

Descent 651

Chapter 651

“What’s wrong?”

Aina’s hazy gaze cleared thanks to Leonel’s sudden movement. It was only then that she sensed the vibration of the room, causing her to frown.

“There’s a bell ringing outside.” Leonel said after a moment.

“A bell? Oh...” Aina seemed to have realized something.

“You know what it is?” Leonel’s gaze met Aina’s.

“Mm... You would know too if not for...”

Aina’s frown deepened. She had forgotten because of Leonel’s advances, but she was still very unhappy about Hero Peak’s actions. If Leonel didn’t have the right to join a Peak, then considering the talent level of this organization, no one should be able to.

Aina shook her head. “We can ignore it if you want.”

After listening to Aina’s explanation, Leonel understood. Apparently, this bell was meant to call for a meeting. Depending on the tone of the bell, it could be a meeting of all sorts.

Apparently, in this instance, a Peak was challenging another.

This challenge was usually a battle for resources outside of the annual tournament and only occurred when there was a grudge boiling between two Peaks that needed to be quickly settled. However,

apparently this wasn't always the case. It was also a court of sorts to expose the wrongdoings of a Peak as well.

Leonel frowned when he gained this information... Because it was completely unhelpful to him.

He had a bad feeling, but he had never joined any Peaks, so it was impossible to target him through such a thing. It was all too confusing.

'Am I really just being paranoid...?'

Aina didn't seem very intent on going. She wanted to spend more time with Leonel after so long apart. If it wasn't for Apestus, they could at least train side by side which wouldn't leave her in such a state of longing... But at least for now, it wasn't very possible.

She had already decided that when she was gathering up merit points for the right to join the competition to enter the Valiant Heart Zone, she would go together with Leonel.

However, Aina could sense that there was something making Leonel uneasy right now.

Leonel took a deep breath. "... I think I have to go."

"Okay. I'll go with you, then."

Technically, Aina knew that it was mandatory for everyone within the mountain range to be present for this meeting, but she hadn't cared. If Leonel had wanted to skip it, she would have skipped it. But since he wanted to go, she would go.

The couple quickly got dressed.

"Do I look okay?" ρ??∪??????

The words fell from Aina's mouth before she even realized what she was asking, but she was indeed a bit worried. The two had been tangled up for the better part of a day and weren't exactly the neatest and cleanest at the moment.

Luckily, both of their bodies were within the Fourth Dimension, so it took more than just a day for them to start smelling terrible. But, that didn't change the fact Aina's hair was a mess at the moment.

Leonel chuckled. He knew that Aina would prefer to have short hair. He really had no idea why she insisted on keeping it so long.

As for Leonel own hair, its form retention was exceptionally high due to the odd material it was made out of. It was flexible, but snapped back into place just as easily. Even he was surprised by how straight it was right now.

"Stop laughing." Aina all but pouted. "I can't go out like this."

"Okay, okay, okay." Leonel chuckled.

Taking the Segmented Cube from Aina, he caused a stream of Cleansing Water to douse her completely just like he had done when he found her on the White City battlefield. Now that he thought about it, he definitely should have used this during the freshman trials...

Before Aina could panic about being wet now, Leonel touched her shoulder, a controlled stream of Fire Elemental Force drying her completely.

With the abilities of Cleansing Waters, just a drizzle was hundreds of times more potent than taking a normal shower.

"Perfect." Leonel smiled. "Let's go."

Grabbing Aina's hand as she slipped on her mask, Leonel's expression turned serious.

...

The location was Valiant Hall. As the symbol of justice for Valiant Heart Mountain, it was obvious that any grudges would be chosen to be settled in this very place.

In the back of the Hall, there was a large open space that would look somewhat like a football field by Leonel's estimation. But, rather than having a large grass field, there were instead massive stone platforms, each with a tall pillar on its four corners.

At that moment, flocks of people were swarming in, whispering among themselves. For some odd reason, no one seemed intent on making a lot of noise.

It had been many years since the last challenge between Peaks was instituted. Although it wouldn't be a massive event every time, there was no doubt that most massive events were centered around it.

This alone wouldn't be enough to cause such a hushed atmosphere. The truth was that the root cause lay in what standing one had to have to call such a meeting in the first place. How could a normal individual mandate the appearance of everyone in the organization? Who was able to do this was an existence the vast majority here couldn't afford to offend.

After entering the arena, everyone split into seven streams. The seats in the stands around the massive structure was also split into seven seating sections, each separated by a wide set of steps.

Each and every one of these sections represented a different Peak, each with thousands of students of their own.

It was at this moment that Leonel and Aina appeared amongst the stream of people hand in hand.

Rather than heading toward the Hero Peak seating arrangements, Aina chose to sit on the ground floor with Leonel along with all the other freshmen.

As more people streamed in, the more quiet the place seemed to become.

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The freshman seating arrangements were not very well thought out. Since freshman like Leonel hadn't even been informed of the importance of the bell, it was obvious that not many were expected to appear in the first place.

Usually, at sporting events, the closer one was to the ground floor, the better. But, in this place, it wasn't quite the same.

With the strength of vision those in the Fourth Dimension had, the viewing experience would hardly be any different whether they were near the bottom or near the top. Regardless, it was only a difference of a few hundred meters.

Thanks to this difference in foundation, those with more strength preferred to sit higher, looking down on those beneath them.

This was especially so for the seating arrangements set aside from Founding Peak, the Peak of Elders.

Whereas every other Peak gained a large somewhat cone shaped seating section, Founding Peak was the only section that didn't have a range of seats from the absolute closest to the absolute furthest. Rather, the entire bottom section of their seating arrangements were outfitted with stone slabs, leaving just a small section at the very top for sitting.

As a result, Founding Peak only had five rows of seats as opposed to the almost hundred every other seating section had.

With such a grandiose display, not many paid attention to Leonel and Aina to begin with. Even those that recognized Leonel from the posters or saw the Hero Peak emblem on the masked girl beside him, didn't say a word.

This wasn't the situation for them to be poking their nose into the matters of others. No one wanted to be the person who caused a scene right now.

...

The Hero Peak stands had a haughtiness about them the other Peaks simply didn't. When one became used to standing at the top, this could only be expected. By now, the pride of the Hero Peak students had sunk into their very bones.

Nearer the top of their seating section, the leg room increased and the chairs became more luxurious.

On the second highest row, one could find a group of old timers. These were Peak specific Elders and they were usually tasked with making sure the Peaks themselves didn't get too out of order.

But it was in this row that a middle-aged woman scrunched her brows.

She kept scanning the Hero Peak section and had taken note of every student that had come, but she hadn't caught the faintest glimpse of the person she was looking for. Could it be that they had really gone off on a mission?

"What are you frowning about so much, Magnaril?"

Magnaril gazed toward the elder who had spoken to her, her frown not lessening.

