**Chapter 243: Familiar and different Parties (2)**

After finishing my conversation with Lammel, I requested a meeting with the Vice Guild Master through the counter clerk.

"Please come this way."

As if permission had already been granted from the Vice Guild Master's side, the clerk led me directly to the Vice Guild Master's office without saying anything else.

Unfortunately, I couldn't bring Denshi along, so I left her in the lobby and arrived at the Vice Guild Master's office.

-Knock knock.

"Come in."

Permission was granted as soon as the female clerk knocked on the door.

Through the door she opened, I faced Vice Guild Master Yonel Freya, a woman with a young girl-like appearance who had a small yellow chick on her head.

Like last time, Yonel Freya was surrounded by various small animals like sparrows, hawks, eagles, cats, and dogs, wearing a deep smile at the corners of her mouth.

'Did something good happen?'

Although the atmosphere was casual towards me, I don't think she usually had such a grinning expression.

While thinking that, I first bowed my head.

"Thank you for agreeing to meet with me, Vice Guild Master."

"No need to thank me. You're here to receive the compensation I mentioned at the banquet, right?"

"Yes."

"From what I saw, it seems you need a mage?"

I did feel some gazes while talking with Lammel, both ordinary explorers' gazes and mysteriously profound gazes that far surpassed mine.

I noticed animals with golden eyes identical to Yonel Freya's around her.

Just like last time, it seemed she could share vision with animals, like the sparrow familiar that the Lust worshipper controlled.

That must be how she knows so well about what just happened.

"That's true, but I could find one if I tried."

It was a lie. Honestly, the situation is a bit desperate, because it's not easy to replace high-level personnel like mages.

A skilled mage who can handle various environments in the labyrinth, additionally, a mage with the courage to venture deeper than the 15th floor has value worth their weight in gold.

Still, I maintained my composure as I answered.

There's no need to show others how desperate our situation is.

"Really? These days everyone is focused on reinforcing their parties because more and more disturbances are being heard from the labyrinth. Finding a mage won't be easy, you know?"

"Our party is now somewhat established, so I think many mages would find us attractive."

"Hmm. Is that so? That's too bad. I happened to know a skilled and talented mage who's preparing to enter the labyrinth, and I was going to introduce them."

"...There's such a person?"

Yonel Freya is the Vice Guild Master of the Explorers Guild.

For someone with enough credit to attend Celsia's birthday party and who has seen many skilled individuals to recommend a mage like this?

This was a rare opportunity.

"Interested? Ah, this won't count as compensation, so don't worry too much."

I felt my guard lowering at her words.

When the mage topic came up right after discussing compensation, I was wary thinking she might try to settle it by making connections, but apparently that wasn't the case.

If so, there's no need to keep my guard up so high.

Good intentions should be well received.

"Honestly, I do need one."

At my answer, Yonel Freya's mouth corners drew a deep curve.

"They happen to be right nearby, want to meet them?"

Being able to meet right away is even better. Just checking their status window would be a great help in making a judgment.

"Yes."

"Good. Since it's someone you know well too, they wouldn't be bad as a party member."

When I nodded, Yonel Freya snapped her fingers.

-Snap!

Right after, sounds of commotion and hurried footsteps climbing the stairs could be heard from below.

By the way, someone I know well?

...No way?

For a moment, my head went cold.

A mage worthy of the Vice Guild Master's praise, someone who could be right below her floor, someone I know well...

"May I come in?"

"Yes. Come in."

The brief thought ended there.

Someone carefully opened the door and entered the Vice Guild Master's office.

"Hik...! W-why are you...?!"

Her eyes widened the moment she saw me.

Even though I had roughly predicted who would come in.

"...What is that...?"

When I saw her fashion, I couldn't help but gape blankly.

On her uniquely mature body even among elves was a cute and bright yellow…outfit like kindergarten clothes, a pacifier worn around her neck like a necklace and a yellow chick hat on her head.

"U, ungie..."

Dark Elf mage Noir, a perfectly regressed baby-like mage was standing there.

"......"

"......"

The moment our eyes met, Noir silently covered her clothes with her hands.

Apparently, she seemed to know her current outfit was embarrassing.

Last time it was bikini armor, and this time kindergarten clothes?

It was really difficult to accept the sight of a mature dark elf who must be several times my age walking around in kindergarten attire.

"Noir. The healing wasn't perfect last time, is this appearance also a side effect?"

Noir, who had been frozen like stone and just blushing with shame, nodded her head frantically as if she'd found an escape route from my question.

"Uh, uh? Ah, yes. That's right! I, I didn't want to wear clothes like this, but my mind only feels at ease when I wear these clothes. So I had no choice but to wear them. Really. I truly had no choice."

As she spoke, a sweet and seductive scent unique to an aroused female wafted from Noir's body.

Despite leaking such lewd dick-arousing pheromones that would anger any dick, she dares to make excuses claiming she had no special sexual preferences or desires?

Suspicion rose up but I nodded for now.

Though her outfit was questionable, there was no need to doubt Noir's abilities as a mage.

"But why is Noir going to the labyrinth?"

Though I don't know much about her, I can guess what kind of person she is from what's happened so far and conversations with Idelbert.

Noir must be one of the people Idelbert called shadows, who handle the dirty work that happens in the labyrinth city.

Like disposing of trash outlaws, or hunting demon worshippers like when searching for succubi in the lawless zone.

Why would someone who did such work now enter the labyrinth?

