**Chapter 278: Hello? (2)**

Early in the morning, the quiet dawn air drove away the drowsiness.

The labyrinth city Valerus has no distinct seasons.

It's basically cool, but some days are hot.

The 15th floor, Eden, also had a similar environment to Valerus.

The appropriately cold air clearly awakens the mind of a hunter heading into battle.

"Grrrr..."

From the moment I wake up, I start my usual routine.

I take time to stretch so that my muscles aren't surprised, and after finishing my shower, I put on the dark full body armor with a clean body and mind.

Clank—

The sound of the armor stepping on the ground resonates heavily.

The feeling of wearing a full metal armor is different from wearing ordinary leather armor.

Of course, the cool steel armor and leather made from the body heat of prey are different in material, but should I say the mindset is different?

I feel more strongly that I'm about to go hunting, and I feel a sense of duty that I should protect the party members by taking the lead.

As if the one wearing the heaviest and hardest armor fulfills that responsibility but just this once, I'll say goodbye to that responsibility and sense of duty.

Those who accompany me today are not beings that I need to protect.

'It might be the opposite.'

-Clank!

I smiled slightly and hung Bunny on my back.

[You're excited. Very.]

[You're excited too.]

[Hmph. Envy’s Worshipper. You, Balkan, surprisingly, you have quite a talent for menu selection.]

It's a story for when we successfully catch the Envy Worshipper, but it will be good nourishment for Bunny, who grows by absorbing the magi of opponents.

As I left the room with my spatial backpack filled with daily necessities and food, and headed towards the stairs, familiar faces welcomed me.

"Oppa! Did you sleep well?"

"Yes. Ellie is healthy from the morning too."

As Ellie approached with her red hair in my face, I messed it up, and she smiled broadly with the corners of her mouth drooping.

"I slept for two hours last night! After going to the 19th floor last time, the portal magic research has shown more progress...!"

Portal magic, which has tremendous potential to cross space, but is still unstable.

Perhaps the portal magic sample collected during the previous Elder Lich subjugation helped with the research, and Ellie has been immersed in research lately.

"But isn't two hours too short?"

"Elves can maintain smooth skin even with just that much sleep, so it's okay!"

Since the first night, Ellie has been putting more effort into taking care of herself.

It wasn't just a feeling that her beauty, which was already exceptional due to her elven lineage, has become even more vibrant recently.

As I brought my hand to her smooth cheek, her cheek filled my hand like a rice cake.

"Ugh, o, ohaa...!"

As I rubbed her cheeks vigorously, her pronunciation of "oppa" slipped out.

To calm her anger, I hugged her tightly and patted her head vigorously, and then there was a presence from the kitchen.

"Hehe. Getting along well from the morning?"

The woman with gently closed eyes and a smile, Diana, equipped with light armor and a longbow, was watching the playfulness between me and her adoptive daughter.

Even though Ellie's breasts were comfortably pressing against my pectorals, and our pelvises were stickily attached as if kissing, there wasn't the unpleasantness that I felt when facing Idelbert in the expression and atmosphere of looking at Ellie and me.

After all, there must be a difference in the way one looks at a child raised like a daughter and a scoundrel teacher.

"Did you sleep well, Diana?"

"Yes. Balkan, have you finished your preparations?"

After finishing playing with Ellie and moving slightly away, Diana smiled faintly.

It's definitely not a smile of relief that I and her adoptive daughter, who were cuddling from the morning, have moved apart.

It must be a smile reflecting the reassurance of seeing me in heavy armor, or the hope that I will be safe from potential dangers.

I deliberately thought so and sat at the table to have a short breakfast.

But there was one person who wasn't visible from the morning.

"Where's Denshi? Is she still sleeping?"

"No. Someone came to see her in the morning, and she said she'd talk for a while and come back."

I tilted my head at Ellie's question.

"Who came to see her?"

"It was an incredibly small and cute spirit with a very unique name. What was it...? Wind Valley, Wind Valley...something like that...?"

"Wind Valley's Chirp-Chirp?"

"Ah! I think that was the name!"

A spirit that had accompanied Denshi for a while came to see her...

Feeling a strange curiosity, I nodded for now.

It could simply be that she went to meet a former companion.

Thinking about the existence of spirits, I felt the presence of the jewel in my bosom again.

-Thump. Thump.

I took out the jewel that was twitching in my bosom, and Diana looked at it.

"Ah, the one received from the royal family back then..."

"Yes. The spoils from the Wrath Worshipper."

The spoils received for the merit of repelling the Wrath Worshipper and Pride Worshipper who attacked the royal family, and the possession of the Wrath Worshipper.

A jewel containing a mysterious life form called a fairy.

"I've been keeping it in my bosom since then, but recently I've been feeling intermittent heartbeats."

More precisely, after receiving Sloth’s power.

"Heartbeats are a sign of life, so perhaps it will be revived soon."

After hearing Diana's words, I put the jewel back in my bosom.

They say that only after seeing the state of the revived fairy can I determine how to utilize it.

