**Chapter 100: The Day Before the Storm (2)**

“What the hell happened⋯”

Her voice was shaking slightly.

Her hands wandered as if she didn't know what to do with the sudden situation.

The air seemed to vibrate somehow, perhaps due to the intensifying emotions.

Diana's entire body glowed blue, and a chill emanated from her.

Unlike Eli, who could wield fire magic, Diana exuded a bitter chill.

Her cynical eyes looked like they could turn the stunned outlaws into frozen humans in an instant.

“It's okay, Ms. Diana.”

I looked at her and opened my mouth to speak.

“It was no big deal, I'm fine.”

“⋯⋯”

Diana barely caught her breath as I spoke again.

The chill that had been radiating from her had faded.

She cautiously moved to my side, her eyes dripping with worry.

I explained the situation to her in a reasonable manner.

When she heard that I had subdued the drunken outlaws, her face hardened.

“That's a big deal. Are you okay? Are you hurt?!”

“I'm fine, it was only against some third-rate thugs.”

I stood up, pounding my chest with my fist to show I was fine.

The vibrations in my pectoralis major muscle sent an earthquake through Diana's eyes. I laughed as she closed her eyes in panic.

I realized that I was the one who had the problem.

“Ah. Clothes.”

I skillfully subdued the dwarf, but the dirt kicked up and stained my pristine suit.

“I apologize for the mess.”

“I'm sorry, I can always buy you another suit, and you are far more important to me than this one.”

The words stunned me, and I turned to look at Diana.

Her face was flushed with worry, and her cheeks were slightly warmed.

I felt a little flattered and stroked the back of her neck with my hand.

It was quite embarrassing.

“Wow⋯ that's how you get a guy on your side⋯”

The guard platoon leader, who had been eavesdropping on the conversation next to us, expressed her admiration.

Diana and I coughed in unison.

“Hmph. Isn't that the end of the story?”

“Ah, yes. As I said before, I would appreciate it if you could come to the guard station as soon as possible, then.”

The guard platoon leader gave the guards the withdrawal sign.

The group of guards left, leaving the mauled dwarf and the human outlaw on the ground.

The onlookers gradually dispersed as the incident came to a close.

“So, barkeep. Are you open for business today?”

To be fair, only those who were interested in the case dispersed.

The customers, who were about to enjoy a meal with Diana's cooking, turned to her with sullen faces and pleading eyes.

Diana smiled bitterly and looked at the ingredients on the dirt floor.

“Mmm... I'm afraid we don't have any mains, but I can serve you some appetizers.”

“That's enough! Open the door!”

“Sake! Sake! Sake! Sake! Let's drink and die!”

Diana opened the door to the inn, and the excited patrons shouldered their way to the tables, dancing in unison.

It was more than Diana could handle on her own so I brushed as much dirt off my suit as I could and turned to Diana.

“Let me help you, too.”

“No, thank you, I'm fine, I'll take it easy today-”

“Kkhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!”

The guests who had been dancing excitedly just moments before coughed urgently.

Their eyes flicked to my suit-clad body.

“Well, ma'am, as a fellow female, there are certain manners.”

“When would we day laborers ever accept a drink from a man like that, please have mercy on us, master.”

Diana looked down at her guests with a sour expression, then turned to me with a nonchalant face.

“You don't have to do this, Balkan. Go upstairs and get some rest.”

Diana pushed me off her back and up the stairs.

“We're entitled to a drink from a dick in a suit, too!”

Over the shouting from down the bar, a smiling Diana looked up at me.

“I'm sorry you had a rough night, especially at the end⋯”

“It was no big deal, so don't take it too hard. I was having fun.”

We looked at each other for a moment and smiled.

“Yeah. Take it easy, good night. Balkan.”

“Yep. You too, Diana.”

A bright-eyed Diana looked at me the whole way down the stairs of the inn.

I entered my room, stripped off my suit, and flopped down on the bed.

I closed my eyes quietly, listening to the muffled laughter of the banquet.

The tumultuous day was coming to an end.

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A dark night.

The Blues Clan's building stood in the entertainment district of the Outlaw District.

At the highest point of the building, a woman with several male slaves at her side slammed a table at the top of her voice.

“Fuck! The elite have been taken again?!”

“Hey. Vesta. Did I take those guys? I just saw them being taken away by the guards. They were already being taken away when I saw them.”

The dark elf Nuer smirked at Vesta, the leader of Clan Blues.

Nuer made no mention of the helmeted man who had defeated the elite.

To be fair, it was obvious where the sparks would land.

‘He's an interesting fellow, but I can't let him be enslaved.’

Noir remembered the man in front of the inn.

The way he'd beaten up the outlaws with such gutsy toughness, he wasn't bad at all.

“Someone of your caliber would have been able to subdue any number of guards and bring them back, wouldn't you?”