To that question, Noir answered with a slightly less embarrassed expression.

"You've heard the news that monsters possessing magi started appearing in large numbers in the labyrinth since last week, right?"

"Yes. To deal with those monsters?"

"Yeah. It's rare for labyrinth monsters to suddenly get stronger and run wild like this without any precursors. Someone must be pulling strings behind the scenes. Magi resonates with magical energy, so when a monster with dense magi appears, other monsters are also affected, albeit slightly. We need to eliminate them as soon as possible."

-Thunk.

As Noir finished speaking, a dog near Yonel Freya approached and held out some documents.

"Read this."

It was essentially the same as being handed documents by the Vice Guild Master herself.

The three or four pages of documents contained photo-like drawings of monsters and information about them.

What caught my eye first was a skeletal monster wearing a black robe.

A body without a single piece of flesh, like a skeleton.

However, black energy that gave off an unusual atmosphere was rippling around the monster's eye sockets and heart area.

"...This doesn't look easy."

Moreover, I've seen that energy before on the chimera monster I faced in the relic warehouse on the 16th floor.

It gave a similar feeling to the magi that was attached to that one.

Sure enough, that name came from Yonel Freya's mouth.

"Elder Lich. One of the experimental monsters controlled by the Sloth worshipper. It took up residence in the swamp cemetery on the 19th floor two days ago and is gathering all the corpses in the surrounding area. Since it's also a monster that handles necromancy, it'll be troublesome if we leave it alone."

"...Is that so?"

I deliberately responded with an indifferent attitude.

The intention behind telling me this in person was obvious.

"What a dangerous monster. What are the high-rank explorers doing instead of catching it?"

"Similar monsters have already appeared in the lower floors too. Four days ago, a demon experiment subject appeared in the relic warehouse on the 24th floor and we sent people to deal with it."

"Is there a shortage of personnel?"

"Not quite that bad."

-Swoosh.

Yonel Freya took something out from her bosom and placed it on the desk.

It was not a wooden explorer identification tag for low-rank explorers, but a sophisticated silver mid-rank explorer identification tag and a heavy pouch of gold coins.

"I was hoping the rumored explorer called the Knight of Light, who showed remarkable skills at the royal palace, would lend his strength."

The chimera monster was certainly a troublesome opponent, but because it handled magi, it had clear compatibility with the Blessing of Radiance and the Elder Lich shouldn't be much different.

"This is advance payment. The subjugation reward will be half of this again, plus a necklace-type HP increase artifact. Though it's an artifact, it's a high-grade item comparable to average mid-grade relics."

I quietly examined the gold coin pouch she handed over.

Even at a glance, it seemed to contain over thirty coins.

Considering we received about 40 gold coins for annihilating the turf clan in the back alleys, the fact that Elder Lich offers an even bigger reward meant it possessed combat power exceeding their entire group combined.

Moreover, for a single monster to be worth that much.

"Ah. By the way, since Noir was scheduled to be deployed to the party for catching this one, party membership will be off the table if you don't accept the request. Instead, if you deal with the Elder Lich this time, I'll arrange a long-term party contract with Noir under good conditions."

At the Vice Guild Master's following words, I scratched the back of my head with a bitter smile.

Until just now she spoke like she would give Noir anytime, but now she's taking Noir hostage?

'Did I show too much interest?'

It was a mistake. As expected, someone at the level of Explorer Vice Guild Master isn't easy to deal with but it can't be helped either.

Although we're also a party with quite good skills and could find a quite useful mage if we invested several months, we can't be certain how long it would take.

It's also unknown whether such a mage would show as much sense as Lammel.

"Eh. Vice Guild Master. What about my opinion...?"

"You don't want to?"

"Ah, no. It's not that I don't want to... u, uu... ttudda..."

While hearing Noir's "ttudda" sound, I fell into contemplation.

From the party's perspective, about 50 gold coins, a relic-grade artifact and a long-term party contract with level 40-range mage Noir are quite attractive.

Personally, besides the chance to find traces of the Sloth worshipper, taking down the magi-possessing Elder Lich could also aim for growth of the Blessing of Radiance.

If lucky, I might also get a soul stone imbued with magi to grow Bunny but risks still exist.

As a monster that appeared on the 19th floor, moreover, since it's a monster that handles necromancy, it was obvious that even just meeting Elder Lich would be disgustingly tricky.

"I don't think I can make the decision alone. Would it be alright if I discuss with my party members and give you an answer?"

"Of course. But let me know within two days. If you refuse, I'll need to send another explorer party."

In the end, I decided to postpone the choice for now because the labyrinth isn't a place I can navigate alone.

If I want to do something, getting party members' consent comes first.

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Explorer District Guard Station.

"Please come this way."

I followed the guard with a half-dead expression down to the underground solitary cells.

"Save me, save me...I want to get out, I want to get out of here..."

"It stinks. It stinks. I hate the smell...I hate the breast milk smell... I don't want to get aroused by this smell..."

"Please kill me. Either kill me or kill that bastard please..."

-Screech. Screech screech.

Arriving at a cell amid sounds of fingernails scratching cell doors and prisoners' lifeless pleas.

-Creeeak.

When the guard opened the cell door, the woman inside came into view.

-Gulp. Gulp.

"Kyahaa...!"

The cow beastkin with an innocent country girl's face, who had been sucking on her own obscenely large milk tanks, put them down and greeted me with a smile spread across her face.

"It's Balkan after all! You came to get me out!"