**Chapter 30: I want to go to the second floor (2)**

It was a good start.

"See, see, didn't I tell you, that doesn't happen as much as you think."

Shortly after entering the labyrinth I looked around and didn't see a single goblin shadow.

After confirming that it was safe, I immediately unfolded the map of the first floor that the armored knight had handed over and checked my location.

"Hmm... Near the escape portal. The direction is slightly west."

"Eh. What is that, a map?"

Puzzled, Grumpy looked at the map in my hand and pointed to a spot on the map with her finger.

"⋯Three markers here. Is that where we are?"

"Uh, yeah."

'So, this increases according to the number of party members.'

There was one mark when I was in the Labyrinth alone, and two the last time I was with Jeremy.

As she stared at the map, her eyes lit up with greed.

"This, this⋯ is an artifact⋯"

An artifact it’s a precious object that only a few blacksmiths or wizards can create.

"⋯Artifact? This?"

I was dumbfounded. In my imagination, artifacts were weapons like holy swords and demon swords.

Is a simple map an artifact?

"Take a look at my map."

Grumpy pulled the map from her waistband.

First of all, there was no comparison in terms of texture or material.

However, it's the content that matters, and the maps are not comparable because the surrounding geography, terrain, routes, and scale of the maps are all terrible.

In addition, Grumpy's map was full of pen smudges that looked like they were hand-drawn, whereas mine were clean as if they were printed and had much better visibility.

The sense of scale is ridiculous.

I don't know, but I think if I'd been given Grumpy's map instead of this one on the trip, I would have just gotten lost in the labyrinth and starved to death.

"The grade itself seems to barely make the lowest rank, but convenience items like maps aren't judged by grade alone. If I'm not mistaken, if you sell this at the auction house, the starting price would be at least 10 gold coins."

"Huh-"

I was so startled that I couldn't breathe properly. It felt like my lungs stopped working as I took in a breath.

Ten gold coins? How much is that? No, more than that. This map is worth at least ten gold coins?

'The armored knight just tossed it to me⋯?’

I had suspected they were an extraordinary individual ever since I realized they had traversed in a few hours what took me several days to walk through in the latter part of the first floor.

'You'd throw gold coins at a stranger?’

And not just one or two, but a whole bunch?

Suddenly, I remembered the potions and antidotes I'd been drinking like water. How much was that? I couldn't even imagine.

I can't sell it, and if we meet again someday, I'll return it as cleanly as possible.

"Ten gold coins."

The look in Jeremy's eyes as he studied the map was eerie. Any more and coins would be flashing in his eyes.

"Can I...can I try using this just once? If I use it, the efficiency of our progress will skyrocket."

The corners of her mouth twitched upward, and though she looked greedy, she had a point.

‘Fucking right.’

The impact of 10 gold coins was too great for me to have the audacity to say, "No way!”

That was a lot of money for a beginner explorer, let alone a mid-level explorer, to earn in just a few months of work.

I thought we'd been through a lot together, but the party was still less than a month old.

‘And the number one thing that causes parties to crash is money.’

One wrong payment and there are signs of division, and if someone gets something valuable, they'll quote it, soak it in, and then pounce.

That's why there are so many outlaws in the Labyrinth City.

"Why do you look at it that way, do you think I'm going to steal your map?"

"Uh. You look so fucking weird right now."

"Hmph. That's right, I was thinking of stealing it. If I run away with it, you'll chase me down and beat me to death, right?"

But our party seemed to be different.

"Hahaha!"

Grumpy's shoulders shook with excitement. Suddenly, her heart began to press against her stomach as if it were in frustration.

She's just a pervert who prioritizes her own pleasure over money.

"You've done me immeasurable favors, so how could I hurt you for the sake of a quick buck, and besides, without you, I'd never make it to the 19th floor on my own."

Jeremy was determined.

Despite the fact that the items were worth at least 10 gold coins, there were no signs of jealousy or discord like in other parties.

‘For now ⋯ pass.’

I don't know how long this party will last.

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The exploration of the first floor went very smoothly.

Having the armored knight's map in the hands of Grumpy, who doubles as a guide, speeds up the journey tremendously.

"Eight goblins up ahead. They're running. We need to engage."

If a goblin comes within the range of her hearing and my perception, we dodge or fight.

For now, the goal was to reach the second floor. Starting from the second floor, although still rare, monsters can drop 'soul stones'. The level of profit changes significantly.

I tried to avoid battles by conserving my health as much as possible, but there were times when I was forced to fight.

Still, the battles themselves were easier than I expected.

-Tsk tsk!

Combat isn't so foreign to me now. The sensation of swinging an axe and killing a creature felt familiar.

With a good quality axe combined with an unhesitating hand, I was able to take on the eight goblins on the first floor with ease.

-Pow!

