**Chapter 11: Hot Night (3)**

I couldn't sleep all night.

It wasn't for fear of being raped in retaliation.

On the contrary, after seeing her level, I trusted her even more.

What if Diana had approached my body as a means to an end, as the nun and beggars did?

Given the power she had, she could have easily made me a rug and violated me, no matter how much I resisted.

But Diana didn't.

This proved that she had no sinister intentions, and that she had helped me out of pure goodwill.

For a moment, I was touched by this fact, but guilt quickly took over.

"I apologize, Diana."

Even though it was a mistake, I was an asshole for doing 'that' to a benefactor.

Even worse, she still felt so soft in my grasp but it was a man's instinct, and I couldn't help it.

I had never in my life thought that my callused hands would ever hold such a vulgar and erotic I-cup breast.

Apart from the guilt building up in my heart, an unknown motivation began to rise in me.

One touch of her breasts was enough to wash away all the devastating things I had been through.

I wondered if this was why women on Earth said to men, ‘Do you want to touch my breasts?’

Those breasts were healing. Honestly, it seemed to work better than a restorative potion.

If you do it in a relationship, that's one thing, but if you do it between strangers, it's a crime.

"⋯I should do something and apologize."

I couldn't just lie still in my room.

It was still early outside. The sun was still a long way off.

‘Diana hasn't come back yet, has she?’

I'd gone into the kitchen, the direction she'd headed earlier, to collect myself and apologize, but I couldn't find her.

I went back down to the ground floor and looked at the inn, which had been abandoned after the drinking game.

The patrons had left quickly, and the alcohol and food they had consumed had taken over the tables and spilled onto the floor.

In some places, there were traces of vomit, and the air smelled of sour milk.

It was a mess. I didn't even know where to start.

"Let's clean it up first."

I was hungry, so I picked up bits and pieces and ate them while I worked.

Even though it was cold, Diana's food tasted great.

Apparently, there were a lot of leftovers because the customers were in a hurry to leave.

I dumped the leftovers neatly into the trash can at the back of the kitchen, gathered the bowls, and cleaned them thoroughly.

I finished washing the dishes, deftly catching a bowl that slipped and nearly broke.

I wiped the table clean of spills and messes and covered it with a tablecloth.

One final sweep of the floor with the broom, a quick mop, and a maddeningly tight sweep of the floor, and I'm done.

I look at the clock on the wall and realize it's already 4am. Despite the mess, the cleaning was relatively quick.

My sister was often hospitalized, so I often stayed home alone, and my housekeeping skills came in handy.

"Huh?"

After the cleaning was done, I was sitting at the table at the inn for a while, when I saw Diana's flustered face peek through the softly opened front door.

"Ah. You're here?"

"⋯⋯"

I greeted her as casually as I could, but she slightly averted her gaze in surprise.

She looked around the inn for a moment, then spoke.

"⋯You, did you clean up?"

"If you mean the tavern, then yes, I cleaned it up. I thought you might be tired."

I said, though my mouth made it sound like I cleaned up out of concern for Diana.

The truth was, I thought it would make my subsequent apology more sincere.

"I'm sorry, Diana. I made a big mistake."

I tilted my head at a 90-degree angle. I hoped my sincere apology would reach her.

"⋯⋯"

"⋯I missed my chance to apologize first. Look up. I'm the one who should be apologizing. I'm so sorry."

The apology came in reverse.

Diana bent her waist 170 degrees. The reason she couldn't bend down 180 degrees was probably because of her chest armor, which naturally made her chest look majestic.

No, this is not the time to analyze this.

Why would Diana, the victim, apologize to me?

As I thought this, memories of the past flashed through my mind.

The men and women of this world are different from the men and women of Earth. I'd realized that from my own experience with numerous attempted rapes.

But I couldn't think freely. Because of my one-sided rape experience, I was ignorant of "normal" gender relations in this world.

In an incident where a man accidentally touches a woman's breasts, choose the victim from the following examples.

1. the man who touched the breasts.

2. the woman whose breasts were touched.

The initial answer is incorrect.

"I'm really sorry for letting you touch my breasts, and you won't believe it, but it was a mistake."

1. the man who touched the breasts.

2. the woman who provided the situation that led to the groping.

In this world, option 1 was the correct answer.

That is, even though I splashed water on Diana's breasts, and even though I panicked and rubbed her breasts, she's the one who should apologize, not me.

The position has changed.

"You endured the unpleasantness and wiped my breasts in good faith, but it's not enough that I put you through such a horrible thing, now you're cleaning up."