"Aina hasn't appeared in more than a day now, but she hadn't said anything to me before disappearing. Now I can't find her. I already told that girl to not go off and do any missions, what good is that brutish battle ax to such a petite young woman? She should be spending more time in the lab."

The elder who had spoken, just for the sake of idle chatter, gave Magnaril a weird look.

This was Valiant Heart Mountain. They weren't known for their secondary professions, if not for this, their top Force Crafter would at least be Tier 1 of the Fifth Dimension. Students came here to learn to fight, not Craft or Concoct.

If this Aina had enough talent to make this Magnaril pull her hair out just looking for her, then if she had really wanted to pursue Force Pill Crafting, she would have gone to any number of Force Pill Guilds rather than being here.

This was to say that for anyone sane... It was obvious that Aina would want to keep swinging her 'brutish' battle ax, right? ρ??(???)

Plus, from what he had heard, this Aina was quite well known on Hero Peak already... And it was most definitely not for her Force Pill Crafting.

But this old man knew better than to say such words to Magnaril. Everyone knew how crazy this woman was. Plus, she controlled the highest class food Hero Peak had to offer. No one wanted to get on the bad side of their chef unless they really wanted to die.

Of course, Magnaril was still aware of all of these things, but Aina was simply too talented. She had practically picked up everything she had to teach in just a month. From a novice, she could already rival a Tier 7 or 8 Force Pill Crafter in technique... It was just that her foundational knowledge was abysmal.

Whenever that girl did something crazy that Magnaril thought no sane Force Pill Crafter would ever do, not only would it seemingly always work out, when Magnaril pressed for an explanation, Aina would always say that it was just a feeling.

This kind of ability... How could it be wasted on battle?!

Exasperated by her own rant, Magnaril scanned the crowd again only to happen to land upon a mask she found too familiar. The issue was that this mask wasn't anywhere near the Hero Peak seats at all!

Finally finding her precious Aina, Magnaril sighed a breath of relief. But, seeing that she was also holding the hand of a boy, she froze.

Magnaril felt her heart shatter into a million pieces as though she was watching her daughter fly off to another home.

‘Don’t tell me that she disappeared all this time for a boy? And a freshman who hasn’t entered a Peak yet after two months?!’

Magnaril felt as though she was having an aneurysm. But, not only did she also not have the guts to cause a scene here despite her elder status, it was then that the stone slabs beneath the Founding Peak seating section began to shift.

A hushed quiet fell over the whole arena.

Soon, the rumbling movement of the stone came to a pause, revealing a platform. On this platform sat a podium that a few figures slowly walked out of the darkness to approach.

Leonel’s eyes narrowed. There were two individuals there, one of which he recognized with ease.

Aphestus.

His long arms, his terrible posture, his impossibly shredded body, even down to his toothy grin. Leonel recognized it all.

Hero Peak? What were they doing?

The young man Leonel didn’t recognize stepped forward. His height was head shorter than Aphestus and his looks were just ordinary. He didn’t look very special in the slightest, yet Aphestus gave way to him.

The young man stepped to the podium, his gaze without a hint of emotion. Without even an introduction, his monotonous voice began to speak.

“We of Hero Peak are here to issue a challenge.” He said plainly and without any hurry.

The seating sections tensed. Everyone looked around, trying to find the target. No one had heard about any big conflicts occurring recently, so they hoped to tell by the reaction of the individual Peaks who might be the likely victim.

But what no one noticed at that moment... Was that the reaction was the same for every Peak.

It was then that the plain young man spoke words that seemed to hollow out the arena.

“We hereby challenge Valiant Hall for all their wrongdoings.. They no longer deserve their throne as peacekeepers of Valiant Heart Mountain and should be demoted back to a Peak.”

Chapter 653

Leonel’s pupils constricted. Had he heard wrong?

His hand couldn’t help but tighten slightly against Aina’s. He still hadn’t gotten an answer for his worries, but he felt as though he was inching closer to it.

Leonel didn’t quite understand why he cared or why he had a sinking feeling to begin with. Valiant Hall didn’t mean much of anything to him. No one he really cared about was a part of it. In fact, he had only interacted with two members.

One was Sael who he had a bit of a complicated relationship with. After he dealt with their misunderstanding, he didn’t hate her, but he also didn’t have strong feelings toward her either. At best, they were just acquaintances who got off on the wrong foot.

The other was Gersan. Though he hadn’t seen him since their battle, that could be considered to be a negative relationship.

This was all to say that Leonel shouldn’t care about what happened to Valiant Hall in the slightest. In fact, he should care so little that if things made sense, he’d be eager enough to get back to his and Aina’s alone time that he might very well leave this very second. As for whatever backlash that came with that? Why would he care?

All of this was only one aspect of these matters. The other aspect was something that seemed even more difficult to wrap his head around.

Demoting Valiant Hall to a Peak? How?

If the organization was structured such that Valiant Hall was the only neutral party, the only party that could settle disputes, the only party that could maintain order... Then what Hero Peak was essentially demanding was a complete restructuring of Valiant Heart Mountain.

Was that even possible? Was it allowed?

The only answer could be yes. Leonel didn't believe that Hero Peak would actually be stupid enough to propose something that wasn't feasible.

Leonel was faintly aware that there was some competition between Hero Peak and Valiant Hall. But as a new member of their organization, he hadn't paid much attention if any at all. It seemed that those matters hadn't been as small as he once thought...

The young man continued to speak unperturbed as though he couldn't sense the shock of the crowd.

"In recent years, Valiant Hall has had an unprecedented strength in controlling the outcome of matters in our organization. Despite supposedly being neutral, they seem to very clearly have their own biases and have grown corrupt to the point of believing themselves to be infallible.

"Two years ago, my Hero Peak proposed a plan to bring our Valiant Heart Mountain out from the brink of despair and back toward a brighter future. But, instead of calmly analyzing this plan as they should, Valiant Hall ignored our pleas.

"In the past, I thought that maybe we were in the wrong. The plan we set forth was indeed ambitious. And, though our hearts were in the right place, the truth was that changing the status quo after so long would be jarring for all. ρ??∫???????

“However, the actions of Valiant have made my heart run cold.”

By now, the members of Valiant Hall had been aware of all the commotion.

In order to enforce their neutral stance, usually, only a few members of Valiant Hall came to organize this event. However, they wouldn't show their faces. Rather, the individuals who opened this platform for the young man to speak were the only members of the Valiant Hall present.

When they heard to the words the young man was speaking, how could they not panic? They had thought, much like everyone else, that this would be targeting another Peak. The likely guess was Brave Peak or maybe Honor Peak, but they had never thought that it wasn't a Peak at all.

This may sound odd. If Valiant Hall wasn't here in some substantial capacity, then how would these things be settled upon?

