

Descent 1171

Chapter 1171 Cloud

Leonel could think of a few plans, but judging by the fact that Aina's father was definitely well into the Sixth Dimension, he would have to be choosy with which one he approached things with.

'I also have to consider the possibility that her father is also aware of my own Silver Tablet.'

When Leonel was in a relationship with Aina, he didn't hide anything from her, that included the existence of the Silver Tablet. Not only did Aina know of it, but she was also well aware of all its abilities and even the details on how Leonel ended up with it.

'Savahn also mentioned that it was a Bronze Tablet? Is there a difference in strength with the color? It's possible, but there aren't enough data points. It could also be related to the type of power it has instead rather than anything else... But if they both have the ability to wipe personalities, maybe not...'

The easiest method was maybe to force Miel to exchange the tablet for saving Aina.

'This may work. I wouldn't even have to save her, I would only need to stall the wedding.

'Judging by how things are going, the Viola are likely invested in Aina's talent. That means that regardless of who her husband ends up being, their main goal is to ensure that she remains within their family.

'Because of how close the event days are, if I sneak into the Viola family compound and kill Rychard, the Viola would have no choice but to postpone the wedding. The optics of forcing a woman to marry someone else right after their fiancé died would be terrible.

'Of course, there's also the chance the Viola wouldn't care. But, even then, they would still need to wait a day or two. By then, the second day of the Selection would begin.

'Aina would have to participate, so there would be opportunity for her father to snatch her away and bring her to safety.'

This was the first plan Leonel thought of, but there were a few issues. For one, if it was so easy to get to Rychard and kill him, Miel would have probably done so personally already. However, the reason Leonel thought it was still possible was because the Viola family was well aware that they had offended Miel, they would always be on guard against him.

The other problem was how Leonel would sneak in to begin with. Yuri and Savahn were probably having their movements monitored by now. In fact, if the Viola were smart, they would already know everything about their movements to begin with.

'They definitely know that Yuri and Savahn contacted Joel and the others. That would put them even more on guard and makes things even more difficult.

'Hm... Seems like it's not worth it.'

The risk to reward ratio wasn't there. Leonel refused to put his grandmother's life in danger, which meant he would have to do it himself. And though he was confident, he wasn't foolish.

Not only was there a high likelihood he would die while the Viola were on alert, but the reward in return was likely not to be worth it. If the Bronze Tablet was just a weaker replica of his Silver Tablet, he would gain nothing from this.

'In that case, we need to minimize the risk more. Aina's father should be present during the second and third days of the Selection. I think I can modify a Force Art technique of the Luxnix into a perfect tracker. By then, I can just deal with him and take the tablet away when I'm strong enough, it probably won't take long...'

Leonel's Force surged, forming delicate tendrils. Soon, a spider the size of a fingernail appeared on his palm.

It scurried around under his control before touching Leonel's spatial ring and vanishing within it.

Leonel closed his eyes and made some quick calculations.

'Several problems need to be fixed. First, I'll modify the shell of the spider. It needs to be more transparent to the point where any light that touches it goes right through... Alright, I'll adjust this point here. Though it won't be perfectly invisible, it won't be a problem under my control.

'The second issue is that crossing the spatial barrier of a treasure weakens it considerably. That cuts down the effective range significantly and it would deteriorate to nothingness in just a few days. I'll have to change the base element of the creation into the Spatial Element and have it fuse with the spatial Force of the ring, creating a sort of symbiotic relationship. That way, so long as the ring lives, the spider will live.

'The solution to the second problem should also fix the third. So long as the spider and ring become one, the ring itself will become a beacon and signal only I can see and hear. Perfect.'

Leonel sat in silence for several moments, his calculations finishing in rapid succession.

His eyes opened and his Dream Force surged once more. This time, it almost looked as though nothing at all appeared on Leonel's palm. But, even if you looked closely, it almost looked like a droplet of fresh water. It was only after Leonel activated the Second Awakening of his Wisdom Branch and his eyes sharpened that he could see the beautiful crystalline body of the little spider.

'Excellent. I should be able to pick out Aina's father based on the energy signature of the Brazinger family when the time comes. I've seen and met enough of them...'

Leonel nodded to himself and didn't mind this matter anymore. So long as he and Miel were on the same planet, he would be able to find him with this method. As for the matters with Aina, he no longer needed to worry about them.

Whether she got married or not had nothing to do with him.

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The minutes turned to hours and then days. Soon, it was the surprise event many had been waiting for and the marriage union of Aina Brazinger and Rychard Viola was here.

Those who had gotten themselves a place in the arena soon began to appear in the Viola Estate one after another. If it wasn't for the fact that many other Sectors were also having their Selections now, they would have likely sent representatives of their own as well.

The grand event was beginning.

Leonel, however, was in his penthouse suite, having finally begun to take his rest seriously. He snored lightly and peacefully, his head resting on a cloud of pillows.

Chapter 1172 Air

Aina sat within a luxurious room upon a well cushioned stool. Before her, a mirror lay, reflecting her image back to her. In her palm, there was a pair of scissors. She held them open and up to her hair, thinking about how short she should cut it. But, for some reason, she was hesitating.

'Hm, it's a bit amusing.' She thought to herself. 'If I really was a vampire, I wouldn't have a reflection at all, now would I?'

It was a completely random and almost painfully childish thought.

Ever since she woke from her sleep, Aina had found her long hair very annoying. She couldn't use it to attack like some other people with weird abilities and she always had to compensate for it in battle so that her opponent couldn't take advantage. She couldn't for the life of her understand why she had allowed it to get so long.

What was especially frustrating was that every time she entered her peak battle state, her vitality would be stimulated and it would grow even longer. By then, she would have to trim the ends just to make sure she wasn't sweeping the ground with her every step.

'My facial structure is pretty good, I could probably pull off going completely bald... Hm...'

As Aina was lost in thought, she heard the sound of footsteps and her door clicking open. She lowered the scissors in her hand, forgetting her original purpose as she met the gaze of the person who had entered through the mirror.

The current Yuri was red and puffy eyed. She didn't look like she had gotten an ounce of sleep, but for someone as powerful as her, missing out on a single night's rest shouldn't have been enough to put her in such a state.

As though she had to sneak around, she carefully closed the door behind her and locked it soon afterward. Her chest beat so wildly that it seemed that her heart might fly from her chest.

"Aina..."

Yuri's voice almost carried with it a pleading tone. Looking at her friend... no, her sister of so long, she felt as though someone was stabbing her through the heart repeatedly.

