

Descent 631

Chapter 631

Leonel and Sael gazed toward each other somewhat awkwardly. Well, Leonel seemed to still be trying to get a read on Sael with the latter felt as though she was walking on pins and needles.

At this moment the both of them were in the private room of a nearby restaurant. Usually, only seniors of high standing would be able to come to this place, but with her standing, it wasn't a difficult task to get Leonel in. Though she had to withstand quite a number of odd looks, she was still able to brave through it.

Finally unable to take the silence any longer, Sael finally spoke.

“Are you from the Seventh Dimensional Morales family or not?!”

She spoke all these words out in a single breath, the tension she was under carrying a palpable weight.

Leonel blinked slightly. So this was indeed the case, it seemed that his deductions were correct. This made everything make much more sense.

If this was the case, then in all likelihood, Gersan hadn't been there to help Thetris, but had rather been there to either monitor or protect him. It seemed he had jumped to conclusions.

That said, he didn't feel very bad about teaching Gersan a lesson. At worst, the young man would suffer a mild concussion. This sort of injury for someone in the Fourth Dimension might as well have been non-existent. His worst injury was definitely to his pride. But, who asked him to speak such venomous words?

“No.” Leonel finally responded.

This response seemed to be enough to deflate Sael completely. Had she really done all of this for no reason?

But in that case, then didn't how was this situation supposed to be handled? If she began to punish Leonel appropriately now, what kind of message would that send?

Everyone wanted to claim to be upright and morally superior, but when you were facing a behemoth like the Morales family... Was it really possible to hold onto your ideals?

In the face of absolute power, there were very few that wouldn't bend. And, those brave enough not to were either courageous beyond belief or were just as stupid. In all likelihood... It was both.

And of course... Such people were also likely dead.

Sael sank into her seat, feeling as though all her world views had shattered. Her situation only seemed to become worse when she heard Leonel's next words, though.

"But my dad is. So, that's likely where the confusion comes from."

Sael froze before her lip started to twitch. She looked up from her hands to meet Leonel's placid gaze. For some reason, she really wanted to strangle this handsome boy to death at this very moment.

However, she managed to calm herself. This hardly changed much of anything if she was being honest. The fact that Leonel seemed to indeed be related to the Morales family made her previous actions warranted. But, this didn't fix her almost existential crisis.

It really grated on her conscience to not be able to follow the rules.

She loved Valiant Heart Mountain. If she didn't, she wouldn't have been so eager to gain Leonel's help. She thought that meeting him with a light at the end of the tunnel... It wasn't until she spoke to her master and the other elders who were far more wise than herself that she remembered nothing ever came so easily...

Leonel would have collapsed. Any other freshman in his seat would have definitely drowned their seat in sweat by now.

Leonel felt as though Sael had become a beast stalking her prey. If he didn't know better, he would have thought she was a cougar with a youthful taste.

He didn't know how old Sael was, but she definitely had to be at least a few decades older than he was... At least that was his guess...

“Hm?”

Leonel blinked. For a moment, he swore he could sense killing intent in Sael's eyes. It can't be that she could read his mind right? Or were women really so sensitive?

But it disappeared as quickly as he saw it.

“This is great news! Excellent news! Couldn't be better! HAHA!”

Leonel was taken aback by the sudden outburst. He could only watch on in a daze, certain that if Sael jumped around any harder... Her chest band definitely wouldn't be able to hold up anymore.

PANDA-NOVEL “Wait!” Sael stopped dancing and turned back toward Leonel. “So you really have no idea about the Heir Trials? Be honest with me.”

Leonel blinked. “Heir Trial? What's that?”

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Hearing this, Sael was stunned for a moment before she sighed and sat back down again.

PANDA-N0VEL “To think...” She mumbled to herself. “This was the real cause of all this trouble but you weren’t even aware of it.”

Sael kept shaking her head as Leonel waited patiently. It seemed he had much more fortitude than she did.

“The Heir Trials are the reason we were so cautious with you.” Sael finally looked up. “In fact, the Heir Trials are the only reason we even know of your existence in the first place.

“Usually, Seventh Dimensional organizations are way too far out of our reach. As far as we know, they’re the pinnacle of the universe. But then again, that’s just our limited knowledge. There might very well be an Eighth or even Ninth Dimensional existence, maybe even Tenth... We have no way of knowing.

“However, our Valiant Heart Mountain has records of your Morales family’s Heir Trials because of how unique they are. I stumbled upon a record of one of our ancestors from several generations ago. According to him, he got the chance to participate as a friend of one someone who, I assume, is one of your Ancestors.

“He speaks of this experience as being one of his fortuitous encounters and it’s even because of this that we were able to lay claim to 70% of the Valiant Heart World. In the past, we barely had control of even 20%.”

Leonel continued to listen quietly.

“That said... While the ancestor said this had been a great opportunity, it was simultaneously a terrible thing as well. If all he received was benefits, let alone 70%, even 100% of the Valiant Heart world would be in our hands.

“Don’t look down on this. Valiant Heart has the potential to enter the Sixth Dimension. In fact, if it wasn’t for particular struggles we face, we might have cleared enough Zones to do so already. Having full control of this world would be a great boon for us. Unfortunately... we couldn’t.

“Do you know why?”

Leonel didn't respond. Obviously, he didn't.

"Participating in the Heir Trials might have given us great benefits, but we were ultimately just canon fodder, too weak to make a large difference.

"The memoire made it sound like our ancestor participated alone, but in the end, he explained the whole truth. It wasn't just him but tens of thousands of our fellow Valiant Heart disciples. And yet...

"He was the only one who came back alive."

Leonel's gaze sharpened. Such a high death total?

"In truth, our ancestor almost died as well. He was lucky to come back alone."

Sael sighed. "That year, there had only been two candidates for the Heir Trials and the one our ancestor sided with lost.

"Despite the fact there were just two, the carnage was unimaginable. Of course, the Heir themselves always survive to the end, but what about the people under them?"

Sael looked up to meet Leonel's gaze.

"My Valiant Heart Mountain is too small to get involved in such conflicts."

Leonel paused. ρ???(???)

"So the reason you've stayed at arms length is because you don't want to owe me any favors."