The answer came in two layers. First, the crowd, with the only exception of freshmen who had yet to join a Peak, would vote on the validity of the arguments presented. As long as there was a majority acceptance for the claims levied, the final outcome would be decided by combat.

Whatever battles that occurred would be restricted to the youth as a way of maintaining the majority of the peace in the organization.

But... with this came a massive issue.

By now, if everyone didn't know who this young man was, they'd be too foolish. This young man was a legend in his own right, the most powerful youth on Valiant Hall Mountain, a young man who would soon grow into a man that could overshadow even Valiant Hall Mountain's Head.

Despite his plain appearance, despite his unhurried words or his monotone delivery, even despite his relatively short stature, he was the most respected student of Valiant Heart Mountain.

The Hero. Raylion.

Finding another member of the younger generation to defeat him? Was that a joke?

The moment Hero Peak stepped forward, this matter was as good as over. As long as their evidence was strong enough, Valiant Hall didn't stand a single chance.

But the question was... Was there evidence strong enough?

The fact that they dared to call this meeting seemed to signal that the answer to this question was yes... And the moment Raylion began to speak on these matters, was the exact moment they realized just how true this was.

Raylion stretched out a hand. Understanding his meaning, Apestus immediately handed over a scroll.

Unfurling it without much fanfare, Raylion allowed the end of the scroll to clatter against the ground. His actions seemed unhurried and without theatrics, but anyone who understood anything about human psychology could realize just how terrifying this Raylion was.

Leonel didn't notice it, but Aina definitely did. His gaze only grew colder and colder, not moving from Raylion from start to finish.. At that moment, it was hard to tell exactly what Leonel was thinking of.

Chapter 654

"... Valiant Hall uses 20% of resources allocated for students without ever participating in resource competitions..."

"... Valiant Hall has exactly 793 cases of corruption in just this past half year alone since we began to track..."

"... Case 1: Student Aderil, guilty of embezzling merit points..."

"... Case 2: Student Xiron, guilty of embezzling merit points..."

“... Case 3: Student Faeynore, guilty of embezzling merit points...”

“... Case 7: Student Ren, guilty of exchanging merit points for favors...”

“... Case 8: Student Engkas, guilty of exchanging merit points for favors...”

“... Case 11: Student Morgo, guilty of exchanging merit points in exchange for sexual favors...”

Like a monotonous drone, Raylion began to list all the instances of the past half year. The stories were packed with such detail that one found it difficult to believe that they were fake. Things were only made worse by the fact these individuals of Valiant Hall weren't present to defend themselves.

Things only continued to become more and more oppressive the more time Raylion spent speaking. It seemed that he had done things on purpose, placing the most benign crimes ahead of the quickly worsening ones.

Explanations of exploitation, theft, and even sexual assault and violence were described in vivid detail, leaving many sitting in a state of half being at a loss and another half truly uncomfortable.

“... Case 22: Student Salor, guilty of ...”

“... Case 31: Student Kirs, guilty of ...”

“... Case 47: Teacher...”

The moment Raylion said the word teacher, the entire arena seemed to have deflated. It wasn't the kind of deflation one might experience from a waning balloon, but rather the kind that one would experience the second after a bomb dropped... The kind of deflation where the world lost its sound, color and feel before a blinding light and a cacophonous boom assaulted the senses.

Up until this point, Raylion mentioned no one but students. Though these matters were serious, especially since many of them were in high positions, it felt as though this matter could still be dealt

with easily. At the very least, if it was only the young that were corrupt, things would be easier to handle.

But the moment Raylion said otherwise, it felt as though the whole world came to a grinding halt.

“... Arnla, guilty of skipping out on private tutoring and stealing the merit points of students for nothing in return.”

“... Case 48: Student Nige, guilty of ...”

“... Case 49: Student Ril, guilty of ...”

“... Case 50: Teacher Ven, guilty of ...”

There was no respite. The names of teachers, famous ones even, began to be named one after another. It was a relentless onslaught of detailed stories spoken in a voice that couldn't have been less lively. But, that only made it all the more grating on the soul.

“... Case 102: Teacher Lujor, guilty of ...”

Raylion's words were endless. By the time he reached higher into the triple digits, many began to realize that some names were appearing more and more often. Whereas in the beginning one might appear just a single time, the worse the crimes became, the more it seemed as though the same people were committing them.

“... Case 239: Student Lanceryn, guilty of posting fraudulent missions for enriching himself...”

“... Case 243: Student Lanceryn, guilty of ...”

“... Case 331: Teacher Dryn, guilty of using disciples for labor without teaching appropriately in response...”

“... Case 334: Teacher Dryn, guilty of...”

“... Case 549: Teacher Pool...”

“... Case 561: Teacher Pool...”

“... Case 792: Teacher Ingsan, guilty of selling Valiant Hall’s inventory to the merchants. His actions were learned of by one of his students, resulting in her rape and subsequent death.”

“... Case 793: Teacher Ingsan, guilty of gross negligence. In a Campaign against our sworn enemy, the Oryx Tribe, his decisions led to the death of 14 geniuses of our Valiant Heart Mountain. The only survivor has been bribed into silence and has suffered through untold humiliation, Sael Liers.”

Leonel’s gaze, by now, was boring holes into Raylion. This only became worse after he heard Sael’s name. He didn’t care for the woman, but that didn’t mean he wanted to hear her name in this context.

Even if what Raylion said was true, weaponizing the names of victims in this way, was simply gross beyond recourse.

Raylion calmly rolled up his scroll, taking his time as though he didn’t have a care in the world.

By this point, there were numerous members of Valiant Hall who had stormed into the arena. But, without a place for them to sit, they could only stand on the dueling platforms, their gazes alight with fury as they stared at Raylion.

Amongst them, there was a familiar figure in Sael. Her aura was so heavy that a wide space had been carved out around her. Everyone knew that if there was going to be a battle, she would be the one to fight. But at that moment, it seemed it took everything within her not to rip Raylion limb from limb at this very moment.

“I’ve listed out many names. By now, they’ve likely become jumbled in your minds to the point that their crimes are meaningless. Honestly, I never wanted to reveal the trials and tribulations of victims in

this way, but there was one matter that pushed me over the edge. It was this exact matter that made me understand that Valiant Hall had no right to be the arbiter of justice any longer.”

Raylion continued to speak, completely unperturbed.

“Six months ago, a Brave City on a small Fourth Dimensional world known as Terrain accepted three disciples.

“This seems like a story we all have been through, however that isn’t the case. There is nothing about this story to be respected or revered.

“Of these three disciples, only one actually went through the necessary trials and earned a right to stand by our sides. As for the other two, they were let in through the back door.”

A murmur went through the crowd, but Raylion seemed to have not noticed.

“This was truly an unfortunate case. Whether out of jealousy or spite, this third disciple, a man who should have become one of our brothers, was killed by one of these two disciples before ever getting the chance to step foot onto our Mountain. The name of our lost brother is Anared Keafir, may we mourn his loss.”