Diana bowed her head, looking genuinely sorry.

‘Is this right, really?’

For the first time in a long time, I felt my common sense crumble.

I ran a hand through my hair, trying to calm myself and think.

‘It's not a bad idea to come to an agreement.’

Ending the matter here is not a bad option. A modest settlement and walking away would be a win-win for now.

‘But it's stupid.'

Settling is the worst option.

It's like being blinded by the immediate gain and throwing away a bigger gain and if the lowest option, the foolish one, can be beneficial, what about the highest?

‘In this harsh world, I can gain the favor of a level 70 powerful person.’

If I succeed, I'll be rich, and if I fail, there's nothing to lose.

What's the point?

"Diana. Look up."

I smiled at her, trying to keep my voice as warm as I could, suppressing the glee in my heart.

Though I couldn't see her bare face through the helmet, I could feel her eyes lock with mine.

"I know you didn't do it on purpose, Diana, and I don't see why I shouldn't believe you."

My voice was as soft and warm as it could be, to reciprocate her genuine goodwill.

It has been said since ancient times that the best way to win someone's favor is to relieve their burden in their heart.

"So, I'm good."

That is forgiveness.

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I heard the sound of thick slices of bacon cooking in a preheated frying pan.

I sat still at the table and waited, and soon Diana appeared from the kitchen, plate in hand.

"Here you go. Eat."

I stared at the bowl on the table.

Three thick strips of bacon with grease bubbling on the surface, two eggs cooked sunny side up, a pancake top drizzled with maple syrup, and a salad with an assortment of vegetables.

Some might call it overwhelming, but for me, it was the perfect breakfast for my active day.

"Isn't that a little too extravagant for a breakfast of just three silver coins?"

“It’s been a while since I showed some sincerity.”

"Thank you. I'll eat well."

Diana smiled sheepishly.

A special breakfast that other guests don't get, this is enough.

I unconsciously paused to remove my helmet to eat.

Maybe Diana wouldn't mind seeing my bare face.

"I'm going to clean up the kitchen so you can eat in peace. If you don't feel comfortable, you can go up to your room."

But Diana was considerate of me, who wore a helmet every day, so she excused herself first.

⋯What. It's good for me.

It was early, so no one else had come down for breakfast.

This allowed me to easily remove my helmet and eat my first human meal in this world.

The thick-cut bacon was smoky and juicy, and the yolks of the soft-boiled eggs were savory.

The salad's refreshing dressing provided just the right amount of bite, and the pancakes were moist without being undercooked.

All the flavors complemented each other without overpowering each other and worked together perfectly in the bowl.

The warmth from the food brought me to tears of joy.

It's been a long time since I've had a proper meal like this.

After a night of sleep-deprivation soup, bread crumbs, and leftovers, the thought of a hearty, warm breakfast is so comforting.

"I ate really well. That was the best breakfast of my life."

I walk to the kitchen and hand Diana the bowl, now glistening from licking the bottom.

She crossed her arms in the kitchen as if she'd just finished washing the dishes.

She was probably waiting for me to finish eating.

"That's very kind of you to say, but I'll put the bowl away later."

Diana took the bowl with a puzzled expression. She carefully set it aside without dipping it in the dishwater.

"Come to think of it, have we never exchanged names? Or was it just me?"

Diana asked, glaring at me.

Her eyes were clearly closed, but somehow I felt like they were staring right through me.

‘The name. A name.’

Nam Soo-jin. A name given to me by people I don't even want to call parents. To be honest, I hate this name.

I didn't change my name because I thought it was the only connection between me and my sister.

I still feel that way today, but things have changed.

Nam Soo-jin, who lived a peaceful life in the modern world as a sturdy day laborer, is now dead.

He's headed to the Labyrinth, where his life will be far from peaceful.

He will have to fight monsters to the death, and he will often have to cut people down.

In order to survive the harshness of life, to keep from missing the happiness and memories of the past, to keep from falling into regret and frustration, I needed a new name for my future life.

"Balkan."

So I gave myself the wildest name in the world, to move forward in a tough world, tougher and more confident.

"Just Balkan."

"⋯What a great name. Keep up the good work, Balkan."

With that, Diana extended her hand.

"⋯Take care of me⋯

It was not the kind of greeting one would give to a guest who was simply staying at the inn for a few days.

I couldn't help but chuckle to myself.

"I, for one, wish you well in the future. Ms. Diana."

I shook her outstretched hand, squeezing it tightly.

A friendly relationship with a level 70 powerhouse was more than I expected.