"Nothing in the Dimensional Verse comes free." Sael replied. "If we used your help to solve our problems, it would be impossible to refuse your help in the future. The rage of a Seventh Dimensional existence isn't something that we can afford to bear..."

“I see.” Leonel nodded. “But now that you know I’m not affiliated with the Morales family, at least not in any important capacity, you’re hopeful that I will be able to help you now without asking for anything in return later?”

Sael bit her lip hard, but eventually nodded.

“Mm...”

Leonel nodded, looking out the window of the restaurant.

Down below, the streets were quite clean and orderly, a far cry from the freshman quarters. Everything seemed prim and proper. There was just a single thing out of place... A picture stapled to a pole light that carried the face of someone easily recognizable, having the words Leo the Cuck written across the top.

Leonel didn’t react much to seeing this caricature of himself. Why would he? By now, he had already seen hundreds of them plastered everywhere.

“... So what you mean is that you expect me to help as a student of Valiant Heart Mountain and for nothing more, is that right?”

Leonel didn’t look back toward Sael, but he could tell that she had nodded.

“And I assume that, as a student, the reason I would want to do this is because I should feel a sense of comradery and hominess from this place, is that also right?”

Sael nodded, biting her lip harder.

Leonel looked back toward Sael, his indifferent gaze causing her heart to shudder.

Leonel's life wasn't as simple as it seemed on the surface. After all, he had spent most of his childhood going to school with those he thought had far higher standing than himself. Back then, he had no idea he was a prince. So, all he saw was himself, a commoner, facing an entire class of nobles, each one with a nose arched higher than the other.

One might wonder, then, how it was that Leonel had managed to go from that reality to suddenly becoming a celebrity everyone greeted on campus. Let alone being bullied, everyone seemed to love him.

Obviously, this wasn't because everyone at Royal Blue Academy happened to have kind hearts. What kind of ridiculous statement was that? There was no such thing as pure goodness or pure evil. This was why Leonel always found the notion of light versus darkness to be so asinine.

In Leonel's opinion, the youths of Royal Blue Academy were no better nor worse than the youths of Valiant Heart, or any organization he had been in for that matter. In fact, in Leonel's mind, the only difference between that organization and these ones was that he hadn't spent very long in any of the latter.

So what was the answer?

Obviously, he beat them into submission. He defeated them one after another, so harshly and so resoundingly that they could only smile when they saw him, fearing that he would turn around and crush them again.

In the past, Leonel had used academics, sports and a sharp tongue to achieve this effect.

But in this world, the only thing he could use was his fist.

"Mm. Then why is it, exactly, that I don't feel that way at all?"

Leonel's words made Sael feel as though she was sitting on pins and needles. She never thought that there'd be a day where she felt so uncomfortable in the face of a junior. The worst part was that Leonel didn't even seem to be trying to pressure her. He simply sat there, asking a simple question.

It was only at this moment that Sael understood that even though Leonel had no real connections with the Morales family, that didn't necessarily mean that he would make some with Valiant Heart Mountain.

He had already made his stance clear multiple times already. He wasn't here for the sake of this organization. He was here for Aina and no one else. He didn't give a damn about anything other than her wellbeing.

As for using Aina to pressure Leonel into doing something?

Sure, that might work. In fact, Sael was slightly worried that some fool would try to do exactly this. But ultimately, the action would be akin to shooting themselves in the foot all in an attempt to take just one step forward.

An organization was built on an expectation of mutual benefit. If they showed that they were willing to sacrifice talents so easily for the sake of their own goals, it wouldn't be long before they no longer had an organization to speak of at all.

Leonel's meaning was as clear as crystal.

What right did they have to ask anything of him when he'd received nothing but disrespect since the moment he stepped foot into this place? On top of that, they were actually trying to stop him from getting revenge too.

There was something else that Leonel had said that made Sael realize that just because Leonel wasn't associated with the Morales family, it didn't also follow that he had no backing to speak of.

Namely... That father he mentioned.

Even if Leonel's family was from the lowest rung of the Morales family it would still be more than enough to ride atop their heads with impunity.

Sael felt stifled.

PANDA-NOVEL She really couldn't allow Leonel to do as he pleased. If she did, there would be no law and order left in the organization.

After a long while, she managed to organize her thoughts.

"I will make sure that all the posters are removed within the half hour."

"That's not enough." Leonel said plainly.

Was that a joke? Did Sael think that she was doing him a favor by undoing something that shouldn't have been done in the first place? Then what then? He was supposed to graciously help her now?

"Let me finish." Sael said with an exasperated sigh. "I can't allow you to rampage about as you please. But... There are plenty of ways to get revenge that are above board and don't require breaking any rules, don't you think?"

"You could join a Peak and make your own Ore faction. That way any battles that happen outside of the mountain range would be sanctioned, for example."

Leonel's gaze remained placid as Sael tried to make an unappetizing suggestion seem palatable.

He was supposed to patiently bide his time and wait? Why? All to deal with Valiant Heart's red tape? No matter what it might seem like, Leonel wasn't a patient man when it came to certain things.

If there was one character trait that he would always have, it was an unwillingness to lose. If this wasn't losing, then he didn't know what was. ρ??∪???????

Seeing that Leonel was completely unimpressed by her suggestion, Sael bit the sides of her cheek, really not knowing what to say.

Dammit, how had things gone this far? She really shouldn't have allowed Gersan to handle matters, but she had things to do. She couldn't very well sit idly by for weeks watching Leonel's every move. In a lot of ways, her combat strength was far more linked to Valiant Heart's survival than even Leonel's help might be.

She couldn't afford to fall behind in strength. No matter what.

Seeing Sael struggle so much, Leonel shook his head and sighed.

"Feed me."

"Huh...?" Sael looked up in confusion.

"Feed me." Leonel repeated, picking up a menu from the table.

Under Sael's stunned gaze, Leonel called in a waiter and ordered a feast that would easily feed 20 men. He didn't say a word even up until the point the food was prepared and brought over, and also didn't say anything as he began to gouge it all down.

Sael's lip twitched. How much would this meal cost exactly?

It was then she remembered what Leonel said before he ordered all of this. And that was exactly when the heartache set in.

