**Chapter 148: Heeheehee...Ddu-ddaa...Puhihi... (3)**

The box was wrapped in a fine cloth, like a wedding ring case.

Perched high on the white cloth, like an artifact, was a brilliant blue granule that I had often seen in the⋯Labyrinth.

“Mana?”

“Often called elixirs.”

Nuer chuckled.

“It's a mana elixir from the 21st floor that has been gathering and crystallizing for decades, and since the 21st floor is a cold region, it contains cold mana.”

I roughly understood that it was an elixir that contained ice elemental magic.

“It’s a precious thing that not only increases your body’s magical power, but also permanently enhances your physical abilities⋯There is a minor drawback that if a man eats it, his already low libido decreases even more⋯”

An elixir that increases your physical strength and also your wisdom, which is related to magic power.

However, the downside is quite irritating.

Decreased libido.

“For you, it doesn't seem to be a problem?”

Nuer said, glancing at the silhouette of my cock next to my thigh.

She wasn't wrong.

The decreased libido would be a disadvantage for a normal man, but for the man I am now, it has its advantages.

I've been taking a break for the past few days and checking out the different types of status effects that come with the Nightmare Curse.

Sage, full of desires, neediness, very severe neediness.

There are four stages, and as I progressed to very severe neediness, I became more easily swayed by my sex drive and found it harder to maintain my sanity.

'In the worst case scenario, I might lunge to impale myself on a monster.’

I mean, I could give a goblin a dick pounding.

The thought of the worst-case scenario sent shivers down my spine.

To prevent such a situation, I needed some means of controlling my libido.

In that sense, that 21st-tier magic elixir would be quite helpful in controlling my libido.

After all, Ellie and Diana's bodies were already erotic enough to make me get hard just looking at them, so it wouldn't cause any problems for our relationship.

This elixir could only be beneficial in so many ways so I reached out to it, mesmerized.

“Uh-huh.”

Nuer quickly closed the box and retrieved the elixir.

“Don't try to take the goods without a contract. I'll give you the elixir when you're done with the job.”

Nuer smirked as she tucked the elixir back into her waistband.

“What do you say?”

Go to the Outlaw District, help capture succubi, and get the elixir.

Or will I just ignore the nameless men and turn down the offer from a mid-level explorer belonging to the Alliance, which will create an uncomfortable relationship?

After a moment's deliberation, I rose to my feet.

“I'm sorry, sir.”

“Huh?”

“I'll pretend I didn't hear about today, then.”

“No, wait!”

As I spun around and grabbed the doorknob, I heard an urgent voice behind me.

“Why? I mean, how valuable is this elixir, and you're not going to take it?”

Of course I'd like to have it but the risks still outweigh the benefits.

“Even without it, I'm sure I'll grow stronger if I'm good and steady in the Labyrinth.”

“No, you don't think dogs and cows get stronger in a stair-step fashion by going through labyrinth after labyrinth after labyrinth, you're an explorer, you should know better!”

“Well, I guess that's about it.”

“Huh, what is this⋯”

Nuer paused, frowning for a moment.

“⋯Aha.”

Perhaps sensing something in my tone, her expression breaks into a smile.

“You're being cryptic, aren't you?”

She then revealed the reason for my rejection.

“You're a greedy man. Is the elixir not enough for you?”

I'm underpaid.

Apparently, there's no one else to replace me, and a single elixir isn't enough to get me moving.

“Ten gold coins per intermediate succubi. Five contribution points. ”

My eyes naturally turned to Nuer at the outrageous amount of money to begin with.

“Don't you think you're being a bit pushy?”

“Because it's worth it.”

Ten gold coins per succubi. Not silver coins, but gold coins.

I wouldn't get this much for killing a mid-level succubi in the Labyrinth unless it yielded a Soulstone.

Plus 5 contribution points.

Fifteen contribution points remain before I become a mid-level explorer.

I only need to kill three monsters to become a mid-level explorer and receive a little more support and benefits from the Alliance.

I wonder if they're more expensive because they're supposedly associated with demon worshipers.

Given the way she'd been blabbering on about my background as an apprentice of Idelbert's, it was possible that she'd been trying to curry favor.

“How do you like it, is it a more attractive proposition now?”