The crowd grew silent, a bubbling animosity brewing in their hearts.

“Unfortunately, this is only the beginning. The killer of our worthy brother appeared at our gates no more than two months ago. Intent on keeping his lofty status, he disregarded our customs and disrespected his seniors, even to the point of smearing our treasures and weapons as trash.

“The end result was three of your fellow brothers bleeding to death while hanging from a tree.

“And what did Valiant Hall do, you might ask? Out of fear for this person’s background, the matter was swept under the rug and ignored.

“I wish this was the end of our story, but unfortunately it is not. In retaliation, our brothers did the only thing we could. Since we didn’t dare to offend a man with such a powerful background, we could only try to smear his name.

“But no more than a week after our only path toward redemption was taken, Valiant Hall stepped in once again, not only allowing the destruction of King of Ores Faction, but also removing our posters and smothering our hearts.”

Raylion swept his gaze over the crowd, his gaze just as expressionless.

“However, it was this final matter that broke my final hint of hope in Valiant Hall.

“Rather than fighting for those it should, Valiant Hall sought to appease this man. Despite not being a part of a reputable Faction, and even without the slightest hint of understanding toward Crafting – this was a man who had the audacity to say that a Tier 7 treasure was nothing but garbage – was allowed to enter the Golden Exchange List at the behest of Valiant Hall.

“Not only was this man appeased to the extreme, but his so-called Crafts led to the deaths of seven more of our brothers.”

The atmosphere was silent but seemed to simultaneously boil. By now, even Sael’s momentum seemed to have lost its sails, her rage feeling as though a bucket of cold water had been poured over it.

“I will not say the name of this man. Some of you know of him, some of you don’t. But, his name is one I feel too much disgust to speak with my own lips.

“I can only say that the tyranny of Valiant Hall will come to an end this day. I, Raylion Wranleth, will not stand for it.”

Raylion finished and stepped from the podium, his expression just as calm and unhurried.

They say that the worst movements in all of history always had a common enemy. There may have never been a Nazi Party had the Jewish never existed.

It seemed that Raylion had decided to make Leonel exactly that.

Chapter 655

It was an intricately woven story, indeed. In fact, it was certain that there wasn't a hint of falsehood in his words as well. Though the truth behind its interpretation might be different, one had to hand it to Raylion. He didn't step outside of his bounds to stretch the facts even by a small measure.

Yet, what these audience members didn't know was that Raylion had sacrificed ten of his so-called brothers in order to allow his words to ring true.

Those three floor sweeper Leonel hung from a tree? The Force Art he drew around them to keep people away would last a few weeks at best. Fourth Dimensional existences could easily last that long without sleep, let alone food or water.

Beyond that, their injuries shouldn't have been severe enough to cause their deaths either, or else Leonel wouldn't have left them there.

It was no wonder Leonel didn't hear anything about those three after the initial instance. Hero Peak had already decided to make them a part of this plot from the very beginning.

Then there were the seven who supposedly died from Leonel's Crafts. Leonel didn't know anything about this, but did that matter? Since when did Raylion and Hero Peak care about whether he was 'in the know' or not?

The truth was that Kaela and the others had already been panicking about this for the past more than day. However, they weren't able to contact Leonel because he had spent his time with Aina all the while. And, unlike with his Aina, he hadn't given Kaela and the others a method of contacting him.

It could be said that the Polished Glass Faction had fallen from the greatest of highs to rock bottom in the blink of an eye. Who would dare to do business with them? They had been blacklisted from the

Golden Exchange List. The seven that had died were all from Hero Peak, so normal students didn't dare to risk offending such an existence. Even if they created a perfect product next time, who would care?

It had to be admitted that this plot was sinister indeed. Maybe the most infuriating part was that the target wasn't even Leonel, he just happened to be a useful catalyst.


Humans tended to grow desensitized to things quickly. Hearing about millions dying across the world would never be as impactful as watching one person being murdered right in front of you. This was the truth of human psychology.

Raylion didn't need Leonel's story. Without it, he would still have more than enough evidence to take Valiant Hall down and implement the changes to Valiant Heart Mountain he had always wanted to see.

But, the convenience of Leonel was too good to pass up.

Without Leonel, there would likely still be some resistance to his plans. But, with a public enemy to point to every time, a dark example of what could have been, molding the people to his will would be much easier.

At that moment, Aina was seething with rage. A bloodthirsty aura hung around her, almost forming a crimson fog dotted with blackness. However, just as she moved to stand, she found Leonel lightly pulling her back.

Aina looked back, only to find Leonel looking toward her with a light smile. 

There was no anger on his face, no coldness. In fact, he looked toward Aina with the same loving gaze he always gave her. It was as though these matters had nothing to do with him in the slightest.

Leonel wasn't a meat head who flew into a rage at every slight. If Apestus and the others believed this, Leonel could only say that they weren't as intelligent as he thought that they were. Anyone who believed this, for that matter, was nothing but wrong.

What could make Leonel lose control were only matters related to his Aina and his mother. In fact, even if one insulted his father, he might not even get angry. It was more likely that he'd burst into a fit of laughter as opposed to anything else.

With all the trauma that old man had given him in his life, he deserved some harsh words thrown at his back. By now, Leonel only used the dictionary when he absolutely had to. He kept running into his father's practical jokes. Plus, he was tired of being called 'Seed' and hearing about how great 'Father Overlord' was.

It was a pain in the ass.

But, Raylion hardly mentioned Aina, likely because he couldn't afford to disparage a member of his Peak at such a sensitive time. And, obviously, he hadn't mentioned his mother either.

One might think that Raylion's biggest mistake was provoking Leonel and making him out to be an enemy. But, this wasn't true.

His biggest mistake was provoking Leonel and making him into an enemy... Without first enraging him.

Facing a calm Leonel with a level head? A Leonel with an amused expression in his eye rather than one of rage? It was clear that Hero Peak had no idea what they had gotten themselves into.

Leonel pulled Aina down to his side, placing a palm on her thighs and squeezing gently to reassure her.

"Don't worry about it." Leonel said lightly.

Aina's chest heaved in her rage. Clearly, she hadn't been able to calm down just because Leonel said so. But, seeing the look in his eye, she could only sit obediently.

The voting process went exactly as one would imagine. Even with attempts at refuting Raylion due to lack of evidence, Valiant Hall was still woefully unequipped to handle these matters, having never been challenged in this way before.

With no suspense, Hero Peak won their suit by a landslide. As a freshman, Leonel didn't even have the right to vote and he could only watch as the members of Valiant Hall trembled with rage.

Sael balled her fists, her shoulders trembling. It felt as though everything she was trying to protect was coming crumbling down. In fact, it was the action she took that brought everything to a head.

