**Chapter 42: Disciple (which means a growth-type sex toy) (1)**

There's a small commotion from night to morning, but the day rolls on as usual.

After filling up on Diana's special breakfast course, which I haven't had in a while, I head straight to the Explorers' Union.

- If you want a lesson, find Idelbert at the Explorers' Alliance.

The reason, of course, is to get a lesson in combat from Idelbert.

I have nothing to lose by going. How often do I get the chance to be taught by an explorer of her caliber?

In a world ruled by barbaric and primal principles of strength, martial arts are a necessary discipline.

I thought I should at least take this opportunity.

The Explorers' Union is busy today. They have a lot of people coming in, including explorers.

Newcomers registering to become explorers, explorers looking to form parties, explorers looking for work, and clients posting requests.

"Next. Come in."

They all go through the Explorers' Alliance staff. They weren't paid well for nothing; the intensity of their work was beyond the realm of the common man.

The man took a seat at the table at the glowering staffer's words. The woman looked at him.

Underneath his black short-sleeved T-shirt, the man's muscular, toned, body was particularly impressive.

"I'm looking for someone," he said, "and they said you'd know it if I told you."

"Oh, right. What are you looking for? A party match or a commission?"

The employee, perked up by the sudden brightness in my eyes, asked eagerly.

“No. I came here to find someone who wants to establish a mentor-student relationship with me.”

"Oh. You're here to apply for training!"

The Explorers' Alliance had a system of training.

Higher-level explorers would teach lower-level explorers like a teacher.

There were two types of training: light training, where they were brought in as porters, and deep training, where they formed a full-fledged mentor-student relationship.

On the surface, it sounds like a good system that allows explorers to develop the basic martial skills and knowledge of the monsters and traps of the Labyrinth.

'In reality, it's not quite as good as it sounds.’

Just as there are different kinds of teachers, there are different kinds of explorers, some with good common sense and some without, especially in the case of a mentor-student relationship, even if an arm gets cut off during a mock duel.

- I didn't realize you were so weak. You can just go to the temple and get your arm reattached, on your dime.

Some people say, "Oh, no.”

- You’re too stubborn to understand even if I teach you. I'll stop teaching you now. Of course, I'll keep the money you've paid.

In short, there is a high probability of getting a landmine teacher.

The odds of getting a good teacher are lower than the odds of a second floor explorer surviving a fifth floor transition trap.

Some beginner explorers bemoan the fact that they've wasted valuable time and money on a shitty teacher, but what can they do?

Even a shitty teacher should be at least a mid-level explorer, if not better.

The Explorers' Alliance preferred someone with some degree of brute force validation and a better handle on the monsters in the Labyrinth than a ragtag bunch of low-level Explorers.

"Oh, I didn't apply, she told me to come if I wanted to be an apprentice."

But every once in a while, this would happen.

A case where a would-be disciple didn't wait days and days for a master to come to them, but where the master saw an exceptional person and moved to take them on as his student.

Low-level masters who are just trying to suck money out of you won't bother with this.

Paradoxically, this is also due to the Explorers' Alliance.

The Explorers' Alliance doesn't care about the weak and untested, but it does promise to treat and reward the strong.

If they want to squeeze a talented sprout for money, they'll come to you first and shackle you to their master's hand.

The employee made a mental note of the helmeted man in front of her.

She didn't know which Master, but being offered first was proof that he had the talent to become at least a mid-level explorer in the future.

It couldn't hurt to look good.

"Ah, I see, if you'll tell me your master's name, we'll get you straight to her."

The helmeted man nodded immediately, and then opened his mouth nonchalantly.

"Idelbert."

Saaaaah.

"?"

Nam Soo-jin questioned as the air around him instantly grew colder.

‘What. Did I say something I shouldn't?’

All I did was say the name Idelbert. What could possibly be the reaction?

"⋯I heard wrong⋯?"