The current Aina looked as beautiful as an angel. The custom of white wedding dresses of Earth wasn't shared here, but none of that stopped her from shining like she was her own star.

She wore a dress of violet that wrapped around her proud peaks tightly before falling somewhat loosely down her hips and legs. Her delicate shoulders were adorned by a silk shawl embroidered with patterns of purple blooming flowers and her forehead wore a minimalistic crown of gold.

Her hair was meant to be done up with a very special hair pin reserved for the ladies of the Viola family who shared similarly high status. This job was to fall into Yuri's hands, but judging by her appearance, she wanted to use this chance to speak of something else entirely.

"Hm?" Aina blinked.

Her gaze looked Yuri up and down, seemingly trying to analyze something.

"You can't go through with this."

Aina's head tilted. "Didn't we already have this conversation yesterday? Why are we having it again?"

Hearing such a response, Yuri felt like banging her head against a wall. She knew that she shouldn't be doing this, she should be allowing Aina to stumble and fall on her own, just like one would in real life. Only this way would she be able to rebuild her personality the way it had been before.

But, Yuri just couldn't accept this. Aina was her treasure, the one person she respected to the depths of her soul, maybe even more than her own adoptive father. She had watched Aina go through so much as nothing more than a little girl. She couldn't stand the idea of her image and sense of self being tainted in this way.

Plus, who went through life without receiving any sort of advice? Miel knew of the danger of Aina not reawakening to her true self soon enough, so he took a hands off approach trying to expedite Aina's growth by allowing her to maneuver through situations alone. But then hadn't he been forced to step in due to the Void Palace anyway?

Everything was a mess. Everyone seemed to be trying to do their best with what they were given, but life and circumstances kept forcing them to trip and fall.

"Aina..." Yuri said with more urgency.

If she couldn't get Aina to agree, any sort of escape plan was meaningless. If the person in question didn't cooperate, any small chance they had was nill.

The truth was that Yuri knew it was helpless. After two days, they had no plan. Miel hadn't said anything to her, she had contacted Joel again only to learn that Leonel had refused, and now there was no one but her and Savahn. In fact, if it wasn't for Savahn stalling the other maids, she wouldn't even be able to be here to speak to Aina alone and give it one more try.

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"Yuri, I know you worry for me, but there is really no need. The likelihood of escaping the Viola is near zero and even if we do, we'll be hunted down. The only escape would be getting accepted by the Void Palace, but why would the Viola allow me to continue to participate if we somehow managed to escape? It's one thing to run away, but if there's a location they know we have to be at, what good would that do?"

Aina's words had suddenly gone from overly childish to coldly calculative.

Yuri grit her teeth. "At least... At least do what I asked and speak to Leonel through me. If you have his grandmother's help, there'll be little the Void Palace can do to stop you from participating."

Aina looked toward Yuri as though she was looking at a naïve little baby.

"Didn't you see how the Luxnix treated them? If Rychard asks a favor of the Luxnix, do you think she could stop the combined might of the Luxnix and Viola all on her own?"

"Plus, I've already said I won't contact him."

"WHY NOT?!" Yuri completely lost her cool, unable to hold it back any longer. "This isn't the time for pride! This is your life we're talking about!"

Aina shook her head. "Because he's a man of his word. He said he wouldn't come, so he won't come."

Yuri felt that all her air had been forcefully pulled out from her body as she fell to the floor.

Chapter 1173 None Other

The hall the Viola had chosen for the wedding wasn't much of a hall at all. There was no ceiling and the ambience was only enclosed by tall pillars holding up nothing more than the sky.

The grass was a fantastical shade of violet, the waters shared a light shade of pink, and the trees in the surroundings all had white bark and delicate silver leaves.

The picturesque scenery seemed like it was pulled right out of a fairy tale. Even with the thousands of guests present, with even more still coming, no one seemed willing to ruin the sheer beauty of it all.

The conversation filling the air was often quite benign and uninteresting. But, of those that were worthy of note, many revolved around this curious turn of events. The marriage of a Crown Heir was most definitely worth at least this much fanfare. The trouble was... There actually wasn't enough of it.

For an event of this scale, it should have been announced months ago. Pillar families and organizations from across several Sectors should have made an appearance and the wife in question should have been a well known figure for ages.

After being blindsided by this information, many began to look into this Aina Brazinger character and her background only made them more curious. She was the daughter of a Vassal of the family, but it wasn't an Eternal Vassal, but rather a first generation one. This was quite surprising.

Outside of this, she didn't seem to have any other background. Her mother was unknown and presumed dead, while her father was quite low profile. The only standout feature, aside from her overwhelming beauty, was her merits in clearing Zones.

Unfortunately, information on this was quite scarce and guarded. Though, this made perfect sense. After all, the highest rated Zone Aina had entered for the sake of the Viola was one related to the Silver Empire. This was obviously information she kept close to herself, and whatever she was forced to disclose was kept well by the Viola family.

The only reason everyone didn't assume that Aina was a flower in a vase, picked out by Rychard because of his lust, was because her performance during the first day of the Selection had spoken for itself. How could any of them look down on what they had seen that day?

That said, this didn't stop those with nothing better to do from placing her firmly atop the list of this Sector's Beauties, a list that contained women who hadn't moved their positions in several decades. On this list, there were princesses of families, famous entertainers, and even the spouses of some of the most powerful men of the Three Pillar Sector...

And yet, she was placed number one.

Among the growing crowd, Gradeyr sat in silence. Every so often, someone would send him a look of disdain or pity, but he simply pretended as though he hadn't seen anything at all.

Ever since he lost the battle for Crown Heir, he had been fairly silent. He didn't reprimand his younger brother for being his Achilles Heel, nor did he snap. He continued about his business as though nothing had happened and like he hadn't lost something he had spent his whole life working toward.

Today, he sat at a wedding that may very well should have been for him had things not gone the way they had gone, but he continued to respect the rules of etiquette and took his loss in silence.

He too had participated in the Selection and managed to get a spot on the second day, but so had many other members of the Viola family. There was nothing special about his achievement and it flew under the radar as usual.

He was never as calculating as Rychard, but he was a man with his own pride and he would continue to act as such.

The inflow of people began to slow. The number of invitees was easily pushing 10 000, making this a truly grand event.

They all took their seats and began to wait patiently, their eyes sparkling as they laid eyes on the large purple lily that stood upon the large platform ahead. It had veins of gold and shimmering petals that swayed gently in the wind. It was the perfect center piece for such a grand wedding.