Leonel devoured the meal in what felt like a few minutes. Sael had no idea how he managed to do so without her being disgusted, but she didn't even consider this thought until Leonel was getting ready to leave.

‘This wasn’t as good as Aina’s food.’ Leonel shook his head as he stood. It seemed that he had been spoiled.

He had thought that such a high-end restaurant would be able to at least be close, but it seemed that girlfriend of his was more amazing than he knew.

“Leonel! Please wait!”

Sael began to panic again. Even after watching Leonel eat all this time, she still didn’t have any good answers. She bordered on shedding real tears at this point.

She knew that if Leonel did as he pleased, the upper echelon wouldn’t be able to stand by for long. At that point, to save space, they would at the very least expel him. If that happened, it would all be over.

“Just... Please at least join a Peak first!”

Leonel looked back toward Sael and raised an eyebrow. He looked her up and down as though he was observing a new species of animal he was fascinated by. And in truth, he was. He found Sael to be quite curious indeed.

“You’re too naïve, don’t you think? What Peak do you think would accept me now?”

Sael froze.

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Leonel continued to observe Sael.

She knew well how the Peaks operated. There was no small number of internal conflicts. The question was which Peak would be willing to be enemies with Hero Peak? And the answer was.

It was that simple. From the very beginning, the idea of joining a Peak to get the right to leave the mountain was asinine. It would never happen.

As for joining Valiant Hall? That was even more ridiculous. Compared to the Peaks, the restrictions they had on their members was even fiercer. They weren't even allowed to become involved in such struggles to begin with, after all, their main purpose for existing was to remain neutral.

From the very beginning, Sael's ask of him was ridiculous. There was no other way to put it.

"You want to save your organization, but you aren't willing to risk owing any favors. You want my help, but you don't want me to seek revenge for the slights levied against me. You want me to lower my head, not the rock the boat, follow all your rules, and still care enough to help you in the end.

"You take everything and sacrifice nothing.

"Don't you think this is a little too naïve?"

Sael opened her mouth to say something but she really couldn't find a response.

"Maybe I'm too naïve too." Leonel muttered. But considering Sael's dazed state, it was unknown if she even heard him.

He might have been right in that he was, because at this moment, seeing how lost Sael looked and knowing how much effort she had tried to put in to make sure everything stayed together... He didn't know if he even had the heart to go after Sarrieth any longer.

He might have reprimanded Sael about sacrifice, but maybe James was right. He was just a hypocrite. He wasn't much different from her at all.

...

PANDA-NOVEL Leonel made it to the ground floor of the restaurant, walking out.

He looked across the street, finding that the poster had already been removed. It seemed that while he was eating, Sael had kept her promise. But, this only made him sigh again.

'I want to see Aina.'

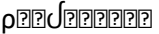
Leonel took out a talisman and poured Force into it. But, there was no response.

It seemed that Aina was still neck deep in whatever training she had thrown herself into. Since that was the case, he'd leave her be for now.

Remembering Aina, though, Leonel's gaze flashed with rage.

He never cared much about what other people called him. It was only because they had dragged his parents and Aina into this that he was so furious. If not for this, would his reaction have been so violent?

Definitely not.

Leonel shook his head and took a step forward, only to find a figure blocking his path. 

"Hm?"

Leonel's gaze traveled up from the well paved roads, up a pair of slender, long legs, only to land on a familiar face.

This woman. He had seen this beauty at the Ore Market. In fact, he had given her a large amount of ores as well.

He distinctly remembered that unlike everyone else who was cautious with accepting their piece of the pie, she wholeheartedly swallowed up everything, leaving nothing behind. Leonel remembered feeling

curious about it, but he had more important things on his mind back then, and most definitely did now as well.

“Yes? I don’t have any more Ores to give you if that’s what you want.”

Hearing the light teasing tone in Leonel’s words, Kaela found herself rolling her eyes to avoid her feeling of embarrassment. She really had looked like a bit of a beggar back then, but her Faction really needed those Ores!

At the same time, though, she sighed a breath of relief.

After seeing Leonel battle, she had thought that he was some hardened brute. At least he was easy to talk to. She didn’t even know why, but she felt relaxed in his presence as though there was no expectations.

That was quite an odd thing to find in the men she spoke to. Usually, more often than not, they all wanted to crawl into her bed.

Truthfully, with all the stress she was always under, sometimes she wanted to accept such an offer just to blow some steam. But with how this world treated women who weren’t picky enough... Well, let’s just say she didn’t want to add any more stress to her plate so she avoided such things as well.

Kaela was the type of woman who would curse the unfairness of it all, but secretly also couldn’t be bothered to deal with the backlash that came from stepping outside the status quo.

“I’m not here for Ores, but your help would be nice.”

“My help?”

Leonel raised his brows.

“Mhm. My faction happens to need a bodyguard like you. Word of me accepting all of those Ores will definitely reach Sarrieth’s ears and I just need you to help us bide some time.”

“Oh? How much time? And why are you so certain that you only need a small amount of it?”

Leonel was intrigued by this. He quite liked Kaela’s boldness.

“The Valiant Heart Zone is opening up soon so there’s going to be a lot of preparations for it. I’m confident that with these Ores, we’ll be able to complete a project we’ve been working on for years now. With it, we’ll be in the good graces of a lot of Peaks, including Hero Peak which Sarrieth is from.

“As long as we succeed, Sarrieth won’t dare to target us so blatantly.”

‘The Valiant Heart Zone?’

Leonel blinked in confusion. Was it a Sub-Dimensional Zone? But why did it have a name? It made sense to be able to predict the opening up of a Zone, but this name seemed fairly... permanent?

Wouldn’t a Zone that had been opened so often been cleared by now?

There were too many confusing things about this single line.

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“What’s this Valiant Heart Zone?” Leonel asked.

“Oh, I keep forgetting you’re a freshman...” Kaela looked Leonel up and down as though observing some kind of extraterrestrial creature. “... The Valiant Heart Zone is the world the Valiant Pillars gate.”

“It’s a Zone?”

“Well... Yes and no. There are four types of Zones, normal types, Mythological types, Variant Types and Unique Zones. Valiant Heart Zone is a Unique Zone.”

