**Chapter 231: Secret Meeting (2)**

The chilly air settling in the reception room wasn't just my imagination.

The unconscious trembling of magical power was strong enough to make the surrounding air cold - a sign of intense emotional change.

One didn't need to roll their eyes to know where it was coming from.

"Your Majesty."

Diana opened her closed eyes and stared at the Queen expressionlessly.

Balkan took a sip of the tea that was turning into slush and slowly put down the cup.

Just as he was about to open his mouth in a situation where he deserved praise for not spitting out the tea he was drinking.

"Haha. It was a joke. Don't glare at me like that."

Teles waved her hand toward Diana with a playful gesture.

'As expected, the resistance is fierce.'

Even looking again, it was hard to believe that Diana had changed this much.

To think she would make such an expression just because someone touched a man who was merely by her side.

Apart from such surprise, there was a bitter taste in her mouth.

'What a shame. Such a desirable child.'

It had been several years since the second princess, the only daughter who had thoughts of inheriting the throne, had been confined to her room.

After the promising heir received what should rightfully be called a curse rather than a blessing.

Even though she had voluntarily changed into a fragile child who couldn't even think of leaving her room and trembled when facing people, Teles hadn't given up hope and had tried various means but none of them had any effect.

Just when it seemed like they would have to give up, at the birthday party held while clinging to one last hope, change finally occurred.

The daughter who would fall into panic and become too scared to speak properly when facing strangers gave a brief speech in front of everyone, displaying royal dignity to the fullest.

Although she had watched through magic from afar, Teles couldn't forget that scene.

And she didn't miss where her daughter's eyes were directed either.

'She must have fallen in love at first sight.'

Looking again, it was understandable.

Balkan had an appearance worthy of being called a national beauty.

Who could think that face belonged to the warrior who defeated the notorious doomsayer?

It was truly fortunate that he usually covered his face.

What use would it be for such a warrior to be known for his looks rather than his martial prowess?

Surely her daughter must have found courage looking at him so Teles decided to support her daughter's feelings.

It would be quite troublesome if she were forced into a political marriage like her in the past and ended up having an affair with a dwarf.

'It's better to do it properly in one go.'

Looking at the etiquette just shown and how deeply Diana was infatuated, his character must be decent.

While laughing heartily, Teles carefully observed Balkan's appearance.

It's natural to become more interested in trivial matters as one ages.

Even as the queen of a nation preparing for retirement, or rather because of such a position, she was more interested in such sweet love stories.

"...I would prefer if you didn't say such things, even as a joke."

Diana said this while still glaring at Teles.

This was because she felt that Teles had only verbally moved past the situation, but hadn't yet given up on Balkan.

One of the main reasons she accepted Denshi was because Balkan wanted it.

But what if Balkan was forced to take a woman due to external pressure rather than his own will?

Diana was ready to gladly stick an ice arrow in them.

"Ho ho. It might not be a joke, who knows? No one can predict what will happen. It's up to the two of them.

"...Sigh..."

"Well. Let's leave that talk for later, the reason I called you here is for this."

At Teles' gesture, Knight Commander Seton, who had been standing behind her, moved.

-Swoosh.

A scroll was spread out on the table.

Several unfamiliar pieces of equipment were drawn on that scroll.

"These are relics dropped by the doomsayer when they retreated. Think of it as a distribution of spoils of war."

"The doomsayer's relics...!"

Balkan's mouth watered.

No wonder the Pride's Worshipper dropped something in bulk when they left.

"I plan to distribute these to everyone who protected my daughter this time, but since you two made the greatest contribution, I'll give you priority."

"We are grateful for Your Majesty's grace."

"Grace? It doesn't sit well with me, as if I'm stealing your achievements."

"But haven't you given us the right to choose like this? That's enough."

"How do you speak such pretty words...ahem."

If the attack had happened outside the royal palace, they could have just taken everything, but given the location, such things weren't permitted.

Still, Balkan was satisfied to have received priority among impressive figures like Diana, Professor Manko Steel, and Duke Rohart, and checked the scroll with a content face.

A wine cup, a map, a bracelet and a jewel.

"The royal mages have appraised these items, so the performance should be accurate."

Brief descriptions of each relic were written below the four drawings.

Unfortunately, the doomsayer's axe that he wanted most wasn't there.

Even while dying after being hit by Diana's arrow, she hadn't let go of that weapon.

The wine cup was the first to be excluded from priorities.

It only had the minor function of making drinks poured into it taste better.

The map was also passed.

Although it was a relic map that showed the optimal route from the 30th to 34th floor, it was a story for the distant future since he hadn't even broken through the 20th floor yet, let alone the 30th.

What remained were the bracelet and the jewel.

The bracelet had the ability to increase strength, while the jewel was said to contain a sleeping fairy.

I pondered for a moment with my hand on my chin.

While the bracelet's function was straightforward enough to just take, my eyes kept being drawn to the jewel that supposedly contained a sleeping fairy.

Seeing my contemplative look, Diana whispered softly.

"I recommend choosing the jewel."

"Yes."

I immediately reached for the scroll with the jewel drawn on it.

Then, as if putting my arm into a subspace, my hand went smoothly into the scroll.