And then, the delicate sound of music began to play.

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In a separate location within the Viola estate, the atmosphere wasn't nearly as lively or beautiful. The lights were dark and the air was especially heavy, the scent of blood and sweat leaving a thick stench in the air.

Standing tall, there were four men. Of them, three were well into their middle ages and the last was a youth just entering his prime. Among the three middle aged men, two seemed particularly subordinate to the last, but this didn't change just how powerful they were individually.

Without fail, all four of these men had flickering violet irises, carrying with them a depth of amethyst that danced between the vibrant color and the shade of black.

Of the two weaker middle aged men, one was particularly tall, his chin, jaw and cheeks covered by the shadow of a short and scruffy beard. His posture would remind Leonel of Apehestus and he seemed to contain the same hidden explosive power within his limbs.

The latter was quite fat and stocky, having such a large belly that one would have trouble understanding just how he walked through doorways. However, rather than jiggling, his belly was like a bronze cauldron, hardly shifting at all with his movement.

These two men were none other than Eternal Vassal Rojeon and Qindi.

And that made the identity of the last all the more obvious... The strongest of the Eternal Vassals and the right hand man of Patriarch Viola... Eternal Vassal Obrien.

And yet, right this moment, they were all gasping for breath, their bodies beaten and bloodied, many of their bones broken, and standing amongst a litter of corpses around them...

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"To think that even after being schemed against to this extent, poisoned, trapped within a formation designed specifically for him, and sapped of his right to gather Force from the atmosphere... It would still take so much to slow him down to this extent..."

The young man spoke slowly, his gaze flickering. If he wasn't so cautious and hadn't prepared so many contingencies, there was simply no way this would have succeeded. Among the dead, there were even countless main family members. The Viola had actually lost 20% of their Sixth Dimensional experts to this one battle, he almost couldn't believe it.

If the Viola elder knew they would take such a loss, they would have never done this. But, who could have known that this person would actually have hidden so much of their strength?

The young man's head tilted up, familiar music drifting to his ears. Hearing this, his frown faded and his smile returned.

"In that case, I guess I'll have to thank you for your efforts by marrying your daughter."

The young man turned and flashed away.

There was no doubt that this young man was Rychard.

As for the man beaten to within half an inch of his life, lying chained to the ground before them all...

It was none other than Miel, Adam Renier Brazinger... Aina's father.

Chapter 1174 Bad Question?

The music drifted throughout the Viola estate. Yuri, who had barely cobbled her emotions back together, found herself crying once more. It was like the beautiful sound of plucking strings and warm horns was instead the call of death to her ears.

Her fingers trembled as she tried to delicately form the strands of Aina's hair. Step by step, her long hair became an elaborate bun. If it wasn't for how blurry Yuri's vision was, she would probably think it was really beautiful. Luckily, she still had her Internal Sight to rely on, or else she would be a true mess.

As steadily as she could, she placed the ornament of Viola family women atop Aina's hair, completing her hairdo.

"This dress is a bit uncomfortable. It would be easiest if there was at least one slit down the leg." Aina spoke to herself, having long since realized that Yuri was beyond saving. If this was a life or death situation, she might just have to leave her behind completely.

The childish and out of place thoughts in Aina's head didn't seem to stop. She hadn't made any sort of progress at all.

Yuri pulled away, trying hard to control her breathing.

At that moment, there was a light clicking noise as the doors opened once again. Yuri's head snapped back like a frightened kitten. But, when she saw that it was Savahn, the rock on her chest instead got heavier than lighter. It suddenly hit her that the opportunity Savahn had gotten for her was wasted once again. She hadn't been able to budge Aina at all.

Savahn, seeing Yuri's pale, tear streaked face, sighed, realizing the truth without having to hear it explained to her.

Deflated, Yuri collapsed onto a nearby couch. Soon, the maids Savahn had distracted would likely come back. And, with the music playing, it likely wouldn't be more than five minutes before Rychard was here to truly begin things.

The marriage ceremonies of the Viola weren't very heavy on tradition. Outside of the hair piece heirloom, there wasn't much to abide by. However, there were still its own set of rules.

This grace period of music that was playing now was actually for the people to give their well wishes and blessings to the couple before the ceremony began. During this time, a silence would fall over the wedding hall and a peaceful meditation would take place. Beneath this silence and the music, the flower centerpiece would begin to bloom.

The blooming of the flower represented the budding of lifelong happiness.

Once the flower was on the verge of blooming, the soon to be husband and wife pair would walk down the aisle together. Their walk would be timed with the final blooming of the flower, and their stepping onto the stage would coincide with the maturity of said flower.

The timing and control of all of this was taken under the man's lead. As he would be the head of the household, it was his responsibility to take on. The better timing the husband had, the stronger his leadership skills and the more blessings the flower would bestow upon their union.

Of course, Rychard would never ruin the timing of his own wedding, so there was no way that he would be late. And, even if he was, no one was naïve enough to believe that the Viola didn't have their own methods of making sure that this tradition of theirs was followed to the greatest degree possible. There were definitely many tricks and techniques they could use to slow or speed up the progress. In the end, there were no real blessings to be had, it was just a hint of superstition from an olden age and a ceremonial practice.

They had all already run out of time. It was over.

Savahn sighed. Forcing a smile she walked to Aina's back, meeting her gaze through the mirror.

"You look very beautiful. You will make Rychard very happy."

Aina blinked. "I'm not interested in making him happy."

"Oh?" Savahn raised her brows. "And why is that?"

"It seems foolish to worry about the happiness of someone that doesn't really care about your own happiness." Aina responded as though it was very obvious.

"Isn't it very hard to make someone you don't know happy?" Savahn asked. "What makes you happy?"

"Fighting and eating." Aina replied with a beautiful smile.

"Being logical doesn't make you happy?"

Aina paused, not answering immediately for the first time.

"Not really. It just makes him happy."

"Does it make him happy? Or is that just what you think would make him happy?"

"Is there a difference? I know him very well."

Aina didn't feel this was refutable. She did know Leonel very well. She even knew exactly how he would react to this exact situation. In fact, she was certain that he wasn't even thinking about her right now.

Truthfully, she was very annoyed by this, but she had already decided to be logical. Since she was being logical, how could she be illogically angry? He had already warned her and he was simply following through with what he said he would do. What would being annoyed change?