She couldn't help but be wracked with guilt, embarrassment, and anger. There was only one chance she had to fix all of this.

"Raylion, get down here!" She roared, her aura causing whipping winds to slash across the stone platform.

Chapter 656

"Big sis..." Gersan's face was filled with all sorts of complicated emotions.

She could feel Sael's rage, but he also knew it was all futile. Defeating Raylion? It was impossible.

Everyone knew how terrible his ability was. Even if he never trained an ounce of Force in his life, he would be an undefeatable force. To ask Sael to carry this weight on her shoulders was no different from asking her to walk through a wall of fire. She might not even leave this place in one piece.

Raylion looked down from the stone rising, his gaze just as expressionless. As though Sael's challenge didn't mean anything to him, he began to speak again.

"Now that the will of the people has been spoken, the context of the coming battle must be laid out."

The crowd grew hushed once again, their emotions still boiling from the recent events.

This was the most important part of every trial. After the majority agreed, the wager would be set. This wager would decide what changes would occur and what spoils would be given to the winner.

Usually, this would just be a change in the percentage resource allocation. But, something was telling the crowd now that this would be a much larger change.

Raylion brought out another scroll and handed it to Apestus.

With a toothy grin, Apestus accepted the scroll and leapt down from on high. His stride was so long that he practically did the splits in the air, plummeting down more than 20 meters and landing with a soft thud on the toes of his feet as though it was nothing.

Apestus cracked his neck, standing amidst the ground of Valiant Hall members without a care in the world. It was as though he didn't fear them lashing out at all.

"Well? Aren't you all going to scam? I have a battle to fight." Apestus said with a wide, toothy yawn.

If everyone didn't understand what was happening by now, they'd be fools. Rather than stepping forward himself, Raylion had actually sent Apestus to battle in his stead.

This sort of nonchalance...

Sael's chest was steaming pile of rage by this point, but she could only watch as the Valiant Hall crowd parted for Apestus to walk through them.

With light toss, Apestus threw the scroll into a bowl. Immediately afterward, it erupted into a pillar of flames, but he didn't react much to this. It seemed that he was already prepared for this outcome.

"It's been set." Apestus said with a grin, beginning to exaggeratedly stretch out his body. "Are you idiots still not leaving yet? There only needs to be two people up here."

Apestus showed not the slightest hint of respect for the Valiant Hall members, forcing them to clear out even beneath their seething anger.

"Are we really going to allow this?" ρ??∪??????

Within the Founding Peak Section, the elders had been watching the happenings without a word from start to finish. They had initially set up the Valiant Heart Mountain political system to allow competition between the youths, but they were certain that whatever changes Hero Peak had proposed with that scroll couldn't just be a matter of the younger generation. It would cause great, rippling tides to drown whatever semblance of their old teachings that remained.

If the elders of the organization couldn't tell that all of this was a farce, then who would? Still, even now, while Sael and Apestus faced each other in a pending duel, of them stepped forward to do anything? Even the elder who spoke had never really expected an answer to his question.

For years, they had done it the traditional way. But, those traditional ways were exactly what put them on the brink of destruction.

Valiant Heart Mountain seemed to be at peace right now, even to a point where they could leisurely have such bouts of internal strife, but the elders knew better. They were a wilting flower, prepared to collapse at any moment.

Maybe in as little as ten years, they wouldn't be able to hold their heads up high any longer.

But Raylion was a beacon of hope. Even if his methods were underhanded and cruel, which part of the Dimensional Verse was clean?

Maybe, before it was all too late, they should try everything they could. Who knows, maybe this new system would bring about a surprise for them. Maybe, with this new system, they'd be able to rise from the ashes and become something greater.

Who knows if these elders were correct or not. But, what was true regardless was that an organization without courage would never get anywhere.

Sael balled her fists, the air around her continuing to tremble.

Aphestus faced her with a cheeky grin, his back still bent over with terrible posture. But, anyone with sharp senses could almost see the bestial aura forming around him. He looked like a beast pulling against its chain, the bars that locked him in just about to snap.

It was the moment when his momentum reached its peak that he suddenly moved.

His head fell toward the ground, his leg stretching out. His body seemed flexible in ways it shouldn't be, his movements far too agile to come from a human.

A swirl of wind was left in his wake, an upsurge of air moving quickly as though in an attempt to fill the space he had just vacated.

He appeared before Sael in the blink of an eye. Her face was still seething, her fists still balled tightly to the point her nails were outlined in a coating of dripping blood.

Aphestus' long legs whipped forward, his lanky arms tightening around his body. The sudden shift made the torque of his hips reach astonishing levels. It felt as though a viper was snapping at her head rather than a foot. It didn't seem impossible for such a strike to decapitate her entirely.

It was then that Sael finally moved, her rage bubbling forth.

BANG!

She crossed her arms in the path of Aphestus' foot, the torrent of raging winds causing her hair to flutter and even her cheeks to deform slightly.

It sounded like two steel plates had collided, neither willing to give in to the other.

Chapter 657

Sael latched on to Aphestus' leg, her eyes glowing with a dangerous light.

This battle was indeed an insult to her. She, the preeminent youth of Valiant Hall was looked down upon to the point of fighting a mere Vice Leader of a Peak. This kind of humiliation wasn't small. And, the sinister plot behind it was even worse.

She needed to win. She had to win.

Sael's gaze grew bloodshot, her fury finally reaching a peak.

She roared, blossoming blue tattoos of blooming flowers growing along her fair skin. Her wrists grew out with delicate blue lily petals and her hair lengthened, growing out into long, whipping vines.

In what felt like an instant, the stage of the battle had been covered in these thick bluish-green vines, each blooming with large swaths of flowers.

Sael's delicate exposed belly, her frail shoulders, even her lovely cheeks became covered in these tattoos. Yet, instead of ruining her appearance, it seemed to give her an exotic air. It was the kind of feeling one might have when gazing upon something alien. The feeling was only made more potent by the change in Sael's eyes.

Her brown eyes became a bright blue, her irises morphing into the form of a six petaled flower.

Anyone who knew Sael knew that she was going all out.

Sael's gaze glowed, her flower petaled irises spinning one petal over.

In that instant, a tattoo bloomed on Apestus' chest before he could put his leg away.

Chuckling, Apestus finally pulled back, hopping through the network of vines and dodging their snapping whips as he touched the tattoo on his chest.

"Hoho... How curious..."

Aphestus felt that his body was slightly sluggish as though his Force circulation had slowed.

He suddenly ducked down, dodging a vine aimed for the back of his head. By the time he looked up, Sael was already before him again, her movements not affected by her obscenely long hair in the slightest.

She threw out a punch, forcing Aphestus to block with a knee. His chuckling grated on her ears. There was nothing she wanted more than to rip that smile off of his face.

“Ooo, big chested beauty. Your eyes seem a little strained after that.”

