**Chapter 46: Preparing for the 6th floor (2)**

"Have you, by any chance, met Idelbert Adeline?"

‘How do you know that by smell?’

I mean, she's a cat, so why not? But how does Serif know Idelbert's scent?

It's never easy to pinpoint an object based on its body odor alone.

It's almost impossible unless you're very familiar with the scent and have been in a relationship long enough to know exactly who it is as soon as you smell it.

‘Are they related? On second thought, they have the same last name.’

Adeline it’s not a common last name. No way.

‘Are they sisters?’

"Yes. She's my teacher."

"Your teacher?! You mean her?!"

"Yes."

"Ugh, ugh!"

Her floppy cat ears and tail twitched as if to reflect her frustration.

Serif swiped her hand across her holy power dispenser, as if trying to swallow a bad word.

Boo-boo-boo-boo-boo.

Then she felt the necklace vibrate and flinched.

"Hmph!"

Realizing how close she was to me, she blushed and backed away in anger.

"I'm sorry, I shouldn't have made such a mistake⋯"

"It's okay, I'm pretty used to this."

I've been training so intensely with Idelbert lately that I've become a little immune to the sight of wild udders jiggling wildly.

It's only a little, of course, and the sight of Serif's breasts, so magnificent and full even when wrapped tightly in her priestly robes, is arousing in a different way.

"Ahhhhh."

My comment brought even more remorse to Serif's expression.

It was a sympathetic gaze, as if looking at a rape victim.

‘Now that I think about it, Serif had some outrageous misconceptions about me.’

"More than that, were you acquainted with my master?"

At my unnecessary prodding, Serif's expression grew fierce again, and she clutched the necklace in her hands as if in frustration, muttering softly.

"⋯A faithless fiend, a cunning traitor⋯"

‘Doesn't sound like a good relationship.’

Whatever had happened between them, the shakiness in her voice was unnerving.

"⋯I mean, I just know her face, but she didn't do anything suspicious, did she⋯?"

"Suspicious?"

I'm not affiliated with the temple, but I know that the Mother Earth Goddess's Order prohibits all lewd acts, including sex.

It's against the teachings of Mother Earth, obviously.

I recalled my training with Idelbert.

'She'd occasionally choke me with her bun thighs and give me a lap pillow, but nothing overtly sexual.’

"Nothing like that, in fact, I feel stronger than ever these days thanks to my master, who is a bit rough but takes good care of me."

The axe strapped to my waist was a natural relief, a gift from Idelbert.

"Well, that's good, I'm glad to hear that, yes."

Serif looked like she had suffered a bitter defeat.

"Well, I can take care of you just as well as Idelbert, nay, even better than she can. If you ever need a miracle or a blessing, you can always come to me⋯!"

"Oh, yes⋯"

She sounded so eager that I nodded involuntarily.

Her red eyes sparkled like rubies as they held mine.

It's like watching a cat clutching a stuffed animal for dear life, afraid it will be taken away.

"Serif, it's almost time. There are too many wounded explorers because of the omens⋯"

Just then, a gold-armored paladin appeared from behind Serif.

[Nate Ellyn LV. 4■]

[Nate Ellyn has Blessings and Curses: 2]

Maybe it's because I leveled up so much on my last trip to the Labyrinth, but even against an almost mid-level explorer opponent, there were fewer censors in the status bar.

I can't see the details of the blessings and curses, but I can see the count.

"Ah⋯ okay, I'll be right there, Balkan, would you mind extending your hand?"

I hesitate for a moment, then extend my hand, and a warm glow envelops my fingertips.

It felt similar, yet different, from when I used the Blessing of Radiance.

"It's a miracle of mental barrier. It's a one-time use, but it will block all mental attacks below intermediate level, so be careful at all times. You're a valuable person, Balkan."

The words that followed stung more than the sudden miracle.

I'm just a lowly explorer.

‘So this is a high-ranking priest of the Mother Earth Order, the Order of the Beneficence and Respect of All?’

It's quite a shock to me, having grown up in an orphanage without parents and never being treated as a valued member of anyone's household.