Unfortunately, it didn't seem that Aina had grasped the ability to differentiate between outward shows of emotion and inward showings. She thought that what someone showed them on the outside was exactly how they felt on the inside. It was a very childish way of viewing the world. She still had the emotional maturity of a toddler.

But now that she was feeling this mix of external and internal emotion, she was suddenly confused.

Was there a difference between what she thought and the reality? Savahn's question left her wondering.

"Savahn." Aina suddenly spoke before Savahn could respond.

"Hm? Yes?"

"I have been very, um... Selfish? Yes, selfish to you, right? But you are still here. Is it because you lack backbone?"

Savahn was stunned by these words. She wasn't sure whether she should be angry, sad or enraged.

She managed to calm herself down, but shuddered when she met Aina's gaze again.

"Was that a bad question? Did it make you angry? I'm sorry."

Savahn was stunned again. That was the first time Aina had ever apologized since she lost her personality.

Unfortunately, Savahn never got the chance to respond.

At that moment, the doors opened much more forcefully than they had before. And, this time, it was Rychard standing on the other side.

Chapter 1175 Unnecessary Things

Rychard looked nothing like a man who had just been standing at the scene of a bloody crime. His robes were a deep violet, almost black, embroidered by a deep dark gold color. On his lapel, the symbol of the Viola sat, intertwining in flowers and vines, while his tall collars were embroidered with twin horned dragons.

When this sort of outfit was matched with his noble disposition, his cascading black hair and his deep violet eyes, he gave off the feeling of a refined, handsome and confident gentleman.

Rychard had a light smile on his face but it froze somewhat when he saw the crying Yuri. He couldn't have something like this ruining his wedding.

"Judging by the situation, it seems it would be best if the two of you just stayed here."

Originally, Rychard didn't find there to be any problem with allowing Yuri and Savahn to attend. A wife without friends would raise more questions than answers, it was already odd enough that Aina had no family background to speak of.

However, if he had to choose between that small oddity and Yuri leaking tears, it was obvious which he would choose.

Yuri immediately wanted to protest, but Rychard had already snapped his fingers. Several of the maids, one of whom had Sixth Dimensional strength, came forward.

Seeing such a scene, Rychard couldn't help but feel a bit of heartache. It was a good thing that the Three Pillar Galaxy had been at peace for a very long time now, or else the Viola family might very well fall due to this choice of theirs.

Losing 20% of their Sixth Dimensional forces in a single sweep was absolutely unheard of. Even now, Rychard could hardly believe it. He was able to ignore the troubling feeling this caused him because he was simply too excited to take Aina as his own.

But ultimately, women were just women. One day he would grow bored of Aina and this trouble would come back around full circle. By then, he wouldn't be able to ignore it any longer.

There was good news, though. They had managed to capture him alive, so they could more easily control Aina in this way. Also, there was definitely something special about Miel and his blood. It was even possible for them to strengthen their Lineage Factor in the future. Should they succeed, it would all be worth it.

'It's fine, the area was too closed off. We should be able to keep this a secret for at least a decade. By then, we would have already recovered.'

Seeing that the maids had come back, Yuri and Savahn could only accept their fate in silence.

"Aina, it's time." Rychard's expression softened.

Aina nodded and stood. Due to her current stature and the shoes she wore, she was even a small hint taller than Rychard now, something that made his lip twitch. But, he buried it deep within. Today was his day, he wouldn't let anything stain it.

"Hold on a moment!"

Rychard frowned but Savahn continued to speak quickly

"It's just a small adjustment. I only want to wish my friend good luck and fortune."

Savahn appeared before Aina and helped her to fix the last wrinkles of her dress.

"Do you really want to know?" Savahn asked.

Aina blinked before remembering what they had been talking about. Then, she nodded.

"My grandparents died. My parents died. My siblings died. I tolerate the things you've done to me... Because I have no one else. So yes... I guess I am lacking backbone. If I was more like Leonel, maybe things would be easier for me."

"..."

Aina remained silent for a long while.

"... No one else...?"

Savahn let Aina go and returned to the couch to sit by Yuri's side.

In silence, Aina walked out of the room with Rychard by her side. She shuffled forward in silence, seemingly not hearing the small attempts at conversation that he was making.

"... We will have to wait until after the Selection for our Honeymoon, but I have amazing things planned. You must not have seen a lot of the Dimensional Verse yet, right? There are all sorts of extraordinary places.

"For example in the Muratha Sector, there's a world formed entirely of a thick mass of water. It's ice caps have such a dense amount of Water Force that when it snows, it precipitates Force Crystals. Every 10 000 years, after enough accumulation, it will enter a Blizzard state where the entire planet becomes encased in a thick layer of ice. If you're lucky enough, there's a chance that it could snow Pure Force Crystals..."

Rychard continued to babble on but when he looked toward Aina's side profile to catch a glimpse of her otherworldly features, he almost snapped. She wasn't paying attention at all.

Rychard had always been good at controlling his emotions, plotting and scheming in the background. But, with the months he spent trying to court Aina, only for her to insult and belittle him at every turn, his patience had long since been wearing thin.

He was truly about to snap, but his reason took over once again. Taking deep breaths, he closed his eyes. Soon... Soon.

It was then that Aina suddenly spoke.

"You have the smell of my father's blood on you."

Rychard's gaze flickered. But, he had just calmed himself, he wouldn't lose it again so quickly.

"Since you know then there's even less to talk about. Be obedient and he will be fine. Step out of line, and he won't be. It's that simple."

"You believe that I care for his safety enough to do every and anything you say?"

Usually such a question would have some sarcasm laced into it, but Aina's tone was indifferent and almost spoken as though she was genuinely asking.

Rychard's expression couldn't help but change after hearing this. This... Wasn't how things were supposed to go?

"My father has always raised me to be a weapon to seek revenge for my mother. Anything that compromises that isn't something that he will accept. Even if he dies, so what? Do you think that this is enough to control me?"

Aina's gaze finally turned toward Rychard, but when their eyes met, the latter felt as though his soul had left his body. The cold chill and the scent of death had practically grabbed onto his nose.

Aina looked away just as quickly. "I am doing this so that I can go to the Void Palace. At the same time, you will receive the social credit of being my husband not to mention a stake in my future. Don't do unnecessary things and make me look down on you even more."

Aina continued to walk forward, her gaze becoming somewhat vacant once more. She still couldn't quite grasp Savahn's meaning... But it should have been simple, no?