Sael didn't respond, her fists raining down. The petals that surrounded her wrists suddenly separated, forming a hovering crown of sharp blades around her knuckles.

Aphestus' pupils constricted.

His back arched backward until his palms touched the ground. The muscles of his torso flexed and writhed, his feet kicking up toward Sael's chin.

Rather than meeting delicate skin, though, he found a blockade of vines in his way. Unable to dodge, his booming kick was stopped in its track.

The air vibrated wildly as they clashed. But this time, Aphestus couldn't pull his leg free so easily.

Vines wrapped around his ankle, lifting him up and into the air.

At that moment, it was as though Sael was walking on air. The same petals that formed around her wrists formed around her ankles, anchoring her legs as they pierced into the ground.

Using them to gather the momentum and foundation she needed, Sael's arms flexed, her back pulsing with strength as she sent a punch toward the dangling Aphestus. p??(???????)

“Hehe, how interesting.”

Hanging upside-down, Apestus seemed as though he was still able to react perfectly. His palms flipped over, causing two daggers to appear.

Each was three quarters of a foot long, shimmering beneath the setting sun.

CLANG! CLANG! CLANG!

The daggers and Sael’s blade-like petals crossed, her fists’ endless barrage being met and countered by Apestus instantly.

At that moment, Sael’s irises rotated by another petal, causing another flower tattoo to bloom on Apestus’ body.

In that small instant of time, Apestus’ body slowed by another measure. He mistimed his block, Sael’s fists shooting by his guard and ripping toward his chest.

Apestus reacted as quickly as he could, flexing the muscle dense tapestry that was his torso to swing himself to the side.

But, Sael’s vines weren’t stationary. Her gaze seemed to be able to counter everything, her sight seeing through Apestus’ intentions with ease.

In the instant Apestus wanted to swing, Sael’s vines countered his weight, resulting in him staying in place.

PUCHI!

The blue blades hovering around Sael’s fists shot through Apestus’ chest, piercing toward his heart.

Her fury didn't seem to be satiated in the slightest. She wanted to watch her fists tear a whole through his body, to feel his blood running down her forearm.

Valiant Heart Mountain meant too many things to Sael. She did everything she had to do, even lowering her head when she didn't want to, for the sake of watching it thrive and survive.

There was little she cared more about than this. And of the few that existed, there was her master, a man she respected more than anyone else. Yet, not only was Hero Peak trying to force her dream to crumble, they were actually attacking her master in the process and dragging his name through the mud.

She couldn't tolerate it!

Sael roared, her fists driving forward. Her stance sunk downward, the petals around her ankles anchoring her into the ground as she pushed with all her might, the veins in her eyes practically bursting apart into a sea of red.

At that moment, Apestus coughed, his body wracked with pain.

“Oof. Are you trying to kill me, big chested beauty?”

Sael's pupils constricted. She found her petal blades were stuck, not because Apestus had caught her arm, but rather because she couldn't seem to slice through the bones of his rib cage.

Taking advantage of Sael's shock, Apestus spun, rapidly slicing apart the vines around his ankle and landing nimbly to avoid the vines that covered the ground.

He looked down at his chest, watching the blood trickle down the blue tattoo that now covered it.

He looked back up and grinned, licking his lips.

But, all Sael saw were the vertical slits his pupils became.

Chapter 658

“Your ability isn’t bad, big chested beauty. Did we strike a nerve?”

Sael’s ability wasn’t one that was publicly known. It was often difficult to tell what a person’s ability was unless it was far too outside the norm. Something like the combination of techniques Sael had just used were most definitely too out there to not be an ability.

Her eye technique, especially, made Apestus quite serious despite the grin on his face. She had only landed two of those tattoos on him, but just those two was enough to cut his Force circulation down by 20%. Whether it was his Force control or output, it all took a hit.

Beyond that, Apestus’ instincts also told him that landing these tattoos also allowed Sael to see through his Force circulation as well, as though she had a connection to them. While her tattoos were hindering his Force circulation, she could sense this flow and predict his next action based on this.

It was truly a fearsome ability, indeed worthy of coming from a top disciple of Valiant Hall. In fact, if it wasn’t for the lack of destructive ability, Apestus would feel that this ability was even better than Raylion’s. If Apestus was honest, Sael’s ability might even be at a higher evolutionary stage than Raylion’s too.

But, there was a difference between Sael and Raylion...

Apestus grinned a toothy grin when Sael didn’t respond.

“I guess it’s about time I get serious. It’s a shame, big chested beauty... You would think you would have realized by now that a fancier ability doesn’t necessarily make you more powerful.”

At that moment, the change to Apestus’ eyes set, his eyes glowing with a radiant yellow as the sun continued to set.

His muscles wiggled and writhed, seemingly intent on bursting out from Apestus’ tanned layer of skin.

If Sael's ability made her a radiant diamond, Apestus ability was just a copper coin found by the road side.

Sael could use all these beautiful tattoos and flower petals. As for Apestus, his ability was known simply from its title: Beast Mimicry.

[Author's note: stay away Kiba]

Apestus could copy the physique of any beast he consumed the meat of into a humanoid figure. It allowed him their agility, their flexibility, their strength and their instincts all in a human form.

Of course, he could do this with beasts only powerful to a certain limit. Or, rather, the more powerful the beast, the more of its meat he would need. Even a lower level beast would need tens of carcasses for him to devour.

However, even though Apestus could do so with any beast, he didn't. Rather, there was just one beast he liked to consume. One of the most powerful beasts of Valiant Heart Mountain...

The Black Patterned Jaguar.

Apestus' canines grew, his body crouching.

Sael's pupils constricted.

BANG!

The ground beneath Apestus' feet cracked, the wind pressure of his sudden movement blowing the vines that had been near his feet away.

In a flash, he appeared before Sael.

With quick reactions, Sael countered the punch of his dagger, aiming for his head. She didn't block in the slightest. She directly pitted her determination against Apestus' as though she couldn't sense the blade striking toward her liver.

However, Apestus was dauntless. Mid-flight, his shoulder dropped and his neck curled to one side.

Sael immediately realized that if the trajectory of her punch were to continue, she would mere take a small chunk of Apestus' shoulder. But, if she didn't pull back, her torso would be stabbed through.

Sael abandoned her thoughts of countering, retreating instantly. But it was then that her irises rotated by yet another petal. This was her true goal. As long as this tattoo landed, a 30% decline wasn't something even Apestus' ability could bridge the gap of.

However, almost instantaneously, Apestus' strike came to a grinding halt at the same time.

As though an agile jaguar, his muscles flexed all at once, his body hopping to one side.

It was then that Sael's irises stopped rotating, but there was no third tattoo that appeared on Apestus.

Eye-sight was near instantaneous. But, as expected, the flower pattern had to travel through the air to land, making it avoidable. And, if Apestus was correct, Sael wouldn't be able to prepare another for another few minutes.