All I can do now is just keep the jewel in my bosom like a hen incubating an egg.

"Both of you, be careful!"

"Yes. I'll be back soon."

"Hehe. Sorry, but I'll leave the inn to you for now, Ellie."

"Hihi. Leave it to me."

After a short meal, Diana and I left the inn with Ellie seeing us off.

Ellie and Denshi only know that we're going to gather on a nearby floor.

I honestly wanted to tell them, but Diana stopped me.

"Ellie is a curious child. If we tell her honestly, she'll definitely try to come along. It's too dangerous an experience for Ellie."

"...I agree."

Ellie's eyes have been unusual lately.

Should I call it a desire for power?

After seeing Denshi try to sacrifice herself to protect me, Ellie began to put more effort into magic research than before.

'It seems like a rivalry with Denshi, but also a sense of urgency.'

That's what worried me.

Although Ellie knows how to handle powerful magic, she was far from having strong mental strength, so I couldn't take her to subjugate the Envy Worshipper.

I glanced at Diana's equipment as we headed towards the portal.

"A longbow, huh?"

"Yes. It's been a while since I've held it. I'm not sure if I can handle it like I used to."

Diana had a huge longbow slung on her back that reached from her head to her knees.

It was a different size from the bow during the Celsia escort mission, but I could feel more intense magic power and the light of an artifact from that longbow.

"It's a weapon that serves as both an arrow and a staff. The magic I handle best is cold arrow magic, so using it this way is most effective. I can usually handle whatever most mages can do, so don't worry too much about the rear."

Diana smiled warmly with a confident voice.

She gave me an enormous pressure that doesn't correspond to the gentle expression and confidence in her own skills.

I felt once again that Diana, although retired, was a person who had reached the depths of the labyrinth in the past.

"I'll just trust Diana."

"......Hehe."

At the answer full of trust, Diana slightly turned her head and hid her smile.

Walking with the shy Diana, we soon arrived near the portal.

"...What? What am I seeing right now?"

"There are still two months left until the precursor phenomenon, but what the hell? What happened in this fucking labyrinth again?"

"I-I don't know. Recently, there was the Elder Lich in the 19th floor, the immortal dragon in the 28th floor, and in the 24th floor tentacle maze, female explorers were caught by succubi and fucked with lesbian sex, and there were many monsters handling magi, but nothing else, right?"

"You know everything. Your source of information is awesome."

"Fuck. A lot of shit happened in that short time. By the way, what the hell is lesbian sex?"

"Is that important right now?! Why are the Union Leader and the Holy Maiden together? They're too big shots to be in one scene—"

The early arrivals were drawing the attention of adventurers trying to leave for the labyrinth early in the morning.

There are no exceptions. The eyes of everyone passing by were directed there.

It was partly because of the beauty that was in a different league from other women.

It was also because of the social influence that the two cat beastkin had.

And it was also because of the invisible war of nerves between the two people, which seemed to heat up even the cool air of Eden.

They were two steps apart and looking in different directions...but it was clear that the two sisters were intensely aware of each other.

"Oh. You're here."

Idelbert, who was looking elsewhere for no reason, spotted us first and waved her hand.

Idelbert's hand, wearing a leotard suit as usual, was larger than usual.

It was because a gauntlet as solid and heavy as twice the length of my dick was fitted.

From the forearm, a large and rugged gauntlet that was large enough to wrap around the fist and still have room left had an undisguisable sticky blood scent.

I could easily imagine how many monsters she had turned into minced meat with that.

"Ah! Balkan! And Diana. Welcome."

Serif, who spotted us a step later, also greeted us with a smile.

Unlike the wild Idelbert, she was dressed in a neat priest's robe, but that wasn't all.

Unlike yesterday, the newly worn priest's robe was made of top-grade Arachne silk with better protective ability than ordinary leather armor, and a strange flow of divine power could be felt.

A considerable amount of divine power could be felt from the wand in her hand and the neat accessories on her neck and wrists.

I looked at them and marveled quietly.

'Is this the equipment of those who headed to the frontline of the labyrinth?'

I couldn't easily guess how much capital, time, and effort went into the equipment they were wearing.

[......What? Why are you like that?]

[I haven't said anything yet.]

[Tsk. Lowly creature.]

Ignoring Bunny, who was clicking her tongue and grumbling for no reason, I approached them.

"What? Even Diana Ordia?"

"I thought maybe when I saw her preparing to open an inn in Eden..."

"Crazy, what's happening in the labyrinth? What the hell is going on that those three are gathered?!"

"...No, there are four? Who's that guy?"

"That axe and armor...Isn't that the guy? The one who caught the Elder Lich and rescued the necromancy faction kids."

"That guy is going into the labyrinth with those three? How?"

"I've been hearing weird rumors about that guy from the temple lately..."

My accompaniment with those who are renowned in various fields in the labyrinth city brought about questions, confusion, and surprise from the surroundings.

"Well, shall we go now?"

But now there was something more important than appreciating them.

"To take out the trash."

Finally, it's time to subjugate the demon worshipper.