**Chapter 171: 13th Floor (7)**

*Clink.*

Balkan touched his axe and looked at Bellee, who shed a single tear.

He had let the worshiper of Gluttony hold a weapon made from the soul stone of Gluttony.

It was an uncertain decision.

Something unusual could happen, but even if Balkan didn't fully trust Bunny, he had grasped her to some extent.

If she had maintained the aggressive and vicious attitude she had shown when they first met, he would never have listened to Bunny. However, now it was slightly different.

If he closed his eyes for a moment, he could vividly recall that sensation.

Bunny, partially materialized, leaning her back against the wall of the confessional and squatting low between his legs, kissing his balls.

Her eyes glaring up at his cock, her mouth muttering complaints while her body was honest, devotedly giving affectionate oral service, sucking on the tip of his shaft.

Such a Bunny had advised him to take Bellee under his wing.

She said there would be a use for her.

“Ah, ah...”

The focus began to return to Bellee’s murky eyes.

In that short moment, her consciousness, which had been drawn into Bunny’s inner world, had returned.

As soon as the image of the man in the helmet was reflected in her cloudy, black eyes, Bellee knelt down.

“I greet you, consort.”

“What?”

Balkan frowned at Bellee’s sudden words.

*Consort?*

Wasn’t that a term for someone else’s spouse?

While Balkan was puzzled.

‘Good.’

Bellee praised herself for what she thought was a not-so-bad choice of words.

The man before her was special.

Not simply because he had given her bread.

Bellee recalled the reaction of the Demon of Gluttony.

‘Every time the Great One mentioned this man, Her heart would race.’

On the surface, She appeared calm, but unlike when She dealt with Bellee—when Her heartbeat was serene as if breathing—there had been an intense tremor, like an earthquake.

‘Just how highly does She value him, to make Her heart race like a maiden’s?’

Who knows? Perhaps She couldn’t sleep, anticipating the day She would finally claim him.

Belle looked at Balkan.

Although his face was obscured by the helmet, his physique alone was superior to any male Bellee had ever encountered.

Considering such a body and the value contained within...

In the world of Gluttony to come, he would be more than suitable for the position of consort to the Lord.

“I am no one’s consort.”

“Yes, consort.”

No matter what he said, such a future would not change.

“…”

Balkan stared at Bellee, who suddenly knelt and spoke in such a reverent tone, with a strange expression.

“Wh-What is this…”

“Consort …?! B-Balkan, don’t tell me! Are you married…?!”

The party members, who had been watching Bellee warily, also showed bewildered reactions.

Bellee, who had spoken arrogantly and not exactly warmly, was now kneeling with her head bowed.

It was as if she were displaying submission and obedience.

There was only one person who could make such a thing happen.

[What kind of magic did you use?]

Bunny had commanded Bellee to submit.

[Hmph. One day, you’ll bow your head to me and thank me yourself.]

Bunny grumbled in reply.

Her voice was slightly lower.

It seemed fatigue had set in after using her mental world, something that required gathering strength for months.

[...So, just keep your promise, you fool...]

With those words, Bunny quieted down once more.

“As the Lady has ordered, I will assist you, consort.”

“Wha-...! The Lady?!”

“Eep…!”

Belle looked at Rubia, who covered her mouth in shock, and Hitolis, who had gone pale and foamed at the mouth, before asking:

“Are they your harem?”

“What!”

“N-No, they are not!!”

Bellee turned back to me after watching Hitolis scream as if this was blasphemy and Rubia blush as she answered.

“I must support the Lady so that she can accomplish great things. Nightly service is part of that duty.”

[...She knows something…]

Balkan clutched his throbbing head while Bellee continued her remarks, with Bunny whispering in agreement in the background.

“...Haa.”

Balkan sighed deeply, holding his aching head.

I spoke privately with Bellee, away from the party members.

Bellee answered my questions sincerely.

As if she had nothing to hide—or couldn’t hide anything.

“To summarize, Bunny told you to assist in my growth, is that it?”

“Yes. Bunny... Is that a nickname? I assume it was inspired by the way her abundant, voluptuous body fills her clothes. It is a lovely nickname.”

Bellee smiled serenely, clasping her hands together in prayer.

She seemed to be recalling her meeting with Bunny in the mental world.

‘What am I supposed to do with her…?’

It wasn’t necessarily a bad situation.

Even though she had the strange idea that Bunny was the wife and I was the husband.

The goodwill of someone with nearly Level 50 skills wasn’t something to scoff at.

However, one ambiguous issue remained.

