**Chapter 263: Who are you? (3)**

Diana, the inn's owner, had not yet returned since she said she would visit Idelbert.

So, in her absence, I greeted those who came to the inn.

"We're still preparing to open. I'd like to offer you some food, but we don't have a chef, let alone ingredients."

"Ah, that's alright—"

The priest and paladin’ expressions hardened when they saw me carrying four large beer mugs.

"It's tea. Black tea. I couldn't find teacups, so I put it in these. Do you dislike black tea?"

"No! We thought it was beer...We'll drink it gratefully."

They looked relieved when I said it was tea, not beer.

As I set the beer mugs down on the table in front of them, Jeremy scratched his head with a confused expression.

"Brother. Why do I have beer?"

"Can't you drink alcohol?"

"When I was a man, I couldn't drink a single drop, but since my body changed, I can drink a little."

"Then just drink it."

I said this as I downed my beer mug.

The cold beer moistened my dry throat, and the bubbling carbonation awakened my senses.

"Kuheu!!"

There's nothing as delicious as beer after returning from dungeon exploration.

The best would have been Diana's freshly made warm soup, but since she wasn't here, I had to satisfy my craving with beer.

I picked up a peanut I'd brought out as a simple snack and asked those seated at the table.

"So, what brings you here?"

"Ah, well—"

"Actually—"

Jeremy and the priests spoke at the same time.

After looking around nervously, Jeremy gestured for the priests to speak first.

It meant they hadn't come for the same reason.

Hope briefly bowed to Jeremy, cleared his throat, and then exclaimed to me.

"Paladin Balkan! Our Earth Mother's Order is always ready to accept you! Please join our order and prosper!"

Staring blankly at Hope after such a direct statement, I saw Paladin Beer touch her forehead.

"...Sigh. May I speak on his behalf?"

"...That's rather surprising. Please explain."

Beer carefully explained the situation after moistening her lips with the black tea in the beer mug.

Beer's explanation could be summarized in one phrase: talent recruitment.

Hope and Beer had clearly seen me cut down the Elder Lich and heal Denshi with the holy power of the Blessing of Radiance.

"You may not realize it, but that's truly no easy feat. It requires immense talent and skill in handling holy power."

"That's right! Not only us! Among the high priests and paladins, only Lady Serif can handle holy power like you can!"

Perhaps because they had received much help from me, Hope praised me enthusiastically with sparkling eyes.

It was somewhat unsettling to receive such a look from a man, but it wasn't bad to receive emotions close to worship.

'Even so, is it really to that extent?'

While the holy power emitted by the Blessing of Radiance was acknowledged as excellent even by Serif, I didn't think it was comparable to Serif, who was a Saint.

Even though my skill in handling magical and holy power had improved through investing chunks of technique, I still needed more training.

Beer calmed the overly excited Hope and carefully continued.

"When I mentioned your valor to a mid-level priest I know, they showed great interest. They would like to arrange a simple meeting with you, if possible. That's why we came."

Mid-level priest.

Compared to explorers, it seems similar to a mid-level explorer, but for those with high value like priests or paladins, it's rated about half a rank higher.

In effect, it's equivalent to an upper mid-level explorer.

As a priest, they might not have direct combat ability, but someone of that stature was requesting a meeting.

'Should I meet them?'

Suddenly, the face of a pure white cat beastkin flashed through my mind.

Priest Serif had helped me in many ways, thanks to her secret teachings, Denshi was able to return from the brink of death.

Why did her face come to mind at the mention of meeting another priest?

'It feels somewhat like cheating...'

But such thoughts quickly ended. Didn't I realize the importance of priests during this dungeon expedition?

With the possibility of danger anywhere, anytime, there was absolutely nothing wrong with establishing connections with skilled priests.

'If it's just a simple conversation, there shouldn't be a big problem.'

I have no intention of joining a temple anyway.

I realized that the current me cannot belong to that stuffy group obsessed with purity and chastity.

However, I was still willing to maintain relationships with capable individuals who belonged to that organization.

"May I know the priest's name?"

"Of course. It's Reverend Louis Jellicy. May I take this as acceptance?"

"Yes. Then when shall we meet...?"

"We'll accommodate your schedule, Sir Balkan."

"Let's make it tomorrow."

"Tomorrow...That's fine with us, but are you sure, Sir Balkan? You might not have fully recovered from the fatigue of the Elder Lich subjugation."

"It's fine. I'm confident in my stamina."

I squeezed my muscles to make a bulge, but since I was still wearing armor, they couldn't see it.

Only Paladin Beer, being a female warrior, sensed the energy and was slightly surprised.