"Hoooo. Whoa, whoa, whoa. You bastards⋯"

I looked at Jeremy, who was rubbing the tip of his spear against the goblin's temple.

[Jeremy LV.4]

She leveled up. It was definitely an experience buff, but the speed of leveling up was abnormal.

'Grow up, boy. My stock.’

"I've never cleared the first floor so fast before."

Maybe it was because he remembered the way he was treated at Deluna's party, but she sounded a little excited.

"Get used to it. It's going to be like this for a while, unless we get faster."

"Eh. Always?"

At that, Grumpy smiled a strangely erotic smile.

I looked away as she continued to stare at me.

"It's near the portal on the second floor, so I think we should take a short break."

I nodded at her suggestion.

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It couldn't have gone any smoother.

We bump into other explorers from time to time, but there are no arguments or confrontations.

"Have fun. Newbies."

"That's cute. I used to be like that⋯"

Some parties even greeted us in a friendly way.

Maybe we're watching a hopeful movie that cherry-picks the best parts of the Labyrinth?

Monsters worth fighting, life in the Labyrinth is challenging but not unbearable, explorers are friendly, and the treasures and goods that are the flower of the Labyrinth are there.

If we keep showing this good side of the Labyrinth, new explorers will think, "This is easier than I thought!" and go headfirst into the Labyrinth.

The first floor was so crisp that I suddenly felt ridiculous for thinking that I should never let my guard down.

“Why are you suddenly slapping me, is your hand okay?"

"Wh-why did you suddenly slap yourself? Is your hand alright?"

"⋯It's nothing. Let's go."

I punished myself for letting my guard down again and regained my composure. Never let your guard down, no matter what. And then it happened.

"Ah. We're here. This is the far end of the first floor."

I stopped walking and took in the sight before me.

A wall of some sort blocked off a long passageway and in front of that wall was a blue portal.

"From the second floor, there should be a red portal next to the blue one."

There is only one way to move from floor to floor in the labyrinth.

‘Cross the portals at the end of each floor.’

There are usually two portals at the end of each floor.

A blue portal that leads down into the deeper levels of the Labyrinth. Known as the Descent Portal and a red portal that brings you closer to the surface.

Rising Portals are not located on the first floor. Instead, there is a white escape portal on the ground floor.

Furthermore, the other levels don't have a convenient portal that allows you to exit to the surface at once like the escape portal on the first floor.

‘It's one of the reasons the labyrinth sucks.’

To get back to the ground floor from the second floor, you have to clear the deepest part of the second floor and cross the red ascension portal.

Does it end there? No. You'll have to drop down to a random spot on the first floor again and make your way to the Labyrinth Escape Portal.

It's a vicious design that's clearly intended to screw over explorers.

As a result, most explorers will take a long, hard look at it, even if they're sure they can clear the lower levels because one misjudgment and descending to the wrong level could mean never returning to the surface.

We've come this far, so I'm sure we can deal with the second floor.

By the time we've defeated a dozen goblins charging at us simultaneously without a scratch, we're no longer on the first floor.

"Master. Come. We're ready."

Grumpy holding hands with Jeremy extends her hand to me.

Suddenly, I remembered the time I came to the Labyrinth.

Back then, I had panicked at the suddenness of the situation and thought only of running away to survive the labyrinth but now it was different.

I have a clear goal: to find my sister and return home.

With a clear goal in mind, there's no need to get lost and wander.

To survive this perilous place and fulfill his purpose, I head back into the labyrinth once more.

"Let's go."

I take Grumpy's outstretched hand and step through the descent portal.

-Whoosh.

With a slight sensation of floating, the landscape around us changed in an instant.

The crude, cave-like ground floor became a bit more mysterious.

The walls, floor, and ceiling were all immaculate, with slight gaps in the stone tiles, as if they were man-made.

There were torches embedded in the walls, so I had no trouble seeing.

‘Wait.’

I suddenly felt a pang of discomfort.

‘Is this how it's supposed to be?’

I rolled my eyes and looked at the floor. It's not high up at all. If I jumped, I could reach it in a second but my feet still hadn't touched the ground.

I've felt this strange state before.

‘When I entered the labyrinth and ran into goblins!’

If it weren't for this strange calmness, I would have scrambled.

‘If this suddenly happened again, does it mean something similar to the goblins happened?’

What could be the danger?

‘Ah. A trap.’

At that moment, the words of Grumpy flashed through my mind. The main theme of the second floor is traps.

-Thud!

"Okay, landing-!"

Our feet hit the floor at the same time as Grumpy’s voice.

-Thud.

The stone floor dents in and out, as if we stepped on an organ.

"Ew."

Or not.

-Eek!

Immediately, a rain of dozens of arrows fell from the ceiling toward us.

I had a hunch that we can't dodge this since the arrows were aimed at our skulls so fast.

Oh, how peaceful it's been.

[Invest 5 free points in Agility.]