Chapter 1176 Foster Care

Rychard stood almost frozen...

Had he just lost 20% of his Sixth Dimensional experts... For no reason?

Aina's mind wandered. This time, she didn't need to hide how she was feeling. It was surprisingly easy for her to separate out emotion and logic when it came to her father. Of course, she lacked the emotional maturity to truly understand why that was.

It could have been because her father had always encouraged her to do so. It could be because her father simply didn't mean as much to her as he should have. It could have even been because the weight Leonel held for her was even heavier than that of the man she shared so much blood with.

The truth was that with her personality gone, many of the baggage and emotional scarring that came with it had vanished as well. The good news was that this had allowed Aina to heal from many things. Of course, the bad news was how these series of events was playing out.

To Aina, she had always attached a lot of this baggage to her father, but most of it wasn't love. It was duty, it was respect, it was an unwillingness to let him down... But on the list of emotions she attached to her father, love was very, very far down the list.

When Aina lost her personality, she essentially lost the ability to contextualize her memories. The things that weighed of heavy importance were often things she had the most and fondest memories of. But, with how long it had been since her father left her side, how could she have many of him to begin with?

The result was this.

Aina didn't feel worry, sadness or anger... She hadn't even asked how her father was doing or if he would survive the beating they had likely given him.

Maybe if Miel could peer into his daughter's mind, he would realize that he had faltered somewhere along their path. As for exactly where, it would be up to him to grasp and understand this.

That said, Aina herself was hardly considering this at this moment. As they walked through the Viola estate, following flowery reefs and paths of delicate rose petals, her mind seemed to be somewhere else entirely.

No one else...

According to Aina's memories, she had felt like Savahn had for a very long time. In fact, she had felt it for longer. There was a period in her life before her father returned with Yuri that she was completely ignored.

The orphanage system of the Ascension Empire was very good. No children were starved or abused, at least not in the normal way. There was no yelling from their overseers and there was always food on their plates. There were even plenty of opportunities to have fun and live life.

Unfortunately, being adopted was something that almost never happened.

With the advancements in medicine, sterilization or impotency was practically non-existent. Even in the people that it did, the treatments were fast, affordable and easily administered, as was most health care beneath Emperor Fawkes' rule.

Of course, there were still kind hearted couples, not to mention same sex couples, who had it within them to help or start families for themselves. But, each of these had hurdles of their own.

In the case of same sex couples, the options for surrogacy and sperm donation was so high class that many would choose to have their own children anyway. Surrogacy didn't even need a living human anymore and would only need an egg donor, while the Gene Analysis Exam ensured that any and everything was known about the sperm and egg donors.

Then there were the kind hearted couples, heterosexual or otherwise, who thought to adopt as a good deed to society.

The first issue was that the foster care system of the Empire was so good, that often the treatment of the children was even better than what these kind hearted couples could provide, so much of the incentive one might have was not there.

Then there came the issue of class disparity. Those on the surface of Earth were often too busy trying to maintain their status into the future generations to worry about adopting while those on Paradise Islands often lacked the resources to even begin the process.

Then there was the biggest and largest issues: The fees that came with adopting a child depending on their Gene Analysis Exam varied wildly. The more talented the child, the more expensive it was to the point where even many nobles couldn't or refused to afford it.

This was done on purpose by Emperor Fawkes. Children wouldn't understand the underlying system, all they would understand is that their government cared for them since they were children when their parents couldn't and even when no one else wanted them...

With her Five Star Evaluation, Aina was doomed to never be placed with a family. Every time she made connections with a new friend, they might be adopted the next day, leaving her alone again.

She closed herself off and focused entirely on her training. She had no one else but herself...

Until her father returned with Yuri, giving her a sister and confidant that she had always wanted. But, her father didn't spend any time with her, leaving her soon afterward to vanish toward parts unknown...

But Yuri never truly treated her like a sister. To Yuri, she was more like a master to serve and cater to. She took care of all of Aina's needs, but it just wasn't the same.

Aina knew it wasn't Yuri's fault. Aina was human but Yuri wasn't. The way the latter viewed and interacted with the world was very different.

Unfortunately, due to the way Yuri was, Aina ironically felt even more isolated from the world than before, even more alone...

The world was repetitive and the same in those days.

Rise. Go to school. Study. Train. Eat. Sleep. And repeat...

Until, that is, she finally reached the end of the foster care program and was allowed to go to high school along with everyone else.

It was there she met two people that changed her life... Leonel and Savahn.

Chapter 1177 Blooming Flower

Thanks to the live-in dorms of Royal Blue Academy, Aina was finally able to live a life close to normalcy after her 13th birthday.

She remembered meeting Savahn in her dorm rooms. Back then, Savahn had been a really shy and reserved person. She was a lot like Aina, having entered the Academy thanks to her talent rather than her family background.

For the first time, it was impossible for Yuri to become a wall against Aina meeting other people for the sake of her 'protection'. In addition, because of the environment, she had to tone down a lot of her usual personality, becoming a lot more quiet and reserved.

Thanks to this, Aina was able to meet and open up to Savahn. Learning that Aina was an orphan, Savahn instantly felt more relaxed. Without having to tiptoe around the heiress of some tycoon family or some arrogant princess noble, she was able to slowly open up and become more and more of herself.

Not long after Aina met Savahn, she met Leonel at their orientation. She honestly didn't remember much about that day at all, all she could remember was his bright smile.

He had his brothers around him and everyone seemed to gravitate toward him. She lost count of how many uppity noble girls cast him one or two extra glances, only to grow frustrated when he didn't seem to notice them back or practically faint when he smiled in return.

Aina had thought that he was the son of some famous noble, but she was shocked when she found out that his background was even poorer than Savahn's, actually coming from a Paradise Island.

From all the social conditioning she had been through, she had always thought that nobles were too high strung to ever care for a commoner like Leonel. But, he had already been proving them wrong for a very long time.

It wasn't until several weeks later their gazes finally met. As much as the first day was a blur, that day was something Aina remembered every moment of. It was as though her entire body had been shocked awake, her hairs standing on end and her heart beating wildly. Her blood rushed through her veins and the air flew from her lungs, retreating with no intention of coming back.

Leonel must have felt the same thing to, because despite all the girls he had ignored up to that point, despite all the popularity he had gathered, he dashed away from his brothers, appearing before her like a gust of wind.

"Will you please be my girlfriend?!"

The words came out like a clap of thunder. He probably hadn't tried to be so loud, but Aina became like a startled deer in headlights, his booming and confident voice becoming like an avalanche to her ears.