“What did you expect me to do when I found your men drunk and disorderly in front of Diana Ordia's inn?”

Vesta stiffened at the words.

No matter how forgotten a person was, their name meant something to those who lived in the same era.

“I suppose it was unavoidable, and I apologize for yelling. I've been hearing a lot of bad news lately.”

It started with the death of someone who seemed promising, the fire mage Deluna.

It's a shame to lose a mage, but she died in the Labyrinth, so I suppose it can't be helped.

Next came the capture of Kurumi, a clan officer, and Reichem, a mage recruited from the Academy.

This was a loss far beyond that of Deluna.

The simultaneous loss of such important and capable personnel was catastrophic.

Especially since Reichem had been recruited by Vesta herself.

It had happened just a few days before, and now they'd lost the elite troops right under their leadership.

But Vesta's misfortune didn't end there.

“Vesta!!!”

While Vesta was lost in thought, a member of the Blues Clan burst through the door with a shocked look on his face.

“This bastard came in without knocking?!”

“I'm sorry, it's an urgent matter, the Third Slave House is being attacked!”

“What?! What kind of bastard dares!”

“That, that. It's a mid-tier explorer from Wind Valley and a nameless black short-haired maiden! With our current troop level, we can't stop them⋯”

A fairy archer and a maiden?

It was a bizarre combination that would never meet except in the most unlikely of circumstances.

“Call in all the bitches you can spare and stop them. There's only two of them at most!”

“Yes, yes!”

The members rushed out of the room.

Vesta felt like a shipwreck floating in the ocean with the news coming at her like waves.

She felt cornered.

‘Damn it. Why now, when the delivery is due soon⋯!'

There were not enough slaves to supply [them].

When you don't have enough slaves, you have to make do with the quality of the slaves.

But unless you kidnap someone or beat them into submission, it's not easy to get quality slaves.

As she pondered this, she remembered something she had thought about but never acted on because the stakes were too high.

A plan that was both risky and tempting, a plan that was made even more so by the recruitment of Reichem.

It's almost time for the Academy's grand banquet, the graduation ceremony.

'⋯Being hunted by the Academy is better than being annihilated by [them].’

Her vision narrows and her rational judgment is clouded.

A calmer mind might have come to a different conclusion, but Vesta could only see one number.

“⋯⋯”

The dark elf, Nuer, looked down at Vesta wordlessly, then quietly left the room.

Once out on the deserted streets, the red lights and moonlight of the red-light district cast shadows under his feet.

“Miao-”

She mimicked the sound of a small cat, and Nuer's shadow wriggled and morphed into the form of a black cat.

“Meow-”

The black cat emerged from the shadows.

Nuer leaned down and tied a note to the black cat's front paw.

“It looks like [those guys] will be surfacing again soon, Alliance Leader.”

The black cat's red eyes narrowed at Nuer's words, and it melted into his shadow once more.

The dark elf sighed, finally relaxing.

“Huh. Another one today~”

Nuer, the shadow of the Explorers' Alliance, the elite spy, slipped into the darkness.

Her skin was black, so she could easily blend into the darkness and disappear.

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Diana sat at the desk in her room, staring at the artifact she'd purchased in the Outlaw District, a small silver ring.

The artifact, which slowly erect her nipples, worked to desensitize her mammary glands and slow the development of her milk.

This helped to somewhat suppress the effects of the Breast Milk Stat Drain Curse.

 It was also meant to prevent her from weakening herself.

It makes sense to put it on. It's the right thing to do.

-It's okay.

“⋯⋯”

But why?

-I'm fine, Diana.

She hesitated to put the ring on.

Flashes of the outlaws and of Balkan, who had fought them and left them dusty, flashed through my mind.

Every time he entered the labyrinth, she was reminded of Balkan's torn and pierced armor and the way he tried to cover his wounds.

Hardship and adversity are inevitable when you choose the path of an explorer.

And along the way, there is a very high probability of death.

Balkan is growing rapidly, he is a far cry from what he was when she first encountered him in the back alleys.

'Still, he's not particularly strong.’

At least from Diana’s perspective, Balkan was still weak.

Diana's eyes drifted to the bucket of water beside her.

A bucket filled with her own breast milk.

Diluted with her own power, it was the densest fluid a woman could produce.

At the sight of it, her breasts throbbed, the same breasts that had been so mercilessly ravaged by Balkan's milking.

An addictive pleasure bubbled up from one side of her chest.

Balkan milking would weaken her but it makes him stronger.

It also meant he would be safer.

Diana, faced with the hellish multiple choice question, closed her eyes tightly.

 Is it her own destruction or⋯The safety of the man she loved.

After much deliberation, Diana set the breast milk suppression artifact down in her desk drawer.

“⋯Just a little bit. Just a little bit later⋯”

 She mumbled something apologetic and closed the drawer.

For now, it would be okay to hold off on using it.

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The next day Diana served breast milk coffee.