“Aren’t Unique Zones...”

Leonel was confused. He was certain that Unique Zones were Zones where outside interference caused their difficulty to multiply several times over.

It was only after he heard Kaela’s explanation that he understood the definition of Unique Zone was far broader than he thought it was.

The strict definition of a Unique Zone was any Zone that was influenced by outside forces. In this case, it encompassed both the Zone which had to deal with Shield Cross Stars interference and apparently this Valiant Heart Zone.

According to Kaela, organizations of a certain level kept and refined certain Zones for different levels of benefits. Sometimes these Zones could perpetually produce resources for an organization, almost like a respawn rate in a game.

Zones kept for that purpose were an easy income source for worlds and could act as a renewable resource.

However, the Valiant Heart Zone wasn’t this kind of resource Zone. Rather, it was a training ground.

“... Yes, the Valiant Heart Zone when it first appeared was a Variant Zone. In the past, Valiant Heart Mountain was on the brink of destruction and it was because of one of our Ancestors and the appearance of this Zone that we were able to survive.

“According to legends, our Ancestor brought back a treasure that allowed us to monopolize this Variant Zone for continuous use. Those treasures are the pillars that guard the mountain pass.”

Leonel's eyes widened. If he was a betting man, he would certainly put no small amount of money on the fact this Ancestor was the very same one that Sael had mentioned.

He didn't know what level of treasure it would take to claim a Zone for yourself, let alone a Variant Zone which was known to have the greatest treasures.

Kaela spoke of the treasures so simply, but wasn't she a Crafter? Shouldn't she know how difficult it was to construct such a treasure?

Leonel might not understand much about the Dimensional Verse, but what he did know about was Force Crafting. Any treasure on this level couldn't be from the Fourth Dimension. It was a surprise that Valiant Heart Mountain had lasted for so long letting such a secret become common knowledge amongst its disciples.

Or maybe... That was exactly the point.

'Are they using the prestige of the Morales family as a protective covering?'

Thinking to this point, Leonel almost wanted to laugh.

He couldn't blame them. They gave up tens of thousands of their members for the right to use this shield of protection.

But, that only made things more ironic. It was because of this sacrifice that they were able to enjoy such spoils. And now what? They suddenly weren't willing anymore? $\rho \int$

Leonel felt that this was a matter that started at the head, this all pervading cowardice. Valiant Heart Mountain was quite literally rotting from the inside out.

The worst of them were so worried about holding onto their authority that they made enemies of freshman for perceived slights despite supposedly being holy seniors.

The best of them were too cowardly, trying to hold onto a meaningless status quo that held no weight whatever.

And what were the Heads doing? Weren't they the exact same?

In the blink of an eye, Leonel felt that he had completely grasped the weakness of Valiant Heart Mountain in an instant. All of this only confirmed the first of his thoughts. He had no intention of tying himself to this place.

As for the so-called Heir Trial? He had not a single intention in participating to begin with. But, even if for some reason he changed his mind, this sort of weak, back boneless organization wouldn't even be on the list of allies he chose from.

They thought too much of themselves.

Of them all, this Kaela was the first one he had run across that was slightly better to look at. Obviously, this wasn't because of her looks, but rather because she didn't carry the same hypocrisy.

“Are you sure you want me to join? There's likely not a single Peak that would take me in right now. And, from what I can see, you're a part of Brave Peak. You sure your seniors would be okay with this?”

Kaela snorted. “If they kick you out, they'll be kicking me out anyway. Plus, whether I'm part of a Peak or not, my Polished Glass Faction will exist no matter what. There are members from plenty of Peaks in my Faction. Crafters are too rare so I couldn't afford to be stingy... I mean, I'm very open minded so it was never a problem.”

Kaela rubbed her nose slightly beneath Leonel's smiling gaze.

pANDA-nOVEL “Alright, alright! That's enough, follow this senior of yours! I'll take you to see a world you never have before!”

Leonel had his wrist grabbed by an oddly firm and sturdy hand, especially since it was from a woman.

‘Seems she’s quite a decent Force Crafter.’

...

As Kaela was dragging Leonel around, another uproar was sweeping across Valiant Heart Mountain.

News of a freshman defeating several sophomore level white belts spread like wildfire, especially when it was learned that one of King of Ores captains, Nigmir, wasn’t spared in the slightest. In fact, according to reports, he was defeated without even a chance to fight back.

This news might as well have been like a ton of bricks slamming against the minds of seniors. However, this had only been the beginning.

News of Valiant Hall removing all the Leo the Cuck posters posted around the city caused another uproar. Rumors that Leonel had joined Valiant Hall began to spread.

It was then that the landscape completely shifted.

Someone had spotted King of Ores, Sarrieth, returning to the organization.

Everyone sat patiently, waiting for what they thought might be an eruption to explode forth.

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Kaela quickly led Leonel to a small house near the base of Brave Peak. It was so close to the Peak, in fact, that the back of the house was no more than ten meters from a rockface.

Luckily, the home wasn’t very close to the main path of the Peak, or else it would be too loud and bustling to get anything done.

The space was under the perpetual shadow of a floating island as a result of this, though. So, it was give an take. But, it seemed that Kaela quite liked the darkness they were cast under.

Luckily, Kaela had had the sense to let go of Leonel's wrist long ago, or else who knew what kind of new rumors would be spreading through the city?

She kicked down the door as though she wasn't its owner, her excitement almost being too great. Leonel couldn't help but shake his head and laugh.

"Everyone! I come bearing gifts!"

"Beautiful big sis!"

Hearing a familiar voice, Leonel's lip twitched. How did Radlis get here, exactly? Did he just follow all the beauties of the organization like a dog without a home?

PANDA-NOVEL Radlis stormed up from what looked like the basement with every intention of throwing himself into Kaela's arms. But, all he received was a kick in return.

Kaela's elegant leg hung in the air. Unfortunately, she wore the customary uniform of Valiant Heart, so there was no soft skin or slenderness to enjoy.

Radlis crashed against the wall beside the opening to the basement, sliding down with a hurt look on his face.