Before she realized what was happening, she, Aina Brazinger, someone who had never been embarrassed or shy a day in her life, rushed off as fast as her legs could carry her.

After that day, due to Leonel's popularity, Aina, who had been practically invisible to the young noble girls, had practically become public enemy number one. They couldn't get a glance but she got a confession? What made her worthy?

Aina never retaliated to the bullying. She had always tempered her mind and remained calm and calculating. It only seemed to be around Leonel that she completely lost control of her emotions, not knowing what to do with herself or even where to place her hands.

However, Savahn mistook her calmness for fragility, so she reformed herself, becoming something she was decidedly not. She became Aina's shield, protecting her from the hail of criticism and mean girl tactics of those dorm rooms for an entire four years...

Since that day, Aina had always had something to lean on. She no longer had 'no one else'. She had a friend willing to become a she-devil to protect her if need be... She had a crush that was willing to wade through hell and high water just for a chance she might say yes...

She knew that she didn't need Savahn's protection, she could have shut those girls up with a single punch. She knew that she couldn't say yes to Leonel, the weight on her shoulders was far too much and she had to give her goals too much of her focus...

And yet, she didn't stop either of them.

When Aina and Rychard appeared at the beginning of the wedding aisle, it was as though they had become the center of the world. Despite her blank stare forward, Aina was like a fairy, unfettered and unblemished by the mundane. Even if Rychard had been a wooden stick, everyone's attention would have been drawn to them.

The two slowly walked down the aisle, the blooming of the flower steadily reaching its peak.

Aina knew that she had been intoxicated by the feeling. For the first time in her life, she had received the attention, the support... the love she had always wanted. From then on, no matter what she did or how unreasonable she was, they were always by her side, even when she was uncommunicative, even when she blamed them for their weakness... Even when she left them behind.

They had always been there.

Over the years, she grew dependent on them, addicted to that feeling she had never had as a child, that feeling that should have been given to her by her mother, by her father...

The pair made their way down under the eyes of all. Rychard had his chest proudly out, a confident smile on his features as though what had happened previously never occurred.

.

Soon, such a woman would be his. Then, he would go off to the Void Palace and come back with the tools he needed to lead the Viola family into the Seventh Dimension and finally end this generations long war.

Ten feet... Eight... Five...

The flower slowly reached its peak, prepared to allow the world to see its glory. Motes of Force gathered around it, filling the air with a sweet and delicate scent.

Aina's vacant gaze became somewhat misty, but she didn't seem to notice at all, still blindly moving forward with her mind in other places. But, by now, the two had walked so far forward that the last line of spectators had been crossed. All anyone could see was the alluring view of her back.

The façade of Savahn had crumbled. Or, more accurately, she had finally told Aina the truth.

Over the years, she had grown tired of always being Aina's shield, silently waiting to be picked up when she was needed and dropped off when she wasn't.

And now, at this moment, when she was about to get married, she was no longer able to be here.

Then there was her father. He was a man who should have been there for her since the very beginning, loving and supporting her. But, he too had failed, captured and likely without a chance to be free for decades to come...

Her mother... She had died not long after Aina was old enough to remember her face. And yet now, she could only recall blurry pieces of her visage. She cobbled together pieces that seemed to make sense, but she had no way of even guaranteeing that the woman she remembered was indeed her mother...

And then there was Leonel... The love of her life...

Of them all, this was the only one that made Aina's heart move. It wasn't because it hurt the most... Or maybe it was... But even if it did, this was most definitely not the main reason...

It was because of them all, whether it was her father, mother or Savahn... All of them weren't here because they couldn't be... Savahn was barred by Rychard, her mother had passed away, her father was imprisoned...

Only he... Only he wasn't here by choice. Only he had truly abandoned her.

Aina raised her foot to step onto the final platform, but her entire body trembled. The mist of her eyes had turned into something much more than that, but given the vacancy of her gaze, it didn't seem like she had realized this at all.

Rychard rose his foot as well, beaming at the sight of the flower. It was perfect. His timing was immaculate and his confidence was completely off the charts. He didn't seem to realize at all that Aina's steps had faltered and she had fallen a step behind.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

At that moment, the dome of protection over the Viola estate shattered, shocking the spectators awake from their silence.

Aina's back trembled. The aura was so familiar. That blinding pillar of light, that hidden air of destruction and menace, that edge of danger and violence...

It was so close. She had felt it too many times before, seen it too many times... Even now, with the vacancy of her gaze, she subconsciously grasped out for it, her eyes lighting up from indifferent to expectant.

She felt her heart rise out of her chest, her lungs expanding wildly. Her blood rushed beside herself and her paling features were flushed with color in an instant. It was as though she had gone from dead to alive, as though she had finally been given reason to breathe again, to live again.

Her head snapped backward, her gaze shooting up into the skies and landing on the figure.

The instant she did, it was as though something inside of her had broken, a rush shooting out from her and her eyes flooding with tears she had already barely been holding back.

Her whole world collapsed, her mind going blank and her lips moving to say words that were all too familiar.

"You're ... not him..."

In the skies, Myghell stood on the back of a golden phoenix, his hands clasped behind his back.

"Kill."

Chapter 1178 Return

Rychard's eyes widened. The sudden commotion would have snapped anyone awake, and he, who had been lost in his own world of fantasies, was no different.

His head snapped into the skies, his pupils constricting in shock as he watched thousands of Luxnix swoop down from their bird constructs, immediately and without reserve levying attacks toward the guards that reacted from the Viola estate.

For a moment, Rychard was in a daze. All his plotting and scheming, all his years of training and preparation, could have never made him ready for this day. He couldn't wrap his head around what was happening.

Had they already found out about their losses? That was absolutely impossible. Rychard had been discreet and as careful as one could be. On top of this, that battle had just ended. How could there possibly have been time to assemble such a contingent? If even that wasn't enough, had this been knowledge the Luxnix used to act upon, the Montex would have definitely jumped aboard to take advantage as well.

Everything pointed toward the fact that the Luxnix had been planning to do this from the very beginning. But, Rychard truly couldn't understand where their confidence came from.

If the Luxnix weren't aware of their 20% loss, then why would they ever take this risk? The three families had always been neck in neck in terms of strength. Launching an attack like this would only cause suffering on both sides and leave the Montex to benefit from the ashes left behind.

