

## Chapter 82: Grafting Procedure

Lysette took a few seconds after her love lay down to admire their quiet strength and radiant beauty. And for the briefest of moments, she turned her focus back to the outside world to give Mirae's now sleeping physical body a quick squeeze before returning to work.

She had absorbed a monumental amount of Essence over the previous two days as her mind was assailed by experiencing the deaths of millions, but it had not yet been Cultivated and used to empower new techniques.

Lysette was pleased that her subconscious mind had not allocated Essence the way it had after battling the landwurm some three weeks ago. She had a few techniques in mind, and it was time to get to work developing them. First, she needed a telepathy skill. More and more of her plans were revolving around covert operations, and she was already attracting more attention from potential enemies who might be spying on her. Second, she needed a way to resist mental probing and similar techniques, ensuring her secrets would remain safe. And third, though this was a lesser priority, she really needed a skill that she could call her own.

She had grown quite powerful in the past few weeks, owing to the many strengths and abilities she had as a Godslayer, but most of the techniques she had to this point were either basic physical enhancement abilities or techniques involving shadow manipulation and control that she had derived from her bond with Zarielle. But she wanted to start developing her own techniques. A technique unique to her, one that reflected a fighting style appropriate for the Demigoddess of Reciprocity.

While she thought about what sort of technique would best suit her new fighting style, she expended the necessary Essence to develop the two techniques she already knew she wanted. Two new branches sprouted forth upon her Divine Tree, and as they finished growing, a new

sensation emerged in her consciousness. With but a thought, she communicated her words directly into Mirae's mind.

*"I love you so much, Mirae. And just as you devote yourself to me, I will give my everything to protect you."*

*Protect.* Yes, that word made sense. A way to both protect her allies while inflicting her Reciprocity on those who would do them harm. That was her role— a sword against the gods, and any who threatened the friends. And a shield to defend those trampled underfoot in this world of Cultivators, those who would, in turn, provide the belief she would need to ascend to true divinity.

An idea struck, and Lysette quickly got to work Cultivating a new technique based upon her already existing aura. Another new branch of her Divine Tree formed and wrapped itself around the pair of branches which together represented her regenerative aura technique. And she smiled as she flared her aura out once more.

Invisible strands of her being extended out along her aura's range, wrapping around herself, and, with a mental command, Mirae as well. She had created a stealthy yet insidious ability that would reciprocate to the attacker the pain and injuries dealt to anyone in range Lysette considered an ally. Her Reciprocal Dominion, as she dubbed it. Small and temporary for now, but one which, in time, would form the basis of her own dominion as a goddess when she did finally reach that point

And, coupled with her regenerative abilities, this technique would provide a way to wear down even the fastest, stealthiest, and most well-defended individuals. Truly, a technique that Lysette could only understand and create after experiencing the most horrific pain she could imagine again and again and again.

Even with her three new techniques, she still had some Essence remaining and used the majority of that to bolster her aura's range and her regenerative capabilities yet further. In doing so, she would solidify herself as a defensive bulwark both on and off the battlefield. And high above, her Star pulsed brighter still, now a shade of yellow-orange not too much dimmer from Aimarion's own sun.

Turning her attention away from her own Cultivation for a moment as she mentally prepared herself for the challenge ahead, Lysette noticed that Serrena's Star was similarly burning brighter, now a shade of orange not unlike her hair. It seemed that in the preceding few days, she too made strides toward understanding her own role as the Demigoddess of Ambition. And Mirae's Star had also grown. It was not yet ready to ignite with its own independent divinity, but the constant contact and joint Cultivation with her was pushing them closer toward their eventual ascension. And that brought Lysette greater joy than she could express in words.

Lysette turned her attention back to the two plants in the center of the realm and readied herself for the next phase of her Cultivation experience. It would be a particularly perilous task—her own plant was something akin to a massive mahogany tree, while Mirae's was closer to a strain of common ivy, and the two were not particularly closely related. Still, her prior experience showed that it was possible, and she *would* succeed.

The easier part would be to graft a small portion of Mirae's plant onto her own. Lysette found a small spot near the bottom of her tree where the lowest branches began to split off from the main trunk and carved a small incision within it. It didn't hurt much beyond a small discomfort in her soul, though, upon feeling that pain, she did consider stopping her experimentation.

She didn't want Mirae to be harmed above all else. Though, remembering the resolve in their voice, she decided to press onward. It felt like a betrayal of Mirae's conviction and devotion to back down, and they were right that such actions were likely necessary, or at least, would be conducive to furthering their goals.