It was similar to the succubi I had met before, who served the worshippers of Lust.

‘A worshipper of Gluttony…’

A demon worshiper.

According to Nuer, they were nothing but a collective of lunatics and irredeemable trash.

And Bellee, among them, was the head of those who followed the Demon of Gluttony…

“Oh. You’re the only one left, right?”

“Yes. Sadly, those who walk the path of Gluttony were unable to overcome their endless hunger and eventually ate themselves. So now, I am the only one.”

With Bunny having only one follower—Bellee—calling her the “head” was a bit much.

‘She really does look the part, though.’

Judging by appearances alone, Bunny was undoubtedly an introverted, big-breasted pervert.

She didn’t have friends or followers.

Anyway, the important point was that Bellee was a Gluttony worshiper.

They were poorly regarded, both publicly and socially, and were hunted by powerful adventurers like Nuer and others in the Explorer’s Guild.

Of course, unless Bellee revealed it herself, no one would recognize her, but there were always a few perceptive adventurers.

‘I don’t want unnecessary misunderstandings.’

Before becoming a*n idiot,* Nuer was the type to fuss and bark, which could get annoying.

“Hm…”

At that moment, an idea flashed through my mind.

Nuer. Crybaby. Idiot. Stupid and blindly loyal. Grumpy. Pet slave.

Yes, a slave.

Following that odd train of thought, I arrived at a not-so-bad plan.

‘I don’t know if it’ll work, but…’

If it did, I could use Bellee more effectively.

“Kiieeeek!”

Thud! Thudududududu!

The desert worm convulsed violently.

Rubia’s barrier was mercilessly crushed under the intense pressure.

Moreover, the desert worm’s scream echoed deafeningly through its intestines.

A noise so unpleasant it felt like my eardrums would burst.

And the cause of that sound was undoubtedly Bellee, standing right in front of me.

“Mnum nyaaam...”

Crunch crunch crunch!

A brutal sound rang out, starkly contrasting with the seemingly cute voice.

Bellee was forcefully carving a path through the desert worm’s intestinal tissue, eating through the worm’s organs as she went.

Like a parasite boring through muscles and organs, Belle devoured the desert worm’s insides.

The desert worm thrashed its body and innards, as if trying to crush the parasite to death. However, Rubia’s barrier rendered all that effort meaningless.

“The desert worm is delicious. It tastes extraordinary because it has devoured so many other living creatures.”

I looked at Belle, her mouth stained with the desert worm’s blood.

Earlier, I’d struck a deal with Belle.

– *You absolutely must not eat humans. Got it?*
– *Wh-what? I can’t eat humans...?*
– *Absolutely not.*
– *Understood...I will not eat humans.*

Eating people was absolutely unacceptable under any circumstances.

– *Then...can I eat monsters?*

Instead, Belle had asked if she could eat the desert worm.

I hesitated for a moment before nodding, and this was the result.

Belle grew little by little every time she ate parts of the desert worm.

From a thin, frail girl, she was transforming into a slightly slender young woman.

Flesh filled out her previously bony frame, and her breasts and hips swelled.

All I could do was watch as Belle’s body slowly regained its curves.

At some point, the desert worm’s spasms stopped, making our party’s movements far smoother.

After devouring enough to grow a little, Belle followed behind me.

I had decided to travel with Belle to the Explorer Union’s Eden branch on the 15th floor.

There, I planned to seek advice from Idelbert.

*‘It’s been a while.’*

As I walked, I recalled the woman who would snap her black cat’s tail like a whip.

*‘I wonder if Idelbert’s weak spot is also her back door?’*

With that ridiculous thought lingering, I split open the desert worm’s sphincter with my axe and emerged.

“Balkan!! Hitolis!!!”

In the distance, countless figures scattered across the vast desert began sprinting toward us.

“Dammit, what did I tell you! I *knew* they were alive!”

“Dya du da da!!”

Jubeel, Nuer, and the rest of the party were there, along with the now-grown green slime Ain, Aldente.

“You bastards! Do you know how hard we worried, wondering if we’d have to send a rescue team all the way to the 15th floor?! Thank God!!”

“Nothing happened, right?”

“Nothing happened?! Getting swallowed by that giant worm was *nothing*?!”

“What? Jubeel, are you crying?”

“I’m not crying, you idiot!”

Jubeel shrieked, furiously rubbing her eyes before punching me in the arm.

Seeing her like that, I let out a small laugh.

She’s stubborn and often ridiculous, but there’s no denying her loyalty.

