The old Doula died filled with regret even after that, but she didn't know just how much pain she saved Ryu. Had she not done this, his Mysteries of Heaven and Earth Pupils would have been discovered long ago. Who knew what kind of trouble that would have brought?

Even in death, she had saved him.

## *Chapter 60: Martial Forms*

Ryu owed his Granny Miriam more than he could express into words. Yet, she had never heard him accept her as one of his family. Despite having gained another thousand years of memories, this weighed heavily on Ryu.

The truth was that he was right to be skeptical. Hadn't he been correct about the betrayal of his elder sisters? It was just that he had hoped he would be right about this one too. But, he wasn't. In the end, the only thing he could do for his Granny Miriam was make sure she didn't die in vain.

Unfortunately, this resolve came with many problems. Firstly, despite having all the talent in the world, Ryu had no experience cultivating and no guider. When he lived on the Shrine Plane, he focused all of his attention on what he could do. Why would he waste time on cultivation techniques he could never practice?

Secondly, he was in danger. He had no doubt that the commotion his awakening had caused was resulting in severe repercussions even as he lay here relaxing. Very soon, there would be many capable individuals coming after him.

Thirdly, there was the matter of how to execute this revenge. Of course, he could wait patiently and bide his time, but he had no intention of doing so. Almost fourteen years of built up rage wasn't something he wanted to bottle up, nor did he believe they were worth him being careful.

Knowing all of these things, Ryu laid out detailed plans. With his calculations, the Tor Kingdom would be no more less than half a year after the Coronation Games ended.

Ryu stood, taking a deep breath as the memories of his life flashed by like the scenes of a movie. Not only had his talent reawakened along with his Spiritual Foundation, the treasures that he had absentmindedly stored within his Heavenly Pupils and bound to his soul had actually followed him into this life as well.

The Embryonic Origin Flame made its prowess known, boosting Ryu's memory and Mental Realm to incredible heights. Finally, he found the scenes of his life he was looking for.

Just the night before Ryu took his own life for the chance at a Second Awakening, the Origin Flame had helped him remember some of the best experiences in his life. It was because of it that he eventually resolved himself to fight against Fate for the sake of his family.

However, Ryu wasn't delving into these memories now to reminisce. He had already leapt over this barrier, he could only see a path toward the future now. Instead, what he was looking for were his early memories before he turned seven years old, the days when he learned the Martial Forms of the Tatsuya, Kunan and Phoenix Clans.

Contrary to their names, Martial Forms aren't techniques that store power. Instead, they're basic martial arts taught to children in order to lay a foundation.

Awakenings, especially for the talented children of the Immortal Planes, can be exceptionally painful. These Martial Forms prepare the body for the shock it might receive during such a ceremony. If Ryu had to compare it to something, it was similar to the Tai Chi practiced by mortals of the elder generation in order to remain healthy.

Although the truth was that these Martial Forms had limited value on the Shrine Plane, here on the mortal Planes, or even on the lower Immortal Planes, they were akin to heavenly treasures.

The Tatsuya Clan Martial Form taught stability and power. It emphasized the strength of the lower body as well as the bones. The Kunan Clan Martial Form taught speed and explosiveness. It emphasized the quick twitch of muscles, focusing on smaller groups to promote not only reaction speed, but ease of adaptation. The Ice Phoenix Clan Martial Form taught stamina and durability. It emphasized the flow of blood and the efficient use of oxygen. Finally, the Fire Phoenix Clan Martial Form taught recoverability and flexibility. It emphasized the comprehension of the human body to the most minute of details. Even a mortal who became proficient in this Martial Form would be able to accelerate the pace of their healing by diverting energy from elsewhere.

Martial Forms acted as the basis for a Clan's Core Teachings, and although Ryu never learned what these Core Teachings were, he believed that these Martial Forms would give him a solid foundation to start and grow from. At the same time, they'd train his body and prepare him for proper cultivation.

Still, Ryu remembered the words his father had spoken. It was impossible to master a Martial Form. One must practice daily and improve their foundation step by step. Once one broke away from the need for Martial Forms, one would become a true expert.

Just like this, Ryu began to train the four Martial Forms of his family in earnest. Although he had had success with them during his youth, he was far stricter with himself now than he was then. Instead of comparing his day to day improvements, Ryu constantly compared his movements to the movements of his father, mother and grandparents. Now, he wasn't simply going through the motions of the techniques, he was painstakingly imitating the perfect reflections of his past memories.

As the search radius for the Fourth Prince widened, Ryu ironically remained within a single kilometer of the Tor Kingdom outer walls. He knew very well that there was a vast expanse of harsh land between him and his next destination, so he took his time. He wouldn't take that journey until his body was ready.

Instead, he made Tor Forest his home, making use of his vastly sharpened senses to avoid detection while training everyday for just over six months.

Ryu's feet stomped the earth, sinking into the dry ground with a perfectly controlled print. His lower body flexed and his bones creaked, but he maintained the posture, rotating his core to unleash the full power of his fist.

Then, his form changed. From calm and steady as a mountain, he became like a galloping horse. His movements were fast, but deliberate and controlled. If one looked closely, it was possible to see that his actions deviated hardly a centimeter from his last attempt.

An abrupt change occurred once more. His sweat matted skin reddened as his veins became visible. The rushing sound of blood drowned out the stream nearby as Ryu's breathing was sometimes as soft as the flapping wings of butterfly, and other times as loud as hurricane force winds.

Finally, his body bent and flexed, reaching angles that should have been impossible without shattering bones. In fact, he seemed to be without bones at all, moving akin to a snake in grass or a fish in water.

It was only after this that Ryu felt like he was finally ready.