What Rychard had no way of knowing was that the balance had been broken long ago. In fact, the balance had been broken three generations ago and it had only continued to tip in favor of the Luxnix. Just a single generation ago, they had already had strength to rival both the Montex and Viola combined. And now, even though this generation had yet to fully mature, they had lost their patience and begun to bare their fangs.

"Seith! What is the meaning of this?!"

The booming voice of the Viola family Patriarch boomed.

The Sixth Dimensional existences of the Viola hadn't even had time to catch their breaths and restore their paled faces when they were forced to come out once again.

Seeing such a scene, the Luxnix were visibly stunned. They had no idea what could have happened to put the Viola in such a sorry state before the battle had even begun. But, soon afterward, they laughed uproariously.

To the arrogant Luxnix, wasn't this just a sign of how correct their Ancestor had been? They had patiently waited three generations, biding their time and pretending to be equals with this trash. And the day they finally stepped out, ready to bare their fangs, the Gods smiled down on them.

How could the sharp Internal Sight of the Luxnix possibly miss something so blatantly obvious?

At this point, Rychard's face turned several shades of pale. He had been harping so much on the 20% number that he had forgotten something else incredibly important.

The 20% loss wasn't nearly as problematic as the current state of the remaining 80%. To say that Miel had killed a fifth of them was only a small part of the story. This didn't consider the at least 20% he had severely injured, or the 20% more than that that he had drained of stamina and vigor.

If an accurate picture were to be painted, it would be more accurate to say that Miel alone had cut down the fighting prowess of the Viola by as much as 50%!

Seeing such a scene, Myghell was even more affirmed in his decision.

He had originally wanted these matters to continue naturally. But, he also understood that 'naturally' didn't mean passively.

Myghell wasn't a passive person to begin with. If he insisted on neutrality when allowing things to go on 'naturally', he would ironically be going against his own nature to begin with.

This sort of complicated maze to navigate was precisely why he wanted the fewest people to know of the details of this matter to begin with. He already realized that he was acting differently than he normally would, and that was counter productive to his goal.

To Myghell's mind, there was still only a possibility that the prophecy spoken of on the tablet spoke of a union of marriage between himself and Aina. But, even if it was just a possibility, how could he ever allow a woman who might be tied to himself in the future to be tainted by another?

There was the ultimate underlying reason, but this was still a good opportunity nonetheless. In the middle of a wedding, with so many people invited and the guards of the Viola stretched thin, what better time would there be to attack? Plus, the three generation waiting period marked down by his Ancestor had already passed as well. What else was there to wait for?

This, however... was a truly pleasant surprise. It seemed that today, the Viola would truly be finished.

Rather than waiting for Seith to respond, Myghell flipped over a palm and his slender sword appeared.

SHIIING! SHIIING! SHIIING! SHIIING! SHIIING! SHIIING! SHIIING! SHIIING!

Myghell took a light breath. For a moment, the world lost all of its sound. The only thing those below could hear was the steady inhale and exhale of Myghell's air as time slowed to a crawl.

"Return to Dust."

Myghell's arm slowly lowered, and yet it somehow felt impossibly fast.

The world was split in two. The clouds separated, the blue skies dimmed to revealed a starry night, and reality itself seemed to pause.

The expression of the Viola family Patriarch warped. He was an expert on the same level as Seith. No matter how weak he was from the previous battle, there was absolutely no way a Pseudo Sixth Dimensional brat should ever be able to make him feel pressure.

And yet... It was already too late.

His body crumbled, falling in two before being carried into the wind like fluttering flakes of ash.

[More coming]

Chapter 1179 Lucky

Aina sat blankly on the platform where her wedding was meant to take place. The carnage around her was still ongoing, she could hear the cries of pain and horror and almost feel the rivers of blood tingling the small hairs on her skin, but she was numb to it all.

Rychard had long since left her side, rushing in an attempt to help the battle. He may have been a lot of things, but a coward wasn't one. And though he was highly intelligent, there was absolutely no way he could have pieced together that the Myghell's goal all along had been to take Aina away, while the destruction of the Viola was just a convenient bonus.

So, Rychard had left Aina alone, knowing full well that if she faced something she couldn't protect herself from, there was nothing he would have been able to do either way.

But, there was no doubt that the fate of the Viola had already been sealed. The guests who had come to take part in the wedding but weren't part of the struggle sat in a daze themselves, realizing that they were witnessing the collapse of an empire that had ruled for thousands of years... And yet, just like that, they were finished?

Aina, though, couldn't be bothered to care. She didn't pay attention to what was happening, she couldn't hear the voices around her anymore, and she just blankly stared at the violet grass before her.

Her tears had long since dried up. The sudden breaking of the dam had snapped her back to reality, a flood of thoughts, emotional compartmentalisations, and slowly grown maturity having come back to her one step at a time.

It wasn't an instantaneous process. In fact, it was quite slow at the beginning. The childish thoughts and immaturity seemed to always want to claw their way back. But, a single step at a time, what was, or at least had been Aina, began to return.

But who was she, anyway?

Aina seemed to realize now that something within her had snapped the first day she met Myghell. And, funnily enough, the day it all snapped back into place was the second time she met him.

As she sat there, her arms wrapped around her legs and her head buried between her thighs, she felt a pain in her chest that she hadn't felt in a very long time. But, almost like a genius of battle who had finally met her match, this pain wasn't something Aina wanted to run from. Instead, she wanted to bask in it, to feel it fill her nerves and take over her mind.

Aina knew she had masochistic tendencies. If it wasn't her ridiculous training regimens, even sometimes going as far as to shatter her own bones just to heal herself, it was always something else. However, this time, she needed this pain not to grow stronger, but to finally feel alive.

In these last several months, Aina felt like she had been standing before a tunnel with an exit of blinding white light. She had been trying her hardest, doing everything she could to run in the other direction... But, as though she was stuck in a dream, her legs didn't move as fast as she wanted them to and her movements felt sluggish.

She pushed herself harder, only to fall and stumble, failing to claw herself back... Until everything suddenly went black and she returned to this world once more.

This pain in her chest right now, the pain she couldn't ignore no matter how hard she tried or how much effort she put in... It was her sign that she was back, that she could finally breathe as herself again, that she could finally be Aina again.

But it hurt... It hurt like hell.

As much as that neutered version of herself wanted to be logical, she knew that wasn't her. She couldn't just bury how she was feeling, and even when she tried, it would always manifest itself in the weirdest of ways. She had too many memories exactly like this... Memories she was often too embarrassed to even recall.