Eventually, Beer, with a subtle smile, bowed her head.

"Understood. Then we'll come to escort you at noon tomorrow."

"The temple is just a few steps away, there's no need to trouble yourselves—"

"You've granted our request, so we should at least show this much courtesy. We'll see you tomorrow."

With those words, Hope and Beer rose from the table.

"You're leaving already?"

"It's getting late, and it wouldn't be proper for us to converse longer with a gentleman at this hour."

The clock was already pointing to late night.

Perhaps due to her superior mental discipline as a mid-level paladin, Beer, who had responded gently despite her gruff first impression, bowed her head to me.

"Thank you for the tea."

"We'll see you tomorrow, Sir Balkan!!!"

After seeing off Beer, who bowed her head, and Hope, who enthusiastically called my name, I looked at the figure still remaining at the table.

"You really are different, brother. To think that the priests and paladins of that order would court you so fervently..."

Jeremy. He... no, she was nodding her head with an expression that said "as expected of brother."

"Enough with the flattery... Is that what you came to see?"

"...Yes."

Right before the battle with the Elder Lich, I had encouraged Jeremy with these words:

—Anya. She has been resurrected as a Dullahan.

Jeremy must have been anxious about whether those words were true or not.

After seeing Jeremy's face full of tension, I called for Denshi, who was in the inn.

Denshi came down the stairs with a clatter, and Ellie was with her.

"Master! You've returned!"

"You didn't know? I knew."

"Tsk. We were in the middle of a serious conversation, so I couldn't find a chance to come out, Ellie. My hearing is as good as Ellie's, you know?"

"Hmph. No matter what, humans have their limits in hearing ability, how could it match an elf's?"

"Do you know how many traps I avoided and enemies I detected first with these ears during this dungeon expedition? My ears are better than Ellie's. And what you just said is human discrimination, you ear freak."

"...What?! Are you done talking?"

"Yes, I am."

My eyes widened as I watched Ellie and Denshi bickering with each other.

After their previous confrontation, Ellie and Denshi had not spoken to each other.

Even when they did converse, it was only for necessary information sharing during dungeon exploration.

They hadn't conversed at all, so it was quite surprising to see them attempting to talk to each other like this, even if they were a bit irritable.

What kind of development had occurred in their relationship during the short time I was away at the Explorers' Union?

"Were you two talking?"

"...Mmm. A little? But more importantly, Jeremy?"

Denshi's eyes, who had been hesitating to answer while clutching the collar around her neck, turned to her former party member.

"Ah! Miss Denshi! It's been a while! I couldn't greet you properly in the dungeon because there wasn't enough time!"

"Better late than never. It really has been a long time! But what brings you here?"

"Well, that..."

I spoke to Denshi, who was expressing doubt.

"Bring my spatial backpack."

"Ah! Got it!"

Denshi, who had roughly guessed what I wanted her to bring, quickly went up to my room.

"...Oppa. What's this? Wasn't she just one of the necromancers we saved this time?"

Ellie, who had naturally sat down next to me, asked while glancing at Jeremy.

"Yes. My former party member."

"Eh...? Ah, ahem! I'm Ellie Ordia. A royal magician and a genius who graduated from the academy at the top of her class. Nice to meet you."

Ellie, who had been instinctively spreading an aura of wariness while fluttering her elf ears as she looked at the large breasts of the trans woman Jeremy, quickly changed her expression and greeted her with a gentle smile.

"Oh. Ah, yes... Royal magician... Heek..."

"Master! I brought it!"

As Jeremy was flustered by that reaction that was close to a complete change, Denshi approached with a tightly wrapped bundle.

-Clack clack clack!

The object, which was making clacking sounds even while wrapped in the bundle, began to emit a frenzied aura when it sensed Jeremy's presence.

Eventually, it broke free from Ellie's hands and charged towards Jeremy's embrace, striking the floor with its jaw.

-Swish.

As Jeremy received it, the wrapping naturally unfolded.

-Clack! Clack clack clack!

"Ah, aah... Aaaah!!!"

Jeremy's eyes immediately reddened as she faced the head, Dullahan Anya, that was welcoming her by clacking its jaw.

Who wouldn't be happy to know that the woman who had lovingly accepted her even with a 2cm clitoral penis had resurrected, albeit unstably?

Even in a world where the concept of chastity has been shattered, the emotions felt would not be much different.

Jeremy, who had now begun to cry to the point of wailing, kept bowing her head to me, saying thank you so much for taking care of Anya until now, as expected of brother.

I, Denshi, and Ellie left the inn, leaving Jeremy behind so that she, who had only looked forward to today's reunion, could express her joy more honestly.