The employee's face, which had been blank and smiling the whole time, now showed deep embarrassment.

"Idelbert, her last name is probably Adeline."

"Huh."

The employee's expression began to spread beyond embarrassment.

⋯I don't know, but I'm pretty sure Idelbert is a strange woman.

"Male. Are you insane, and where do you dare to call upon her dignity?"

“You're crazy, you jerk. Hey, just because you have a d\*ck doesn't mean you can say whatever you want and get away with it. You're going to get in big trouble one of these days.”

Not only the staff, but also the explorers directly under the Explorers' Union who were standing around began to approach Nam Soo-jin.

Not all explorers are loyal to the Explorers Union.

‘They feel like mercenaries.’

They just wear an Explorer badge. There are many others who have joined their own factions, such as nobles, academies, temples, clans, and others.

The people surrounding him now were explorers whose bones were buried in the Explorers' Union. He could tell by the badges on their chest.

They stared down at him menacingly.

He didn’t know why they're having fits, but figured out the common link between them and the staff. They all belong to the Explorer's Guild.

Reactions of deep embarrassment, anger, etc.

'Idelbert. She must be a great person.'

I kind of expected it.

She was a member of Diana's party and had that much power, so it was strange that she wasn't a high ranking person.

I stood still and studied them. Some of them are a bit strong while some of them are a bit of a joke. If I put up a fight, I might be able to get out somehow.

But there was no need for that.

I'm not a fight-crazed savage, and I have no reason or justification for bloodshed.

"There you are. Diana’s sex toy."

A woman came into my perception range leisurely.

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"Hullo, Union!"

"Yi, yi, I'm greeting Union President Idelbert!"

The people surrounding me tensed and bowed to Idelbert.

So did the dozens of employees at the window.

"Wow. To actually see the head of the Explorers' Union in person⋯"

"What's with the sudden appearance of the woman who never shows up without some sort of incident?"

"I don't know, just look at her...I'm shivering...That's the ideal alpha female."

"Hey. You have a weird look in your eyes."

The explorers, who were minding their own business, looked at Idelbert in wonder.

"Why are we all here?"

Idelbert asked the group surrounding me, and the answer came quickly.

"This man dared to speak of your honor without knowing what he was talking about, and he was talking about mentor-disciple and all that, so we thought we'd take a look-"

"Uh, I was the one who suggested it."

"Haha. I see. Then we'll do some work on him- eh?"

The woman who had been smiling and answering mechanically stiffened.

"I'm the one who called him, so now go take a shit."

"Ah. That, yes, yes!"

Idelbert waved her hand roughly and all the explorers returned to their work.

I stared at Idelbert, who now stood before me, and opened my mouth.

"What the hell is a sex toy? I have a name, Balkan."

"You’re going to be Diana’s sex toy later, hmm. Yeah, whatever. Balkan. Since you're here, I assume you've accepted my offer?"

"Yes."

"Wise choice, then you are my pupil from now on, follow me, pupil."

Idelbert's tail flicked slightly, still expressionless.

I stepped into the magic elevator reserved for the Union President, watching Idelbert's tail dance on the outside of her cloak.

The interior was impossibly spacious and the air was strangely fresh.

Any other explorer or staffer would have to climb this damned high Explorers' Alliance building via a cramped old-fashioned magic elevator and staircase.

Idelbert nonchalantly pressed the button for the top floor.

Through the slowly closing doors, I could see the panicked faces of the Union’s staff.

"This can't be happening."

"Did this happen⋯? No, even high-ranking explorers rarely take on disciples directly⋯but the Union Leader herself⋯?"

"She never had a disciple."

"She's taking on disciples! She's taking on disciples!"

I stared at them in panic, then glanced at Idelbert, who stood beside me.

Her height was nearly one hundred and eighty. I didn't have to bend my head much to see her.

"Am I your first?"

"With you, what's the first time?"

"⋯?"