"Damn useless mut. You're lucky I didn't kick you out of here after learning you can't Craft anything yet you still want to take advantage of me. Here."

Kaela threw over a spatial brace to Radlis.

"Organize all the Ores in here. You probably don't know their functions so just do it by feel like you usually do. After you're done, you can get Litia to take inventory of them."

“Ah, yes ma’am.”

Radlis stood up quickly as though he had never been hurt.

It was only after he finished leering at Kaela that he finally realized that there had been someone by her side all this time. In fact, it was also at this moment that the others came from the basement. Aside from Radlis, there were five others, all wearing a lab coat similar to Kaela.

It seemed that this lab coat was their marker as a faction. It wasn’t a bad look though it did seem a bit out of place.

“Ah! Bro, it’s you! You actually have the confidence to show your face. Respect, respect!”

Radlis laughed for a moment before looking wearily between Leonel and Kaela. After a moment, his eyes sparkled.

“How’s your girlfriend doing? Is everything alright at home?”

“Hm? You have a girlfriend?” Kaela looked at Leonel curiously.

Radlis grinned as though a devious plan of his had succeeded.

‘Don’t blame me, bro. You can’t keep hogging all the women. Us ugly men need to live too.’

“I do.” Leonel nodded with a smile.

“I see.” Kaela nodded. Then as though it was nothing more than a brief interlude, she looked toward the five who had come up the stairs.

“The giant who can barely stand to his full height is Rum. The twin sisters are Madia and Litia. As for the final two, the girl with the spectacles is Thilly and the boy who’s even lankier than Radlis is Vaglor.”

Radlis open his mouth to say something, but in the end he just closed it. p??J???????

‘Are all women so shameless? First Balthorn and now Kaela? None of them care that he has a girlfriend? Where is the justice in this world?’

“Nice to meet you all.” Leonel said with a smile, greeting them all warmly.

“I may have gotten us into some trouble...” Kaela coughed lightly.

The moment their leader began, the five sighed as though they were already used to this. Leonel could imagine the number of conundrums Kaela had caused in the past.

“... Anyway, the short of it is that we’ve been banned from buying more ores from King of Ores Faction and Hero Peak may or may not be coming to find trouble with us in the coming days.”

“Kaela!” Litia looked exasperated. “What did you do?!”

“Nothing! Honest! Those bastards wanted to double the prices, how was I supposed to take that laying down?!”

Litia wanted to face palm. She already knew her leader was exaggerating, but there was nothing more she could say.

“It’s all okay, though! I’ve found us a bodyguard!”

Everyone looked toward Leonel. But, when they saw his black belt, they felt as though black was all they could see. Their legs swayed and they almost fell over.

They were supposed to entrust their safety... to a freshman?

Even Radlis, who had seen Leonel in action, was one part speechless.

‘He definitely did something to beautiful big sis...’ Radlis wanted to shed real tears. ‘... Just because he’s good in bed, big sis, doesn’t mean he’s good at fighting. Those are two completely different battles...’

Radlis felt as though his world was crumbling. It seems he would have to find a new big sis to fawn over. This was too depressing.

His dreams of sleeping on a beauty’s lap were going up in smoke just because of Leonel.

“Ah, you’re all thinking too much about it. Leonel is even stronger than I am, by a good margin. Stop worrying so much. Come on, let’s go work!”

Litia shook her head. Seeing that Radlis was trying to escape, she grabbed him by the ear and pulled him down into the basement.

Everyone followed, even Leonel. He was quite curious to see what kind of lab the Polished Glass Faction was working with.

The result was completely out of his expectations.

“I’ll show you around so you can think of some security measures. I haven’t really thought of your payment but... Bah, I’ll think of something. How about free room and board? This place might be shabby, but it’s still far better than the freshman quarters.

“Oh! Don’t touch anything and try not to breathe too hard! The experiments we’re working on are very sensitive to outside stimuli, especially impurities.”

‘Better indeed...’

Leonel looked around.

The basement was filled with endless walls of white and steel tables. It looked more like a biology lab than a crafting station.

But, they were dealing with a very precious ore that Leonel immediately recognized.

‘They’re working with something so sensitive? What are they trying to do here exactly?’

Chapter 637

The Ore Leonel immediately recognized was quite a unique metal that manifested like glass. It had all the texture, feel and pliability of metal, but also happened to be see-through. This ore was simply known as Polished Glass Ore and it seemed that Kaela’s faction received their name directly from this source. The only difference between it and normal glass was that it had a slight black hue to it as though in warning of its danger...

The issue with Polished Glass, though, was that it was incredibly volatile. And as Kaela mentioned, it was best not to leave it with any impurities unless one wanted a face of what would amount to a stack of TNT.

However, as it seemed with most things, the more difficult they were to deal with, the better the reward for dealing with them. The problem, though, was that Polished Glass had a very specific use case that would benefit it the greatest and it was difficult to reach this balance.

Seeing that Leonel had spent so long looking toward their stores of Polished Glass, Kaela smiled.

“Definitely do not touch that. Radlis, that brat, actually almost caused us to go up in smoke a few days ago. It’s lucky that he has some use or else I really would have strangled him to death by now.”

Though Kaela seemed casual with her words, the lab itself was in great order. Even at this moment, the Polished Glass was locked away safely and securely.

The five members of the faction, excluding Radlis, had all gone off to work.

Rum held two massive hammers, pounding away at something with his head hidden under a hood. Litia and Madia seemed to be taking whatever product he finished and purifying it what looked like flames. Thilly inspect their products, while it was the lanky Vaglor who took the most volatile product and placed it within the protective covering.

To give Radlis some credit, though, it seemed that he had also gotten started on the task Kaela had for him. But, for whatever reason, he kept looking back toward Leonel and Kaela with tears streaking down his cheeks. One would have thought that he was cutting onions.

The last station was completely empty. Leonel was certain that whatever processing was left would be left to Kaela herself.

“You want to watch?” Kaela asked, seeing that Leonel was still curious.

PANDA-NOVEL “Sure.”

Kaela made her way to the last lab table, her expression turning serious. Everyone seemed to take a pause on what they were doing to look over.

The hair scrunchy that kept Kaela’s ponytail in place began to flicker to life, dancing with a golden-red.