He leapt forward, his daggers raining down in a combination of feints and sharp attacks. 

Sael landed a heavy foot backward, the blades hovering around her feet cracking the ground. But, at that moment, rather than helping her, they were a hindrance.

When Sael went to lift her foot to take another step back and reposition herself for a counter, the split moment it took for her to pull out were all Apestus needed.

He closed the distance between them, his daggers sweeping across and causing arcs of crimson to bloom.

Sael narrowly dodged, her gaze flashing with anger when she realized that Apestus almost ripped her chest band in two. Was he still trying to humiliate her?

In the next instant she winced, feeling a deep slice run through her torso.

“Sael!” Gersan roared from the sidelines.

Apestus’ attack was relentless. The moment Sael suffered her first injury, it wasn’t long before she suffered a second, then a third. As though a beast cornering their prey, Apestus’ gaze bore down, he stalked forward, her momentum increasing and his canines glistening.

His body became a lethal killing machine. His close combat ability was off the charts. His reaction time, his combination attacks, his counters. Each was more furious than the last.

With just his two arms, he seemed capable of battling all of Sael’s vines alone with her own arms and feet simultaneously. A single one of his strikes could sever a vine and counter her blade infused punches. A single swing of his blade could tear a cut into her delicate skin and push her further into the pits of despair.

The reversal was near instantaneous, and it only occurred to a single mistake, a single lapse.

But in a battle of experts, this was all it took.

Sael was pushed nearer to the end of the arena, her hatred brimming forth so fiercely that unshed tears brimmed at her eyes. However, what did fall wasn’t those tears, but rather the blood from her popped blood vessels as she tried again and again to use her ability, only for Apestus to dodge as though he could predict her action before she took them.

The members of Valiant Hall clenched their fists. Many shouted for Sael to just give up, but she didn’t seem to hear any of them as the blood fell from her cheeks.

Aphestus cocked his hip back, his torso flexing as his leg whipped forward.

It seemed to be the same strike he started the battle with, a devastating kick to the head capable of decapitating such a frail beauty. However, compared to then, after activating his ability in full, it was more than three times as lethal.

Sael reacted quickly, putting up her arms to block. But, this action was as good as giving up her arms for the rest of the battle. She already knew what would happen.

It was then the words were spoken.

“I think that’s enough. Valiant Hall has lost.”

It was impossible to tell when exactly he appeared, but Leonel grabbed at Aphestus’ leg while sweeping Sael in his other arm.

BANG!

Both Leonel and Sael were sent flying, skidding across the arena and almost falling over another side.

Leonel whistled, looking at his hand just as he managed to steady his feet from falling over the edge. He couldn’t help but smile a bit bitterly.

‘Seems my wrist is fractured.’

He looked down at Sael who seemed to have all but collapsed from exhaustion. Shaking his head, he walked down from the arena without looking back at Aphestus.

Withstanding the furious gazes of the Valiant Hall members, he handed Sael who had fallen unconscious to Gersan.

“Let’s go.” Leonel said to Aina. “Let them have their fun for now.”

Leonel looked over his shoulder one last time, his gaze locking onto Raylion. A small smile tugged at his lip before he left.

An odd atmosphere hung over the arena.

Chapter 659

Those in the arena found it difficult to wrap their heads around what had just happened. They had all thought that some knight in shining armor was planning on swooping in, yet after ‘saving’ Sael, this mysterious person hadn’t done anything else.

No one was sure how this person appeared, or how they even managed to stop Apestus’ furious kick without suffering severely for it. It was as though he had simply teleported to the location.

Of course, there were some who made the connection between this mysterious person and the posters that had been recently taken down. By extension, they also realized that it was this young man who was meant to be considered their public enemy at the moment.

But, this only made things more confusing.

On the surface, it made sense. Since Valiant Hall and this young man were in cahoots from the very beginning, didn’t it make sense for him to save Sael?

But, on a deeper level, this was pure nonsense. Raylion had painted a much different picture. The narrative he had formed wasn’t one of mutual interest, but rather one of a man with a powerful background preying on the corruption of Valiant Hall.

If this latter story was the truth... Would the arrogant young master described ever care to save anyone useless to him? In fact, shouldn’t he be raging about since his name being swept through the mud?

The odd shift in the atmosphere occurred without a single word being exchanged. But, what was done was done. The moment Sael was unable to battle, Hero Peak had already won and the changes they wanted to implement to Valiant Heart Mountain would soon rule all of their lives.

Yet, in the moment he should have been basking in his victory, Raylion's expressionless gaze flickered.

Only the well learned, thoughtful, and intelligent would be able to reach the second layer of analysis needed to understand the underlying oddity of Leonel's actions. The vast majority of people were not this and still felt that Leonel had acted because he was allied with Valiant Hall.

But, the support of such people was meaningless to Raylion. Such fools who could be so easily swayed could just as easily be swayed in a new direction tomorrow.

...

Even as the first to leave the arena, allowing them to walk through the empty streets of the city, Aina was still fuming.

Though her enraged expression was hidden beneath her mask, Leonel still thought that it would be boundlessly adorable.

"There's no need to waste your emotions on them." Leonel said with a chuckle.

Still, in thanks for his efforts, he received a glare in return.

Aina wasn't wrong to feel this way. Leonel always saw blood when someone poked at Aina, yet now he was telling her to not feel enraged for the vice versa. He was definitely being a hypocrite.

Still, Leonel continued to chuckle. He really didn't care about this very much. In fact, he was almost happy it happened. He found this to be much more interesting. He could even see a quicker path toward curing Aina now, how could he not be happy?

Seeing that Aina was still upset, though, Leonel sighed.

“What I did at the end was really the most I could do under those circumstances. Proving my strength or displaying my Force Crafting ability wouldn’t have been as impactful as you think.

“In the story he painted of me, the Raylion guy implicitly acknowledged my prowess. How can someone who is weak kill three Hero Peak members and destroy King of Ores faction? What infuriated the people most was my sense of superiority, so how would proving my superiority all the more help me?

“It would at most be short term satisfaction that could easily be spun on its head, especially since I had no legal pathway to participate in these matters.”

Aina bit her lip beneath her mask, knowing that Leonel was correct.

Had Leonel been a part of Valiant Hall, things might have been different. In the worst case, he could just battle Apestus personally even though he had apparently underestimated the strength of this Vice Leader.

“None of these are reasons to be smiling.” Aina finally said.

“How could I not be smiling? They’re about to give me exactly what I want the most.” Leonel grinned.

Aina looked up toward the side of Leonel’s face in confusion.

“Think about it, Hero Peak has already effectively been the ruler of the Peaks for a long time now. They control 20% of the resources just like Valiant Hall does and no one can challenge their position due to their apparently undefeatable leader.