I held out my hand to Nuer, who looked up with a confident smile.

On these terms, it was worth the risk.

“I am not very good at it, but I ask that you take good care of me.”

“Good for you for being honest about your desires. Let's do this together.”

We grinned at each other, grabbed hands, and shook.

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As I walked out of the office after my conversation with Noir, I saw two people with their ears pressed up against the wall.

“What are you two doing?”

“Hmmm. Nothing.”

“We were listening in on your conversation. We have no particular reason, we were just curious.”

With an apologetic Joy Hog and an outspoken Jubeel, I returned to the Alliance lobby table to discuss the settlement.

“We'll subtract the succubus soulstone, which Balkan practically single-handedly captured, and divide the rest equally as usual.”

“I have no objection.”

“Neither do I.”

“I see. Then put some of the byproducts in here. I'll exchange them.”

I handed the byproducts in my subspace backpack to Joy Hog.

I have harvested quite a bit by carefully collecting various monster byproducts, including winter saplings used in necromancy and black magic to raise corpses, three soulstones of snowy kobolds, and the soulstone of the leader of the snowy kobolds.

 After an hour or so of jubilant jousting, Joy Hog returned from exchanging currency with a big grin on her face.

“26 gold coins! Heh heh. Is this why everyone is desperately trying to get to the middle floors?!”

Income has skyrocketed compared to the past when we would laugh at a few silver coins.

Even though it was a bit of an inflated income due to the large amount of soul stones, it brought a smile to Joy Hog and Jubeel’s faces.

The Labyrinth becomes a different kind of money-maker the more risky you take.

As I looked at the five gold and twenty silver coins that came my way, divided by headcount, I realized once again how outrageous Nuer's reward was.

“Balkan. You're not going to sell the succubus soulstone?”

“Anything related to succubi is going to sell for a fortune, as the supply is low compared to the demand.”

Joy Hogg drooled over the succubus soulstone, and Jubeel formed a ring around her finger and slipped it onto her index finger.

“I don't need the money right away, so I'm going to keep it. I'm sure I'll find a good use for it.”

I now had six gold and seventy silver coins.

More money will come if I successfully complete my commission with Nuer.

Later, when I need money, I can sell the soulstone through the business card of Claudia's top executive, Delmitri Claudia, which I got at graduation.

She said she'd always give me a good price.

“Yeah. That might be better than selling it now.”

Joy Hog chuckled, and after a moment of silence, she spoke up.

“Well, I'm afraid I won't be joining you on your next trip to the Labyrinth. In fact, I think I'll have to leave the city altogether for a while.”

The bombshell dropped out of nowhere.

“What? Why all of a sudden?”

“What the hell. What's going on?”

Even Jubeel asked, her expression grave at the sudden absence of her party leader and trusty tank.

“While I was on this labyrinth expedition, I heard that my parents, who were running a shop outside the walls of the labyrinth city, were attacked by some strange thugs. Fortunately, they were not seriously injured, but since they are both old, I think they will need someone to help them out.”

“Oh.”

“How dare they!”

Jubeel slammed his fist on the table and jumped to her feet.

“I don’t know. They say that a lunatic who muttered something about ‘punishing the greedy’ wielded a knife. Before the escort could come out, his head suddenly burst and he fell. I don’t know if it was fortunate or unfortunate… Anyway, everyone, be careful. There are a lot of lunatics in this city.”

Joy Hog sighed heavily with a bitter face.

“I'm sorry I swore at you, but you'd better get your act together.”

“Make sure they get their asses kicked. Way to go, Joy Hog!”

“Ha ha. Thanks guys. That makes me feel better.”

Joy Hog chuckled at the brief consolation.

“So. Since you're going to the Labyrinth while I'm gone, shouldn't someone be the party leader?”

“⋯Leader.”

 “Hmm.”

Party leader, the head of the party, leading the party and being called upon to exercise sound judgment in all cases, including emergencies.

“Hitolis is a priest in the temple, and Lammel doesn't care for this position, so that leaves only two.”

Joy Hog's words made me stare at Jubeel.

I looked at her face, which was shaggy and plain, like a country maiden's, unlike a tramp's, and I looked at her cow-horned hair, and I looked at the sword scabbard at her waist.

Jubeel, who was looking at me as well, opened her mouth.