Taking a deep breath, she slipped her hands into the two openings within the transparent container, her gaze growing focused.

Her flames licking across her hair danced down her neck, along her shoulders and arms, through the slots and onto the tips of her fingers.

Very delicately, she began to handle the piece of transparent Polished Glass.

At this moment, it already looked like a finished product. There was no amount of polishing that could make it any clearer.

But, as Force Crafters, they all knew that this was an illusion. Handling such a piece of Polished Glass felt no different from standing in a nuclear war zone. Even if your eyes couldn't see it... You didn't have to for you to already be considered dead. ρ???(???)

The most dangerous part of handling Polished Glass didn't come from purifying it to this extent.

This shouldn't be taken out of context, because it was indeed dangerous to reach this step. Rather, because the impurities were so obvious during the first steps, they were easier to deal with and manage.

But right now...? They were like hidden assassins ready and waiting to take your life.

This was the most dangerous step. Not the purification, but the molding of Polished Glass into your weapon of choice.

It took Kaela several hours of careful, step by step processes to finally mold the final product.

She gently pulled her hands out and grinned triumphantly, sweat matting her brow.

Despite how happy she was with her work, she didn't take it out of the container. Rather, after pressing a button, the container collapsed in side very gently and formed a small box of metal that Kaela then put to the side, ready to receive the next.

“... So you're making grenades?”

Kaela gave Leonel a surprised look.

“How did you know that?”

The final product looked no different from a Christmas tree ornament. It had a small round body, so small, in fact, that one could fit three into the palm comfortably. Combining with its transparent appearance and it was quite a beautiful ornament, indeed. The slight black light it radiated only made it more intriguing.

The only other oddity about the design was the small hole at the top. It was barely a centimeter and a half across and was hard to pick out amidst all the transparent glass.

This was all to say that... other than a vague similarity in shape, it should be impossible to tell what the purpose of the vessel was... Especially since it wasn't truly the final product! There was still one more step Kaela had to complete in secret before it could be deemed to be finished.

Leonel shrugged and spoke casually. "Just a guess."

Kaela's mouth opened to answer but couldn't come up with anything.

Was it really just a guess?

"It's definitely an innovative idea. Usually, Polished Glass is used as the edge of blades due to its extraordinary sharpness. But, your design is innovative. Since you can't purify the Polished Glass completely, you're taking advantage of this to finish a completely novel Craft. It's quite genius."

Leonel's casual remarks filled Kaela with pride in the beginning before she was left more stunned than anything else.

"You... How...? What?"

This wasn't analysis a layman could complete no matter how learned they were. Just telling that the Polished Glass wasn't completely purified required a deep level of knowledge.

"How?" Leonel blinked. "Oh, that's what you mean.. I'm a Force Crafter too, I guess."

Chapter 638

“You...”

Kaela was speechless.

Having such combat prowess at such a young age yet also having such insight as a Force Crafter... Was this supposed to be a practical joke?

Kaela could be considered rare enough, having decent strength along with good skill as a Crafter. But, she was also much older than Leonel. Though she didn't want to admit it, she was easily over double his age.

Well... Double what she estimated his age to be. If she knew Leonel was only 19, it would be much closer to triple than double.

Leonel raised his brows. Was it really so shocking? He understood that Crafters would be rare on Earth, but even if they were also rare here, running into one or two every so often shouldn't be impossible. There was no need for such surprise.

Kaela shook her head.

“You're right, we are making grenades. Initially, as you said, we wanted to use the Polished Glass stores we found for the sake of making sharp weapons.

“If we managed to succeed, even if the finished products were only Tier 3, they'd be able to rival Tier 5 and 6 weapons in pure sharpness alone. They'd be hot commodities among the lower class of Valiant Mountain and there would be more than a few elites interested in them too.”

Leonel frowned.

Polished glass was a Tier 6 Ore. To use it to make Tier 3 weapons was a bit wasteful. He didn't quite understand why they would do that.

If he thought about it more deeply, though, Kaela likely planned on using an exceptionally small amount right on the edge of the blade. This would indeed make a big difference in the sharpness of a weapon.

But, even then, Kaela spoke as though she had no plans at all of making true Tier 6 weapons. If used properly, they could nearly rival Tier 7 weapons. That would truly make them a hot commodity and this endeavor would be far more worth it.

Of course, that was ignoring the idea of grenades which Leonel felt was an excellent pivot.

PANDA-NOVEL Seeing Leonel's look, Kaela put on a wronged expression.

"I know what you're thinking..."

Leonel raised his brows.

"But Valiant Heart Mountain only has stingy people. If you came here hoping you could find a pathway to Tier 5, 6 or higher, this senior of yours will have to disappoint you.

"The elders hoard everything, even from their disciples. I used to be under the tutelage of the best Crafter Valiant Heart has to offer, Tier 9 Black Crafter, Jac Beinala. But after realizing that that old fogie only want to work me to the bone while giving me nothing in return, I left."

Kaela sighed as she 'broke' the news to Leonel.

She had correctly guessed that Leonel's weird expression was about her not being able to complete Tier 6 Crafts. But, what she incorrectly guessed was that Leonel was also unable to.

“Because of that bastard, I can only Craft up to Tier 5 on an excellent day, and that’s despite the fact I already have the skill to complete Tier 7 Crafts. Even if I have all the materials, I just don’t have the knowledge of Force Arts necessary to bind them properly.”

The lab entered a somewhat depressing state.

‘Oh? So that’s the limitation...?’

Leonel grasped a bit of what was going on.

He agreed with Kaela’s assessment of herself. Her hand speed and control was indeed at the Grade Two Designation. Though it was a far cry from Leonel’s own Superior Grade One Designation, it was still good enough.

Speaking of which, Leonel had long since begun on his Bronze hand exercises, so he had actually already entered the Grade Three Designation and was approaching Advanced Grade Three Designation. So, technically, he was already beyond his previous Superior Grade One Designation for the Black Grade and could begin to work on Fifth Dimension Crafts.

Still, to put this matter into perspective, not all Bronze Crafters even reached Grade One Designation first. So, Kaela was indeed not wrong when she said she had the skill to complete Tier 7 Crafts.