Feeling something grab inside, I pulled my hand out, and a purple jewel with a mysterious glow appeared in reality.

"...Ho ho. You choose right after hearing such words? How do you know if that fairy will be helpful to you or not?"

"Diana is my benefactor. She wouldn't give advice that would harm me."

"Hmm..."

Teles laughed at Balkan's words as he held the fairy-inhabited jewel.

'Does that man even realize that the woman beside him is in heat from what he just said?'

If it's a man who can say such things with that face as naturally as breathing...

'I might get to see lots of grandchildren.'

Her daughter, who was already practically immune to men, might be in considerable danger.

The turn passed to Diana.

Diana chose the bracelet without hesitation.

Diana met Teles' eyes and smiled slyly.

"Surely there aren't any childish restrictions about not giving rewards to others?"

"Do as you please. That too is your choice."

Only then did Diana wear a satisfied smile and put the relic bracelet into subspace.

When the selection was over, the Knight Commander collected the scroll.

"You may go now. Feel free to drink more tea if you'd like."

At Teles' words, Balkan moistened his throat with tea.

It was because he was exhausted from the marriage proposal and the invisible power struggle between Diana and the Queen.

After spending some awkward time like that, he got up.

"Explorer Balkan."

As he was about to follow Diana, who had left the reception room first, he turned his head at the voice calling him and couldn't help but open his eyes wide.

"Thank you so much for saving my daughter."

The queen of a nation was bowing her head to him.

"P-please don't do this, Your Majesty. I merely repaid my debt to the princess."

"Still, the fact that you saved my bloodline remains unchanged. Please accept this gratitude."

"...Sigh. I understand."

I wanted to end this uncomfortable situation quickly.

Even setting aside the vast difference in status, it wasn't very comfortable to have a grandmother with a warm impression bowing her head.

"Thank you again. I too have incurred a debt to you. A very large debt. If you ever have any difficulties, please let me know. I'll do everything in my power."

"Haha...Thank you."

Balkan laughed heartily and faced the Queen who had raised her head, then smiled bitterly.

Clearly, he was the one who had left a large debt to the queen of a nation, yet somehow he felt like a collar had been put on him.

"I hope I can see you again next time."

"I too will look forward to next time."

Balkan showed his respects and left the reception room again.

-Creeeeak.

From beyond the automatically closing door, a small voice was heard.

"A debt to my daughter..."

The voice that seemed pleased to know there was a story between Balkan and Celsia that she didn't know about became inaudible as the door completely closed.

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On the way back to the lodgings after leaving the reception room the full moon hung in the darkened sky.

"...It really is beautiful."

"Heehee. Right? I originally brought you just to see the moon, but ended up making you go through something incredible."

"It's fine. Thanks to that, I got to fight someone like that. And I got this too."

Balkan smiled while showing the fairy-inhabited jewel.

A rare Labyrinth creature different from the spirits of Wind Valley - a fairy.

"Fairies are rare even on the 30th floor, and this is a jewel that can grow and hatch one...We were really lucky."

According to Diana, this wasn't just a simple relic.

If you tame the fairy that wakes from this jewel well, it can be used in various ways not only in Labyrinth exploration but also in daily life.

Although I wasn't sure how long it would take to resurrect, I thought there might be progress if I kept it close like a mother hen.

Nodding with satisfaction, I returned to my lodgings while enjoying the full moon with Diana.

Unfortunately, we had separate rooms.

It couldn't be helped since we couldn't openly have an inappropriate relationship in the royal palace, and we had to be mindful of others staying in different lodgings.

I lay down on the bed that had become even larger and softer in the newly assigned lodgings after saving Celsia.

I felt an ecstatic sensation like floating on clouds. As expected of an artifact bed prepared for honored guests.

What would it feel like to mate here? Would it feel like mating while flying in the sky?

As soon as my body became comfortable, random thoughts started flooding in.

Like how it's already been over a week when I told Denshi I'd come back in three days...

Or whether Ellie, who had muttered something while looking at the portal created by Pride's Worshipper, was okay...

Although I wasn't too worried since I left her with Rubia, Ellie was somehow strange at that time...

-Knock knock.

While having such thoughts, there was a careful knock at the door.

I was too lazy to move and closed my eyes to turn on my perception, but my body sprang up immediately.

My body, which had bounced up like a spring, headed straight for the door.

When I flung open the door, nothing was visible.

"Ah, down here..."

At the small voice, I lowered my gaze to find a small woman barely reaching my solar plexus standing there.

The second princess Celsia, wearing an even more fluttery...negligee that looked like sleepwear.

"Pr-Princess Celsia!"

"Sh-Shh...!"

When I spoke in a loud voice, she looked startled and hurriedly looked around while putting her index finger to her lips.

"If, if you speak too loudly...ev-everyone will hear...because it's night... qu-quietly..."

"Ah, yes...But may I ask why you came..."

"Ah, th-that...ummm..."

As if flustered by the sudden question, Celsia, who had been nervously tapping her index fingers together and rubbing her fingerprints, carefully opened her mouth.

"Um, I was wondering if we could talk for a moment..."

Along with a voice that seemed slightly wet with moisture, a man's figure was reflected in her green eyes.

"...Just the two of us..."