She took a long, deep breath as she ran her fingers through the teal-colored ivy. She surveyed the plant with the full extent of her mental faculties, attempting to figure out if any particular leaves or stalks corresponded to any of her love's techniques. Although she was unable to do so, she found a small branch that called out to deep within her, almost as though Mirae's soul was wanting to give that part of themselves to her. With no other leads and no better options, she covered her finger in a blade of shadow and made a clean slice, coating the wound in a bit of her shadows to prevent any desiccation while she continued her task.

With the stalk in hand, Lysette attached the base of the ivy scion into the wound she'd previously carved in her own tree and sutured it in place, using some of the remaining Essence to seal the grafting site shut. And as she did, a cool, refreshing sensation came over her, not dissimilar to when she and Mirae would cuddle for long hours in the dead of night. Her soul felt more complete than ever before, and, with another new mental impulse, a pair of icy wings sprouted out of her back.

Lysette turned to Mirae with a wistful smile on her face. "Have you always had these? Or did you only recently gain this ability? Either way, I promise to make good use of it. And thank you for letting me do this with you."

With her own power in place and the graft firmly attached, Lysette pondered what ability would be most beneficial for her love to gain. Shadow Dissolution was her first thought—it would be useful in multiple ways, both for stealth and for escaping encounters. But she wasn't

sure her love would be able to maintain both that and aurasight simultaneously, at least, not as they currently were. And she'd need to craft her love another invisibility cloak, something that would require more time and resources that she didn't have.

Instead, Lysette chose to grant them her regeneration ability. It would protect them in a different way and, unlike most of her other techniques, worked passively by strengthening the body's natural healing factor instead of relying on conscious control, not unlike how strengthening one's foundation passively would improve one's dexterity, strength, mobility, or computational speed, depending on how Essence was allocated.

She sprouted her new wings and floated above the surface of her realm, something which, in retrospect, she probably didn't need said wings for. Identifying the branch responsible for her regeneration, she calculated the relative thickness of Mirae's ivy with her own tree branches and cut off a small shoot about as long as her forearm. The pain was there as before, but so minor compared with what she'd already experienced as to be unnoticeable.

The next few minutes were spent performing the grafting process once more, suturing Lysette's abilities onto the metaphysical representation of Mirae's soul. It took a few tries to ensure an optimal connection and ensure that the various substructures were properly attached, and only once Lysette was satisfied did she first wrap the two now-unified plants with her shadows and fused the graft sealed with the last bits of Essence within her.

Lysette sighed with relief, her task now complete. And, until Mirae finally awoke, she devoted her time to a bit more Cultivation, alongside planning the next steps for her future kingdom building ambitions and meditating on the legacy Finis and the Aestori had left for her. And perhaps most importantly, no small amount of time cuddling with Mirae both within their Cultivation realm and the outside world. Altogether, about three hours passed by Lysette's

estimation before her love roused to wakefulness and the two bade their shared Cultivation realm farewell.

The Aestori inner sanctum was still just as dark as it once was, but after their days in the chamber, Cultivating subconsciously while Lysette experienced her mental torture session, the fog of Essence had noticeably dispersed, and her aurasight was far clearer than before. Mirae was still sitting in Lysette's lap, and as they awoke, Lysette planted several kisses on the back of their neck before sharing one long kiss on the lips.

"Morning, love," Lysette said. "How are you feeling?"

"I feel great, honestly. Better than I have in awhile. Was your experiment successful?"

"It was on my end. I apparently gained the ability to sprout ice wings and fly."

"How did you know I could do that? I was hoping to surprise you."

"You did surprise me, Mirae. But it was your soul that called to me, told me that that was the right ability to graft onto myself. And for that, I am very appreciative."

She was less enthused at realizing that the two could have skipped the previous carriage ride altogether and not had to deal with such discomfort, but was more proud with her love's progress than she was dismayed about the inconvenience.

Mirae paused. "My own ability to use that technique feels a bit... distant, at the moment. Almost as though I'll need to spend some time Cultivating to make it readily accessible again."

"I see. And, I apologize—"

Mirae shook their head. "I said I trusted you and that's that. Better that you know that outcome now than in an emergency situation or before a major battle."

They leaned in for a kiss, which Lysette granted.

“Oh, and I gave you a portion of my regeneration technique,” Lysette said. “I figured it was the best skill for you as you are right now.”

“Always looking for an excuse to protect me.” Mirae smiled. “One of the many things I love about you. With that said, this lowly mortal must request we get out of here so I can get some food.”

“Shall we test out your new regeneration then?”

“We’re going to warp?”

“We are, love. Hold on tight and brace yourself.”