What did all this mean? It meant that Kaela’s only real limitation was her lack of understanding in high level Force Arts.

Leonel sighed. This was his first time finally understanding the scope of what he had in his hands.

Even a Bronze Organization like this one was hoarding knowledge Leonel might not even deem important enough to write on a piece of tissue paper.

The words of his grandfather couldn’t help but come back to his ears. Should he be handing over his things to those who were less privileged than he was...?

Leonel could only sigh again.

At that moment, he felt a light pat on his shoulder.

“There’s no need to feel so down.” Kaela said with a smile, trying to comfort Leonel. “Those old bastards are just jealous of our youth. Once they croak, it’s not like they can take their knowledge with them. By then, we can just rob their graves.”

Hearing such words, Leonel could only burst into a fit of laughter.

This Kaela was indeed quite an interesting character. She somewhat reminded him of Mordred.

‘I wonder how Camelot is doing now...?’ Leonel thought somewhat absentmindedly before shaking his head.

Clearing his mind, Leonel suddenly clapped, startling everyone in the lab. By now, even a casual clap from Leonel seemed to send swirling winds in every direction.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa! Are you trying to kill us all?!” Kaela panicked.

Leonel grinned. “Hey Kaela, I have some ideas. I wonder if you’re willing to take another gamble on me?”

Kaela blinked, her beautiful eyes sparkling somewhat.

For some reason, whenever Leonel entered such a state, just his aura alone seemed to make everyone gravitate toward him. The confidence he exuded bordered on intoxicating.

Kaela looked around at the others, only to find that they were curiously observing Leonel too. It seemed that they had been caught up in it all as well. In the blink of an eye, the depressing atmosphere had vanished with the wind, the entire room orbiting around Leonel’s bright smile.

“Alright freshman, what ideas do you have?”

Leonel’s eyes sparkled.. Since Valiant Heart wanted to hoard high level Force Arts, he would just have to show them how powerful low level Force Arts could be.

Chapter 639

“What plan do you have in mind?”

Instead of answering, Leonel walked over to Rum’s station. The massive man towered over Leonel, but he seemed to be the quiet type. In fact, aside from Litia and Kaela, excluding Radlis, it seemed as though every member of Polished Glass was quiet.

“I’m just going to borrow your station for a little bit.” Leonel smiled.

Rum hesitated but bowed out of the way eventually. None of them knew how skilled Leonel was, but at least in this station, even if there was an explosion, it would be manageable. If Leonel insisted on starting at Kaela’s station, then maybe even Kaela herself wouldn’t have been able to allow it.

However, what stunned Rum was that instead of going under the hood like he had, Leonel removed the coverings entirely, revealing the existence of a special violet light and numerous unprocessed Ores.

Without a spirit, Rum could only use the most primitive method of purification. But, that didn’t necessarily mean that it was an inferior method. There were many Force Crafters who swore by their blacksmithing methods. Leonel had even read about a famous Crafter who wielded 16 hammers at once during all his crafts.

Though, he obviously used a special telekinetic ability, or else it would be too ridiculous.

Rum, however, used just two hammers. But in his hunched position, one could imagine the limited range and control he had. It took a lot of discipline to work at his station, for sure.

Unfortunately, he had no choice but to do so. The Polished Glass faction could only afford a single open space like this. So, in order to maximize the special light he used to pick out impurities, he had to use such a posture.

Leonel picked up a piece of ore under the horrified gazes of everyone present.

Rum couldn't help but take a few steps back. Even Radlis scrambled away, pressing his hands together in prayer.

But what happened next left them all stunned.

A regular wrist band that had been wrapped around Leonel's arm with not a single hint of movement suddenly made its presence known, enveloping the ores completely.

"Metal Spirit!" Kaela screamed out, her breathing hurried.

Her face flushed red, her body trembling as though it couldn't grasp what it was seeing.

A familiar, of any kind, was rare beyond compare. Kaela's hair scrunchy seemed to be a Fire Spirit, but this couldn't have been further from the truth. It was nothing more than a manifestation of her ability.

Kaela's ability was somewhat like Monet's except it emphasized control over both flames and their heat.

She could make flames as fluid as gas in one instant and as solid as iron in the next. She could also make her flames as flexible and soft as a scrunchy...

The only downside of her ability was that her output of flames wasn't very powerful. So, usually, she went out of her way to find sources of good flames then stored them on her body in various ways. Her scrunchy was just one aspect.

This was all to say that Kaela... Had never even seen a Spirit in her life before, let alone the Metal Spirit.

The Metal Spirit was widely accepted as one of if not the best Familiar for Crafters to have. But, they were notoriously impossible to control and there were very few with the ability to do so.

Yet, even those people would never casually leave a Metal Spirit on their wrist as though it was any other accessory. That was ridiculous and asking for death.

But... That was exactly what was happening before her.

Leonel overturned the piece of ore in his hands, his eyes flashing. His aura became stifling, a heavy air hanging over the lab.

'Dream Sculpt.' ρ??∫??????

In the blink of an eye, the ore, its every imperfection, its every crevice and peak, was perfectly reflected in Leonel's mind.

Under the astonished gazes of everyone present, what took Rum hours of hammering to accomplish was completed by Leonel in just 10 minutes. No... This couldn't be said. Compared to Rum's unfinished product... Leonel's was perfect.

Bloop *Bloop*

Little Tolly hopped around Leonel's palms happily.

In one of Leonel's palms, there was a rock that looked no different from any other. It had a plain greyish appearance and sat silently.

On his other palm, there was a perfect glass ball. Not a single imperfection could be picked out of it.

Kaela didn't need to ask Leonel to understand. That perfect ball... It was exactly the product she slaved over continuously... But this was the first time she was actually seeing it.

“This...”

Kaela’s eyes brightened.

“With this, we could actually make those Tier 3 weapons!”

Leonel smiled. “We could. Or... We could make a better version of your grenades.

“But... In that state, the Polished Glass is completely inert.”

Kaela could tell this easily. In fact, anyone could.

The way was simple. The black light the Polished Glass usually gave off had vanished, leaving behind nothing but a shallow, barely perceptible grey light. This was how one knew you had reached perfection.

