**Chapter 222: It's Been a While (2)**

When I returned to the inn, Diana was carrying a luggage box, so it was clear she was preparing for something.

However I didn't know it was preparation to open a second branch of the inn, and not on the ground, but in Eden on the 15th floor of the labyrinth.

"Why suddenly a second branch?"

Balkan asked carefully.

Diana, who they thought was living a leisurely life in retirement, wanting to open a second branch? And in the dangerous labyrinth at that?

Of course, she wasn't the type of person to be concerned about such dangers...but it was a bit sudden.

"Hmm. I thought it would be nice to have an inn like this on the 15th floor too."

Balkan knew that Diana wasn't running the inn and tavern for the purpose of making money.

She provided much cheaper and better quality accommodations than other inns, and though somewhat expensive, meals of excellent quality.

The inn she ran was clearly a good place for both ordinary labyrinth city people and explorers to visit.

It was the only sanctuary in the harsh labyrinth city, a tavern where happiness dwells, where those soaked in blood and frozen from cold could warmly laugh and chat.

That was the Cozy Winter Night Inn.

Diana seemed to want to create such a sanctuary in Eden, which was also called another labyrinth city but it's not easy to make such a decision just based on that thought alone.

Balkan stared intently at Diana.

Though Diana had her eyes gently closed, he could feel her eyes slightly avoiding his gaze.

"I'm sorry if I'm prying, but is there something you're uncomfortable telling me?"

"..."

Beads of cold sweat rolled down Diana's forehead as she smiled leisurely.

Finally, Diana sighed as if admitting defeat and said.

"...I was a bit lonely, being without Balkan for two months..."

The deeper you go down the labyrinth's levels, the longer it takes to return.

Diana experienced the feeling of longing while waiting for Balkan after a long time. She wanted to be by his side, to be with him, even if she couldn't join his adventures due to various restrictions.

She wanted to at least prepare a place that could serve as his resting place on the 15th floor, which would become the main base from now on.

Balkan had shown tremendous gratitude and apologetic feelings just for building one bathroom in the inn.

His joyful expressions always made Diana's heart flutter, but she hoped he wouldn't feel too burdened by her kindness.

So she had tried to divert Balkan's attention through talk of a second branch...

"So...damn. You're saying you wanted to open an inn all the way in Eden because you wanted to be with Master?"

"...yes."

When Diana nodded shyly at Denshi's words as he summarized the situation with an astonished face, Balkan spread his arms wide.

"Ah...Diana."

"Um, yes...?"

"Come here."

"...yes. Huuu..."

-Squeeze.

Diana, crushed by thick arms and torso, exhaled a hot breath. Her breasts were roughly squashed, providing an ecstatic sensation.

How could every single one of her actions be this cute?

Balkan couldn't help but wonder if the woman before him was really of similar age to that monster-like master.

After a moment of embrace, Diana, her face thoroughly flushed, continued speaking while fanning herself to cool down.

"So I was thinking of going to the 15th floor with Balkan on the next labyrinth trip...what do you think?"

"It would be my honor."

He felt like he'd gained an army of thousands. A labyrinth trip with Diana? What would there be to fear?

"Then what happens to the main branch...if that's what we should call it, this inn while we're gone?"

"There's someone who will take care of it while I'm in the labyrinth, so don't worry. Thanks to changing the contract to only having to show my face once every three months, the restrictions on my actions have become a bit looser."

"Contract?"

"Yes. Embarrassingly, because of a small incident I caused in the past, I'm in a position where I need to get permission from someone high up whenever I enter the labyrinth. Heheh."

Diana laughed it off as if it were nothing.

Behind us, Denshi carefully whispered in my ear.

"What kind of incident would make a high-ranking explorer's labyrinth access restricted?"

"I can hear everything, you know?"

"Ahem..."

At Diana's cold voice, Denshi hurriedly cleared her throat and turned her gaze away.

Though he didn't show it outwardly, Balkan had personally thought something similar.

What would one have to do to be banned from entering the labyrinth?

Considering her demeanor when surrounded by people at Ellie's graduation ceremony and Diana's character, it probably wasn't anything criminal.

From various circumstances he'd heard, it seemed past Diana was quite a troublemaker, so maybe she caused an incident in her youthful vigor...

"Still, I was able to change the contract on the condition of serving as the princess's escort, so that's really fortunate."

His eyes grew round at her following words.

"The princess' escort?"