I asked, meaning, of course, that I was the first disciple, since I had heard what the Union people said.

-Click-click-click-click.

Idelbert's black tail flicked like a whip, so it was clear that she had heard a strange double meaning.

'⋯She's a bit of a sexpot.’

"For your information, I'm a virgin. I have the same curse as Diana."

Idelbert's virginity was probably irrelevant, but that last statement suddenly piqued my interest.

"The same curse as Diana?"

Diana's blessings and curses totaled six.

‘One curse was the Curse of Decadence from the Black Moon⋯’

I wondered what the rest of the curses were, but it looks like I'm about to learn one more.

"Yes. And you can call me Master from now on, disciple."

"Ah. Yes⋯ So, what is this curse? Can you tell me?"

"Of course I can tell you. But you must keep it a secret for the rest of your life. Can you swear?"

"At least I won't tell anyone."

"Swear if you want to hear it."

"Yes. I swear."

Ding!

The magic elevator screeched to a halt, the top floor of the towering Explorers' Union.

‘Shit.’

It's bigger than I'd imagined, much bigger.

It was a training facility of sorts. There was a running track, a dueling room, all kinds of exercise equipment, weapons, armor, and more.

Everything was optimized for training, and there were countless pieces of equipment.

I followed Idelbert into the training center.

The arena was quite large.

It was about twenty square meters, and it was also quite high, so even if I swung a greatsword upwards, I wouldn't be able to reach it.

"First, as a simple test, I'll give you a few fights at your level. We can decide on the direction of my instruction afterward."

She said, pulling off her cloak.

Her skin was a nice coppery color and her body toned.

My gaze was momentarily drawn to her leotard, which barely covered the peak of her ample breasts, leaving more than half of her ass on display, flowing gently over her groin and hipbones.

At first glance, it was the ideal, predator-style, female body type, but⋯

I can feel a tremendous amount of energy bursting from within her.

‘If I let my guard down, I’m dead!’

I looked at her, drawing my axe from my waistband.

"Master, you don't use weapons?"

“I am a martial artist.”

Idelbert thrust her fist forward with a snarl as a warrior's aura radiated from her scarred fist.

"I'll give you ten attacks."

"Isn't that too generous?"

"It's called balancing. Usually."

Okay. I feel like I'm going to lose even at this point. I remember the eerie feeling of aliveness.

I feel like I'm losing, like someone is whispering next to me, "Are you going to lose?”

But there's nothing good about being stuck. Hesitation is always a recipe for defeat.

So let's just go for it and aim high.

"Win."

Idelbert's face twitches slightly at my muttering. Is she smiling?

"Earlier, did you mention you were curious about my curse?"

"Yes."

I nodded, and she answered immediately.

“It’s the Curse of Rejecting Lousy Dicks.”

"⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯ What?"

I was about to pounce when she spoke, but I couldn't help but be stunned by the absurdity of the truth.

"It's a curse that literally rejects the invasion of lesser males. The cock of a being weaker than me cannot be inserted at any cost, not even an inanimate sex toy."

Idelbert looked at me with her characteristic expressionless.

For a moment, I thought to myself.

Perhaps that's not an expressionless face, but rather the expression of enlightenment and liberation that only someone who hasn't had sex in decades could achieve.

"I expect something from you."

What does she expect, I wondered, terrified. Suddenly, I felt like I was in a sex toy training center, not an apprenticeship. What was I in for? I wondered.

"Come on. Attack."

Idelbert spread her arms wide as her black tail swished like a whip.

I had timed my ambush perfectly.

I had learned one thing right from the start, in combat, you have to never take your eyes off your attacker.

I'm also being taught by a woman who doesn't make things easy⋯

-Kaaaah!

I grip the axe harder.

After all, if I don't grow up, I have no future.

Even a night with Diana might be lost.

‘No way.’

I gritted my teeth and lunged at Idelbert.

I had one more reason to be strong.