Aina took deep breaths, wiping the last evidence of her tears away. She looked up into the skies, almost as though to affirm herself that Leonel was truly not there.

For the first time in a long while, she stood to her feet. Her body flashed, her wedding dress falling to ashes and her body being adorned by flexible silver and black armor.

She reached for the hairpin that held up her elaborate bun and crushed it in her hands. Then, looking off in a certain direction, she began to walk as though nothing was around her.

Surprisingly, or maybe not very much so, no one bothered her. To the Viola, she was their Crown Heir's soon-to-be wife. And, to the Luxnix, she was on the list of those they weren't meant to touch.

Using her high Blood Force affinity, finding her father's direction was as easy as breathing. Though Myghell took note of Aina's actions, he also didn't nothing to stop her. If Aina believed that they hadn't come for her, that was fine too. He didn't mind.

She was indeed as beautiful as the piece of her face he had seen before told him, but most beautiful woman he had ever seen, but Myghell's pride wasn't something most could understand. He wouldn't chase a woman, even if he wanted her.

How things fell into place in the future, so long as he was the Light mentioned, he didn't care. His goal wasn't women, nor was it fame or wealth... It was to stand at the pinnacle of the Dimensional Verse and he didn't care who he needed to use to get there.

The events of that day would spread like wildfire, setting the Sector ablaze and leaving a shocking amount of territory completely unprotected.

But, what did these matters have to do with the Void Palace? Without even a slight delay in schedule, the second day would begin on the day it was promised.

...

In the skies above, Alienor watched this scene with her arms crossed about her chest, coldly watching Aina's every action before she lightly snorted.

"Consider yourselves lucky."

She seemed to be referring to the Viola, as though their collapse wasn't punishment enough or like she had had something even worse in store for them. But, her next words were even more unabashedly wild.

"And you. Even if my son doesn't want you anymore, you'll still have to spend the rest of your life single."

Chapter 1180 Simple Words

Aina walked slowly, her father draped over her back. Despite the weight of the man, with Aina's obscene strength, doing this much wasn't very much trouble at all. In fact, had she wanted to, there were probably a myriad of ways she could carry her father without even touching him.

But, in the end, she still chose this method.

Despite the grief her father had brought her in her lifetime, he was still her father. While he could be considered to be emotionally abusive, Aina could still understand where he came from. At the same time, if she fell into some introspection, what exactly was the alternative?

One of the few guilty pleasures Aina had was reading and watching dramas. When she wasn't studying, training, eating or recovering, she lost herself in worlds that weren't her own. But, in how many of those stories was the trouble the heroine faced the exact opposite of her own?

In a father-daughter dynamic, would Aina even get the chance to do things as she pleased? Wasn't it more likely that her father would try to protect and coddle her, closing her off to the world because she was simply too 'fragile' as a woman?

It sounded quite ironic to say such things now because of how many mental breakdowns Aina had had in recent months. But, after regaining control of her faculties, she could say with 100% certainty that she would choose a father like this 10 out of 10 times over a father who refused to let her chase after her goals and live life.

Had her father made mistakes? Yes. Had his approach been terrible? Yes. Could he have picked a path that would make a lot of this much easier on himself and everyone else? Yes.

However, he was still a man willing to hand over the Brazinger family Heirloom to a little girl, even knowing that it would cripple his own strength. He was still a man willing to leave her on the safety of Earth to slowly grow while he weathered the storm of the world alone to pave a path for her to be here... He was still a man willing to face the army of a Pillar family alone, all while poisoned and handicapped, just so that she wouldn't have to do something she hadn't wanted to do.

He wasn't a perfect father by any stretch. But, what in her life was perfect to begin with? This father of hers was the only family she had left, the one unconditional pillar of support... She wouldn't allow anymore harm to come to him.

Miel's body was too weak to move. Being forced to rest on his daughter's back like this, the rest of his body refusing to listen to his commands, when it should have been him protecting her. He felt a seething rage boil all through him, his flaming red hair and crimson eyes practically jumping about as though they had minds of their own.

He felt a wild mix of emotions he couldn't even properly process. But again and again, shame, humiliation and inadequacy popped up in a perpetual cycle, refusing to allow him to forget.

"I'm... sorry."

Miel's hoarse voice barely came out audibly. His vocal cords had been shredded and he barely managed to squeeze out these words before he hacked up a mouthful of blood and organs.

The poison that Rychard had forced on him wasn't lethal to begin with, but it would still take another day before it was flushed out of his system completely. That compounded by his injuries made him extraordinarily weak. If not for the Viola needing him for whatever reason, he would have long since died in battle.

Aina's steps froze when she heard her father's words. She wasn't quite sure how to react.

This wasn't the first time her father had said such a thing to her. In fact, this was precisely the second time. The first time was when she had just lost her mother and her father was forced to leave soon afterward.

That was maybe the lowest point in Miel's life. His wife died, his daughter was cursed, and he was useless to stop it all. He could barely stop himself from breaking down in front of his little girl.

And now, over decade later, little else had changed. He was still here, still too weak to do anything, still apologizing to his little girl.

His mistakes were always compounded. Every step he took forward, he cost those closest to him even more.

If he had never allowed his love to grow and bloom, that beautiful woman he had loved with all his heart would still be alive. If he hadn't let his emotions dictate his actions the gorgeous little baby girl they had birthed together wouldn't have to live a life of suffering. If he hadn't been too confident in his strength and spent more time refining his mind, he would have never let his daughter come so close to giving up the most precious moment of her life to a man who didn't deserve it.

He tried to teach his daughter to become a better him, a greater version of himself. But, he never realized that he was so broken and damaged himself that whatever he projected to his little girl would be broken and damaged as well.

He truly didn't know how he would face his daughter ever again, but for her to come out unscathed due to nothing more than trash luck... He didn't know how he should feel.

This was the only thing he could do. Apologize... He was useless... It was the only thing he had left to give...

Aina didn't know how to respond. For a very long time, she just stood frozen in place, unmoving and in a daze. Compared to when she had been a toddler hearing those words, it hit much differently now that she was a grown woman.

When she finally did open her mouth to respond, what she said was short and simple. But, it was still enough that Miel could no longer hold back his tears. Everything that he hadn't shed for his wife, for

leaving his daughter behind, for her growing without him by her side, for all the failures he had had in this life...

It all poured outward like an endless torrent, a silent stream of tears drenching his daughter's back.

"I love you, dad."