“Don't you think it would be better if Balkan did it?”

“What?”

“Jubeel. Are you okay with that?”

“Ugh.”

I was baffled by the tidy answer, which seemed to have come without even going through my frontal lobe, but Joy Hog didn't seem to mind Jubeel’s comment.

“Then I'll let Balkan lead the party while I'm gone.”

“No, wait, are you both okay with that?”

Joy Hog was leaving the party she'd built in my care.

Jubeel, as a future party member, is now subject to my wishes.

It wasn't a simple conversation.

“But there's no one else to do it but you.”

“Exactly. Your judgment in times of crisis, the strength of mind and will to fight that abomination alone in the fifth floor to give the party a chance to escape. Honestly, I can't think of anyone better suited for the job.”

The two nodded, as if it were obvious.

The sudden praise tickles the nape of my neck, but embarrassment overtakes me.

‘When I was in charge, the party was shit.’

I've only been a party leader twice.

Once, the party was destroyed upon entering the Labyrinth, and the other time, they were attacked by outlaws and torn to shreds.

“Are you sure you're okay with me being the leader?”

“Of course. I may not have known you when we first met back on the fifth floor, but you're honestly the strongest member of our party now.”

“That's right, Balkan. You're on par with this Jubeel, or even better.”

Apparently, they already recognized me.

I didn't mind them saying so.

“What the heck. Let me just fuck you once.”

“You don't have to try so hard, because if a man gets fucked, he ceases to exist.”

“Jubeel. Please⋯”

I sighed, then suddenly laughed.

Somehow, I'd grown to like them.

I left the Explorers' Alliance, feeling a bit of responsibility as the leader of the party that would lead us through the labyrinth ahead.

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The next afternoon I carried Bernie on my back and wore simple armor.

I'm just a decoy.

[It's almost bedtime, where are you going again?]

[To get rice.]

[⋯Rice? Uh, what kind of rice?]

I gave a vague answer to Bernie’s mumbling in my head, told Diana I was going to do some explorer work, and left the inn.

As the sun set over the streets of the Labyrinth City, I took a carriage to the Outlaw District to the west of the city.

To get to the west, I had to pass through the Temple District to the south, so I cleared the Temple District and made it to the Outlaw District's walls without incident.

I had traveled quite a distance, and the sky had already turned dark.

“You're late.”

Nuer muttered as the dark elf leaned back against the ramparts, oblivious to the eerie atmosphere around her.

“Ten minutes before our appointment.”

“I was here twenty minutes ago.”

After muttering that, Nuer approached me.

She wore black bikini armor, it was an incredibly daring outfit for a mage, or even if she wasn't a mage.

I couldn't help but stare at her, not only because of her beautiful elven features, but also because I could see her dark-skinned sternum and eleven-pack abs, but also because there was no reason to look away.

Her weapon of choice is a staff, the symbol of a wizard, and a short but well-honed dagger at her waist.

I flicked the 'thing' at her.

Pow!

Uh-oh.

I try to make it land on her hand, but it misses slightly.

The 'thing' sticks to the sternum of Noir's bikini armor.

“⋯What is this?”

With a puzzled look on her face, Noir pulled the steaming, squishy, liquid-filled 'thing' away from her sternum.

Tsk!

She held it in both hands, staring at it as it stuck to her skin and then fell away with a sticky sound.

“Lukewarm, a bit heavy for water⋯no ordinary liquid.”

Noir poked at the balloon object with a black manicured finger.

The sticky liquid inside quivered with each poke.

“It's a condom. What's inside is semen.”

“⋯What?”

Nuer's face went blank at the bland answer.

“That's a direct line to a succubus, so let's go.”

“⋯Uh, uh, uh, uh, uh, uh, yeah. Okay. Yeah.”

Peering over the ramparts, Nuer nodded, suddenly looking more alert, and tied a condom to the waistband of her bikini armor, showing her ID to the guards on the ramparts.

"You are under the command of the Union Leader. Proceed."

The guards nodded and let us through the gates.

A district steeped in luxury, indulgence, and decadence, isolated from the rest, that was the outlaw territory.

It was an unknown place I'd heard so much about, but had never been to…and now I’m here with a dark elf wearing a used condom.

I stepped forward cautiously.