Because it was quite an unusual statement.

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The Labyrinth City Valerus was a place that has long prospered due to the existence of the only Labyrinth on the continent, where light and darkness exist only as blurry boundaries.

And outside such Valerus, there naturally exists a wider world and the kingdom that embraces Valerus.

"Of course, since Valerus occupies more than half of the Arlonia Kingdom's territory and holds the most important value, the royal palace sits prominently in the deepest part of the noble district. Well, I've only heard about it."

"Indeed, there's no place in the current continent that prospers as much as Valerus."

Diana nodded at Denshi's words.

Balkan also quietly agreed with their words. There was no disagreement about Valerus being a prosperous city.

It's just that he only went back and forth between the weapon shop lines while running around the labyrinth every day.

The noble district, temple district, and the bustling commercial areas near the explorer district were quite luxurious places.

And escorting the royalty, who were clearly the ruling power of the most prosperous city on the continent, was impossible without considerable trust and fame.

"It's the 2nd Princess's birthday in a week. I was able to get permission to enter the labyrinth on the condition that I attend and escort the princess that day."

"It's the 2nd Princess's birthday, but you need to escort her?"

He changed his expression at the somewhat chilling story.

Could there be forces targeting the princess of a nation?

Various stories naturally formed in his mind. Like messy succession struggles.

"Mmm, it's not what you're worried about, Balkan. The two get along quite well."

He realized that the 'two' Diana mentioned referred to the 2nd Princess and someone else, probably the 1st Princess.

"Then there shouldn't be much danger..."

"Danger doesn't only exist inside. Since ancient times, danger has always come from the outside. Have you ever heard the story of the Red-Haired Minotaur?"

"...Don't tell me that rumor was true?"

Denshi made an incredulous expression at Diana's words. When I looked at her questioningly, she continued.

"It's a bit hazy since it was so long ago, but there was a rumor that the Red-Haired Minotaur, called the Extinctionist, appeared at the 2nd Princess's birthday banquet and brought a bloodbath."

"It wasn't quite a bloodbath, but it's already been well over 10 years ago."

Diana muttered as if reminiscing about old times.

I thought perhaps she might have experienced it firsthand rather than through rumors.

"Anyway. That Extinctionist...Goth, who worships the demon of wrath, has recently started moving again, and since it coincides with the princess's birthday, I've been assigned to escort the 2nd Princess just in case."

While the succubi who followed the worshipper of lust had gone with Nuer to search for clues, unlike them, the whereabouts of Goth, the red-haired minotaur who worshipped the demon of wrath, seemed to be somewhat known.

Well, after attacking not just some noble but a princess, one would have to live as a fugitive avoiding pursuit for life, what else could they do?

Rather, it was more surprising that she was still alive until now.

"Then you'll be away during that time."

"I suppose so."

"It'll be lonely while you're gone."

"Hmm?"

Diana tilted her head at the quietly muttered words.

"Ar-aren't you coming with me...?"

"What? How could I go there? Who am I to do that?"

Balkan expressed doubt at her words that assumed he would naturally come along.

While something like Ellie's graduation ceremony would be understandable, how could he attend a royal birthday party? It would surely be filled with distinguished nobles.

"You could enter if you come with me..."

Even if it might be possible for a high-ranking explorer who held important power and authority in the labyrinth city, it wasn't a place for a mere explorer whose status badge barely touched the middle-lower ranks to tag along.

Rather, he could spend time experimenting more with the dragon's heart blessing he recently obtained or ask Zirnier to make new armor with all the gold coins he just earned...Ah.

He realized that even Zirnier had left for the royal palace to repair the 2nd Princess's armor.

In the end, the only thing he could do alone was magic training, and even that would be much easier if Ellie, who had gone as a royal magician, could teach him...

But honestly, more than those reasons.

"Um...so you didn't want to come...I just, really it's nothing. After the escort duty is done, I thought we might look at the moon together... The night sky viewed from the royal palace is really beautiful, so I wanted to see it together...Ugh. I-I'm not asking you to come along forcefully if you don't want to, so don't feel too pressured-"

The woman before him, stumbling over her words due to embarrassment, was...too cute.

No other calculation was needed. Diana wanted to be with him.

Isn't that reason enough to move?

"Alright. Let's go together."

"R-really?!"

When he spoke as if admitting defeat, Diana's gloomy face rapidly bloomed into a bright smile.

How could he refuse this?