“With their strength, they have the power to sway the politics of Valiant Heart Mountain any way they please. And, those elders have apparently already decided on Raylion being their next Head so they’re allowing him to do whatever he wants.

“Knowing all of this, what else could Hero Peak possibly want? Where is there more power for them to grasp? What could they do to claim more strength for themselves?”

Aina’s eyes narrowed. “Weaken the other Peaks.”

“Exactly. They don’t care to take over Valiant Hall’s position. What would that do for them? They already control much of everything without the forced label of having to be neutral.

“In that case, their goal is to break the balance and weaken their opposition and the best way to do that...

“Is to abolish the Peak system entirely.”

Aina’s pupils constricted.

“Just snatching away more resources for Hero Peak wouldn’t work. Raylion would just end up fueling the discontent of the more common talents of Valiant Hall.

“In that case, he has to ‘snatch’ those resources away using an above board manner.

“In order to stop the laymen from realizing what’s happening right under their noses, he’ll abolish the Peak system, opening up Valiant Heart Mountain.

“In the old system, Hero Peak would always be capped at 20% of the resources. But, if there is no longer a Hero Peak, it becomes a free for all and suddenly that hard cap becomes much larger.”

Aina calmed, her irises flickering. “He wants a place where the law of the jungle truly rules.”

“Exactly.

“You don’t have enough resources? You must be too weak. Why would you blame others for your own failures?” Leonel said in a steady tone. “But, why would I fear such an environment?”

At that moment, Leonel suddenly heard the sound of a sneer.

“You certainly talk a lot for a freshman without a Peak.”

Chapter 660

Leonel didn’t look very surprised when he looked up. There might be an ability out there that could catch his senses off guard, in fact, he had run into one during the Freshman Trials, but it was clear that this older woman before him didn’t have one. Or, maybe she just thought that her previous concealment was good enough.

Magnaril appeared before the couple silently. Her greying hair was done up in an untidy bun, her appearance being somewhat eccentric.

She had thought that Leonel would be shocked by her appearance, but she was quite bitterly disappointed.

“Little Aina, is this where you’ve been? You didn’t even leave a word behind.”

Leonel curiously observed Aina. It seemed that these two knew each other?

Honestly, Leonel had thought that this was an elder Valiant Heart Mountain might have sent for the sake of trying to appease him.

In reality, Leonel wasn’t aware of who was in the know about the affairs surrounding him. He hardly knew much about the structure of Valiant Heart Mountain, let alone understanding which elders were considered the highest echelon and which weren’t.

But, it seemed that he was wrong. This meant one of two things.

Either Valiant Heart was no longer afraid of offending him, something that was highly unlikely. Or, the highest echelon weren't aware that he had been dragged into this matter at all.

How likely was it that the highest ranking members of Valiant Heart, existences deep within the Fifth Dimension, had time to care about prank posters posted about a freshman? They might not even understand who Raylion had been referring to.

"Elder Magnaril, what brings you here?"

After a small hint of surprise, Aina politely responded just the same way one would expect someone younger to speak to a member of the older generation.

"How could I not come here and see who my disciple is frolicking about with? You know, the reputation of a young woman is very important."

Aina's brow wrinkled.

She had felt alright with leaving this woman because she had already learned everything there was to learn from her after engrossing herself in study for almost two months.

Magnaril kept insisting that Aina become her disciple, but Aina's perspective on such things was different from Leonel.

Leonel might not care very much about such a title. He had grown up on Earth, so the importance he attached to the word 'master' wasn't very high. In his mind, it wouldn't be much different from having another coach.

However, to Aina, who was far deeper into her understanding of this world in comparison to Leonel, she knew the heaviness one placed on such a title.

Aina would accept her as a teacher, but a master? Aina didn't think they were fated in such a way.

Yet, this woman kept calling her a disciple and was now commenting on her relationship.

Leonel wasn't quite sure how to step in even though his brows were raised at an odd slant.

"I'll keep Elder Magnaril's words in mind." Aina said lightly.

Magnaril shook her head, feeling Aina pulling further away. Seeing that this wasn't working, she turned her attention toward Leonel.

"Boy, how did you get involved in these matters?"

"What matters?" Leonel blinked. p??J??????

"Do you take me for a fool? Even if I wasn't aware before, there's most definitely a grudge between you and Hero Peak. If not, you'd have a screw loose for interfering in that battle at the moment you did."

"Oh, that?" Leonel shrugged. "Is having a few grudges with Hero Peak a big deal?"

"Of course it is a big deal. You don't need to pretend, I know you suffered no small defeat thanks to that one attack. If you can't even withstand a single strike from Apestus, what makes you think you can take on Raylion?"

Leonel really wasn't sure whether to laugh or cry at the antics of this old woman, he didn't even know what her purpose here was exactly. He found it difficult to get mad at an old lady who had to strain her head to look up at him just to meet his eyes.

Rather than Leonel, it was actually Aina who didn't like Magnaril's words very much.

“Elder Magnaril, I think that’s enough.”

The old lady frowned, clearly not liking the tone of Aina’s voice.

“Don’t you know that being embroiled in these things will only slow down your speed of improvement? If you have grudges with such powerful students so early on without having the strength to protect yourself, you’ll be hampering your own growth. Are you willing to allow yourself to be dragged down?”

Aina’s gaze sparked, but Leonel pulled her back.

“Thank you for your kind intentions, Elder Magnaril.” Leonel said with a light smile.

“Bah, who’s your Elder?! The biggest thank you that you could give me is leaving Aina alone!”

Leonel smiled and pulled Aina along to walk past Magnaril. He seemingly didn’t take the words of this old lady to heart.

However, Magnaril was stunned. She was an elder of Valiant Heart Mountain, was she really being ignored like this?

She was just about to snap with rage again, when she suddenly heard Leonel chuckling about something.

“I really don’t get it. Why do people think I’d be afraid of someone who didn’t even dare to say my name?”

Magnaril stood frozen in place, her next shrill comment caught in her throat.

...

As though Leonel's true ability was to see into the future, matters worked out exactly as he had predicted.

The Peak system was abolished, no longer requiring students to join specific Peaks for the sake of using unique resources. Rather, everything now functioned via a merit system.

Due to the distrust many had for Valiant Hall, all previously earned merit points were deemed null with the sole exception of those gained via battle missions which had easily verifiable conclusions.

With Valiant Hall abolished, a new neutral party was needed to be constructed. But, rather than forming a separate existence, a council was constructed. This council, known as the Valiant Council, would be made of the most senior youths.

It was hardly a surprise that the majority of this council was quickly filled with former Hero Peak members, among which was a certain King of Ores Sarrieth who had seemingly vanished during the past month...

It was while these vast and sweeping changes were occurring that Leonel brought Aina back to Kaela's home, only to find a far gloomier atmosphere than even he was expecting.