**Chapter 153: Deal (2)**

"This is a tough situation."

Puppeteer, a person with an extraordinary ability to curse others and turn them into puppets.

It seemed that her puppet curse could not only watch her victims but also control them.

As if time had stopped, the movements of dozens of people walking through the street had all ceased.

*Thud.*

A young girl standing in the middle trembled as if her whole body was connected to a thread.

*Swish.*

Soon, the girl, who had been trembling a moment ago, turned around and looked at me with a very natural movement and a face as expressionless as a mannequin.

It was definitely not an expression a young girl could make.

"You know about me."

As soon as I heard her voice, cold sweat broke out on my back.

A mechanical voice, as flat as her face, came out of the girl's mouth.

It was a dull and monotonous voice, as if the original, lively voice of the girl had lost its light.

"Cachile(Grumpy) must have told you."

The girl, who was reciting the puppeteer's words, stared up at me, but the feeling I got was slightly different.

It felt more like she was looking down on me, and I was looking up at her.

The messy scenery of the lawless district was no longer visible.

I felt like I was standing on the palm of someone's hand, with the sensation of a palm beneath my feet and a wall of fingers behind me.

Looking up again, I saw the giant, expressionless face of the girl looking down at me, observing me as if she wanted to see what kind of struggle this creature could make.

I shook my head. It was all an illusion. I had to stay calm.

I swallowed hard and finally opened my mouth.

"Yes."

"So, why did you dare to mention my name?"

With each word the girl uttered, my instincts screamed a warning.

I had never felt this way before, but I felt like this was how I would feel standing in front of an enraged Diana or Idelbert.

A feeling of being infinitely small in front of an immense power.

Even though I thought I had grown quite a bit, I realized how insignificant I was compared to these truly powerful beings.

There was no chance of me winning against a giant like her, even if hundreds or thousands of me gathered together.

"If your reason is trivial, you will have to pay the price for daring to call me by name."

But that didn't mean I would give up.

'No.'

If I gave up, nothing would change.

I would simply be trampled and end my short life without any value.

I had to struggle somehow and show her that even an ant can bite if it's cornered.

"Please let me leave this lawless district unharmed."

"What?"

*Zit!*

The girl's brow furrowed slightly, and a stronger aura emanated from her.

But I didn't back down and repeated, "Please don't interfere with me leaving this place."

My goal was to escape from this lawless district.

It was quite a distance from where I was standing now to the wall of the lawless district.

Even if I ran, it would take at least thirty minutes, and the lawless district was the Puppeteer's territory.

Considering the number of people whose actions were controlled by the Puppeteer that I could see right now, it wouldn't be strange if that number doubled.

"Pueng..."

Carrying Nuer on my back, it would be difficult to navigate an unfamiliar area and fight my way through countless enemies to reach the wall.

'It's possible.'

It would be extremely difficult, but if I squeeze every ounce of strength out of me, like Diana had taught me, I might be able to do it.

But the real problem was different.

"You're arrogant."

Would the Puppeteer just let me go?

Grumpy had told me that she could curse people and turn them into puppets.

If I were to be cursed, I would become just another one of her puppets.

I might even end up like Nuer, a babbling idiot.

If that happened, my life would be over.

I wouldn't be able to protect my sister, Ellie, or Diana.

It was a huge risk but to avoid that risk, I had to take an even bigger gamble.

"You're foolish and stupid. Knowing the gap between us, you dare to make such a foolish request. Know your place."

I replied with a calm voice,

"Then I have no choice but to kill myself."

[What?]

"..."

Before the girl could react, I swung the artifact axe at my neck.

*Crack!*

I felt my skin being cut and the blade piercing my flesh.

Ah.

This was what it felt like to have your neck cut.

My heart pounded, my blood flowed faster, and my vision widened.

I could see the puppets around me, the puppeteer's hand holding me, and the handle of the artifact axe that was blocking my attempt.

[This...! Crazy! Foolish! What are you doing?! I would have stopped you!]

*[Be quiet, be quiet.]*

I ignored the voice of the axe in my head and focused on the being in front of me.

"..."

The girl, whose eyes were reflecting my cut neck, was speechless.

"I was expecting you to stop me."

I smiled bitterly.

I had taken a gamble, and it seemed to have paid off.

"You're...foolish."

The girl's eyes widened.

"I didn't expect you to go this far."

"I'm desperate."

I replied simply.

If I had to choose between becoming a puppet and dying, I would choose death.

I had nothing left to lose.

"Fine. I'll let you go."

The girl sighed.

"But remember this. You'll regret this."

"I don't think so."

I replied with a confident smile.

I had survived the most dangerous situation of my life.

And I knew that no matter what challenges I faced in the future, I would be able to overcome them.

A wry smile crept onto the girl's usually emotionless face.

"Add 'madman' to the list of things I've encountered."

She pulled a potion from her subspace.

"Fine, your little trick worked. You madman."

*Hiss!*

As soon as she sprayed the high-grade potion, my wound began to heal rapidly.

If things had gone really south, I was planning to use a mid-grade potion I had hidden away as a first aid.

"I'll grant your request. You can leave this area. No one will stop you or chase you. But there are three conditions."

"I'll listen."

"...Fine."

The girl nodded, looking somewhat surprised.

"First condition. Kill the woman beside you."

It was a condition I hadn't expected at all. Killing someone?

"Even if she's guilty, killing an innocent person..."

"Puppet number 88911. Born in the lawless district, she committed various sexual assault crimes. Thirty-two men contracted STDs and were raped because of her. She had four abortions and abandoned two children."

She was a tough nut to crack. Honestly, she deserved to die.

"If you can't kill her, cut off one of her arms."

The puppeteer had already made two concessions. I couldn't delay any longer.

*Slash-* The axe severed the rapist's arm.

The puppet, a rapist, stood still without showing any change in expression.

"...As expected...the stimulation is weak...As I thought, that kid is special..."

Muttering to herself, the puppeteer soon made her second proposal.

"Carry this from now on."

The girl pulled something else out of her subspace and threw it towards me.

*Thud.*

I caught what she had thrown.

"...A doll?"

It was a small doll but it wasn't a cute toy doll that children would play with.

It was more like a miniature figure of a woman.

What was special was that the woman the figure was based on was so beautiful that she would put even an elf to shame, and the figure had incredibly detailed genitalia.

"From now on, whether you go into the Labyrinth, sleep, or even go to the bathroom, carry this doll with you wherever you go."

"...Yes."

It was a strange condition, but compared to killing someone, it was acceptable.

"What's the third condition?"

The puppeteer watched the man walking away with a woman on his back.

"Balkan...was it?"

The third condition.

She had asked him his name.

She could have easily found out through a background check, but asking him directly gave her a different feeling.

"What a madman."

His suicide attempt, his obsession with his own life.

It was a short incident, but it had left a significant impression on the puppeteer's long and monotonous life.

"Haha."

She let out a dry laugh.

For the first time in a long time, she felt a sense of curiosity towards someone.

She reached out and touched a device.

*Buzz.*

The communication artifact started to ring.

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When I left the outlaw area, it was late at night.

I was at a loss as to where to take the idiot Nuer.

Since it was late, I got back on the carriage I had come in and headed to Diana's Inn.

In front of the inn where I arrived, a figure wearing golden armor was sitting blankly like a homeless person.

“⋯Ah. Balkan. Finally, finally! You're finally here.”

“What are you doing at this hour?”

The sword of the Mother Goddess Church, the escort paladin of Saint Serif, Nate Elin let out a deep sigh as soon as he saw me.

“⋯Lord Serif is looking for you.”