“True. But this still exists.”

Leonel tossed the pile of impurities up and let it land on his palm again.

“You... What?” Kaela was confused.

PANDA-NOVEL She didn’t understand. The impurities were exactly that... impure. They weren’t even unique to Polished Glass Ore.

Impurities were just anything that happened to be in the environment the Ore was birthed in. Ore Veins had to grow around a lot of rock and sediment and often times these impurities would seep in and disrupt its growth. These would have to be taken out during the refinement process.

Though some Ores could only be grown in special environments and thus usually had impurities in common across their Ores, Polished Glass Ore had too many potential growing spots to have anything so convenient attached to its lore.

This was all to say that... The impurities in Leonel's hand could be from anywhere. In fact, it was no different from a rock one could pick up on the roadside. If one tried to sell it, you'd get beaten to death for being a fraudulent merchant.

Leonel's actions were simply too baffling.

However, he only smiled and his hands began to move again.

Chapter 640

This time, having snapped out of her daze due to the appearance of a Metal Spirit, she paid more attention to Leonel's hands. Seeing how deft he was and the level of speed he was able to maintain, Kaela felt as though she had entered a completely new world.

'This is at least Grade One Designation... That's... Impossible...'

Elder Jac Beinala only allowed them to watch him work from afar, but she was certain that he was at the Advanced Grade Two Designation at best. In fact, Kaela was only able to reach Grade Two thanks to a fortuitous encounter while searching for flames to empower her Crafting.

It was thanks to this that her scope broadened and she realized the Beinala wasn't as great or mysterious as he claimed to be.

But even though she was aware of this, seeing Leonel now still made all she had learned in the past several decades feel like nothing more than a waste.

In 10 more minutes, the rock of impurities had been reformed into six different segments.

Leonel's right palm, which held the Polished Glass, let go, allowing a portion of Little Tolly to let it float.

With a flip of his palm, an elegant black quill appeared in Leonel's hand. Just its sight alone made Kaela's breathing quickened. This time, it wasn't only her either.

PANDA-NOVEL The Metal Spirit was so rare in this corner of the universe that only the most well learned would recognize it on first sight. But this quill was something they all recognized because all of them had one.

A Crafting Quill wasn't a rare thing. However... One of the quality Leonel was wielding now... Well, that was a different matter entirely.

They all thought that it was at least Tier 7, having never seen a Quasi Bronze Quill before. If they had broader knowledge, it would have been easier to guess. But, even without knowing, they were practically drooling.

Leonel, however, was completely focused.

His wrists flicked, several Force Arts being drawn in what felt like in an instant. It felt as though his quill would pass by a region, only for a pristine Force Art to appear where he had just been.

This was the first time they had watched someone draw Force Arts so quickly, and on a useless piece of rock, no less. But at that moment, they didn't care.

Unlike Jac who always found ways to hide his process, Leonel didn't hide a single thing. Kaela even managed to see through what Force Arts Leonel was drawing.

The language was a bit different, but the function was the same. She felt certain that these were just modified versions of the Arts she had drawn on her so-called final product, but Leonel was drawing them on the useless rock.

"We'll use the same Arts you used with just a single change." Leonel began to speak.

Kaela's lip twitched. A single change? Leonel had already altered the whole designed. She had no idea what he was thinking.

"You combined an air purification, wind shield and air suction Force Art in order to simulate a vacuum. It was a genius combination, I won't change anything about that..."

Leonel knew a higher level Force Art which didn't require this combination and could simply form a vacuum by itself. But, he felt that there was no need to do this. Kaela was the leader of this team, not him. There was no need to make her years of hard work meaningless when it was a method that would work well enough.

Kaela beamed with pride, practically grinning ear to ear.

"The only think I'll add is a spacer. It's a simple magnetic Force Art that adds a charge to an ore."

ρ??∫??????

Kaela blinked. She was really curious because she had never seen such a Force Art. But, at the same time, she was even more curious about what it would be used for.

At that moment, Leonel's left had began to move. Little Tolly, who had been doing nothing but holding the pristine ball of Polished Glass Ore up, shifted.

The pristine ball was separated into several marbles. A single palm sized ball formed what seemed like over 30 thumbnail sized ball.

Leonel took just a single one, his fingers moving like a blur.

The marble was molded and folded, forming small, surgical knife blades that couldn't have been thicker than a hair's width.

Leonel's pen began to move again, place the final Force Arts in place.

With deft fingers, he slid the knife blades into the six pieces of rock. Then...

*Snap.

Kaela jumped.

When she saw the complete Craft, she was stunned.

It was a small ball, less the third the size of a palm. But, it had numerous thin perforations. If it wasn't for the fact she had seen Leonel slide the Polished Glass Ore pieces into them, she wouldn't have noticed this at all.

On top of the ball, there was a small pin no different from any other grenade.

Leonel smiled, his expression just as relaxed.

“This is the final product. It looks like the blades are touching but they aren't. The blades are just a small bit thinner than the perforations in the ball. The magnetic Force Arts repel each other from all sides equally, causing them to hover in place.

“The pin completes the circuit for the completion of the vacuum. The moment the pin is removed, air rushes in. The sudden surge, caused by a high concentration of air flowing into an area of low concentration, will cause the thin blades to rattle.

“The moment the thin blades touch the impurities, the etchings I had to carve in for the sake of the magnetic Force Arts will ignite.

“The magnetic Force Art on the Polished Glass Ore will shatter before the ones I drew on the impure rock. The disruption will cause the blades to be ejected outward. The combination of the magnets and the explosion of the Polished Glass Ore will combine into one, making the explosion far more violent than it was originally.

“I’m fairly certain that this grenade could put someone in Tier 5 at death’s door. Someone in Tier 6 would still be severely injured and it only costs a thirtieth of a weapon.”

Leonel smiled, pointing toward the 29 remaining marbles.

Kaela and the others looked toward Leonel as though they were looking at a monster.

Radlis, especially, was at a loss, remembering what Leonel had said on the mountain pass that day.

‘He wasn’t lying....? He isn’t a fool...? He really doesn’t care about Tier 7 weapons...?’