Well, it’s probably why she’s part of the team.

When I turned back, I could see the desert worm’s gaping hole sticking out of the ground.

Thanks to Belle, we managed to kill it, but hauling that carcass would be ridiculously difficult.

Looking around, I noticed the area had gotten crowded.

With our party and Fusilini’s group combined, there were quite a lot of people now.

“Thank you, Balkan. I will never forget this favor.”

“Tru lu tuu bababa.”

The mage Fusilini and slime Ain Aldente, who were tending to Gellan and Hope—still reeling from their traumatic experience—bowed their heads repeatedly.

“Yes. Don’t forget it. I’ll make sure to collect the price later.”

I intended to get a *very* thorough repayment for this.

As Fusilini began to sweat nervously, I asked, “What will you do now?”

“...”

With a weakened tank and a lone mage, it would be nearly impossible to reach the 15th floor.

Going back to the 12th floor would also require significant sacrifices, leaving them in a real bind.

“If you’re really in trouble, want to join our party?”

At my casual suggestion, the mage and slime’s eyes sparkled.

If I was going to help them, I planned to milk them for all they were worth.

The 14th floor passed by relatively smoothly.

Though Gellen and Hope were additional baggage, Belle, Fusilini, and Aldente added enough strength to handle any monster we faced.

“Ah, I liked the warmth.”

“Exactly. The 14th floor was like spring...”

From the snowy plains of the 12th floor, to the desert on the 13th, the next area had been a blooming forest of cherry blossoms.

It was almost disappointing that such a pleasant environment had been so short-lived.

“Well, the 15th floor is next, so who cares?”

Crossing this portal meant we’d finally get a chance to rest, so I didn’t mind too much.

“True. A floor without monsters...I don’t know how it was made, but it’s truly the best.”

“I... I can’t even imagine it...”

“They say it’s like a miniature labyrinth city, but... honestly, I have no idea what to expect.”

While the others talked excitedly about the 15th floor, I stood in front of the portal, tense.

*‘This time, I have to pass out.’*

The “event” I discovered back on the 10th floor.

Every 5 floors, my body undergoes a transformation--- a physical reconstitution that enhances my body’s abilities.

Reflexes, muscle efficiency, and skeletal strength all improve, but the price is excruciating pain.

Last time, I tried to endure it and suffered for it.

So this time, I planned to pass out before the pain could even begin.

“Got it. That thing from last time? I’ll handle it.”

Just in case, I’d explained the situation to Jubeel, like I had with Joy Hog before.

Then I braced myself, ready to collapse.

As the party gathered and we stepped toward the portal leading to the 15th floor...

“Dadtawaa!”

Nuer, perched on my back, suddenly tapped my helmet.

“Hey, you littl—”

As I reached up to grab the helmet before it slipped...

“Ah.”

My arm slipped away from the others, and the world changed.

“Shit—”

*Splash!*

I felt like I had fallen into a warm pool.

And then, before I could even register the pain of my body’s reconstitution, I lost consciousness.

“Phew...”

Idelbert carefully immersed her body into the warm bathwater.

Once a day, after a tedious, frustrating, and exhausting day, this was her blissful time.

Leaning both arms on the wide bathtub that symbolized her authority and looking up at the sky, a hollow feeling suddenly crept deep into her heart.

*Paang! Pang!*

Her black cat tail, half-submerged in the bathwater, whipped around like a lash, splashing and smacking the surface of the water.

After a while of splashing the water with her tail, Idelbert once again submerged herself into the tub and muttered absentmindedly.

“How’s that brat of a disciple doing...?”

It was a thought Idelbert had every time she took a break recently.

It had been far too long since she’d last seen him.

Was he training on time and becoming strong properly?

He still had to help pierce her maidenhood, after all. He couldn’t be slacking off too much.

Still, she didn’t like the thought of him pushing himself too hard and getting injured.

Moderation was best in everything, but that foolish disciple of hers had no sense of it.

Every time she turned around, he was almost dying in the labyrinth, and it was just like him to have the bad luck to meet the Demon of Gluttony—his troubles and accidents never seemed to stop–

*Splash!!!*

A sudden, unfamiliar sound erupted close by.

“Wha–”

Half-submerged in the bathwater, lost in her drowsy thoughts, Idelbert’s eyes shot open, searching for the source of the sound.

She didn’t need to look far.

The man who had fallen from the air was right in front of her.

The disciple brat she had just been thinking about.

Balkan, unconscious, had landed in front of the naked Idelbert.

...With his helmet half-loosened.