I believe you, Serif. You are a faithful priest.

"Thank you. Serif. I'll be sure to come back for you next time."

"Yes! I'll be waiting!"

Serif smiled broadly, and with a flick of her cat ears and tail, she and the golden paladin headed for the Great Hall.

I watched them go in silence, then turned toward the library.

Oh dear. Time to read. My head already hurts.

Isn't this some kind of mental attack?

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"Serif, why did you waste your miracles on such a man?!"

Nate Ellyn, the gold-armored paladin of the temple, couldn't understand the whole situation.

"There are more than a hundred mid-level and above explorers lining up to receive the Serif's miracle, and that's not all, even those snobby nobles are lobbying the temple for a glimpse of the Serif's face!"

Serif Adeline was a senior priestess of the High Priory.

She was a woman in a position to make anyone come to her.

Every day, dozens, perhaps hundreds, of explorers await her approval for the dazzling miracles she performs.

The nobility and upper class, eager to make a connection, bombard her with gifts, pay her off, and do whatever it takes to get a glimpse of her face.

But what the hell is going on here?

Serif Adeline has her paladin stationed at the temple's window to greet a lowly explorer.

She's not even attending to her duties when she hears of this mysterious man's arrival!

‘Even a miracle I've never received before!’

Now, this was a shocking event that hadn't happened to Nate Ellyn since she became the Paladin of Serif.

"Well, Nate, I know what you're talking about. I've had enough of people trying to get in my way."

Serif Adeline laughed softly but it was a slightly different smile than the one Nate had seen before.

‘No, no. On the contrary, this smile is the usual Serif.’

It was so subtle that she didn't notice it right away.

It was still a beautiful, dazzling, sublime, compassionate smile.

It was a fake smile that felt like a mask.

Even then, others would not even notice.

Nate, who had been by Serif's side for ten years, could recognize the slightest difference.

'⋯The way she looked at him was so much more colorful and natural-'

"He's a valuable man, far more valuable than the likes of me."

Serif's quietly muttered words halted Nate's train of thought.

How many people in the Labyrinth City right now were more valuable than Serif?

"He's only a lowly explorer, Serif!"

"Yes. He's just a low-level explorer now, but will he be later?"

Serif smiled, her natural smile again. Who was she thinking of now, Ellyn wondered.

The answer was obvious.

"He will shine with a dazzling brilliance one day."

With that, Serif clasped her hands together and prayed.

Her tail and ears, the symbols of the cat beastman, dropped slightly, then straightened.

An unearthly sound rang out from the clasped hands.

"So, I can't let that sneaky fiend take him from me."

Serif vowed, clutching the cross necklace that trembled slightly on her chest.

"Never."

Thinking of the woman who had once been her sister, and the demon who had betrayed her and the temple.

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The temple's library was quite large. I've never been in one, even in modern times, but it seemed to be twice the size of a public library.

However, despite the number of books and the size of the building, few people actually came to read.

With the help of the librarian, I was able to find a few books on what I was looking for.

[Correct gender for boys and girls]

[Why Monsters Are Dangerous: Male Corrupting Pheromones (with illustrations)]

Why Monsters Are Dangerous: Male Corrupting Pheromones (Illustrated) was tattered from the cover, as if it had been turned over many times.

The librarian looked at me very suspiciously, so I grabbed a couple other books.

[The Mysterious and Amazing Tale of the Labyrinth]

[Mythology of the Earth Mother Goddess and Light]

"Don't you have any books on portals?"

"You'll have to go to the Academy's Great Library for specialized books like that."

I was most curious about books related to fountains and portals, but the temple didn't seem to have any.

‘How am I supposed to get into the Academy?’

It was practically impossible to get in.

I sat down and read for a while.

I returned the book [The Correct Gender of Men and Women] because it was full of nonsense that made my head spin.

[Why Monsters Are Dangerous: Male Corrupting Pheromones (with illustrations) was also full of things that made my head spin.

- Male corrupting pheromone is a specialized pheromone that makes men go crazy with pleasure when they are attacked by a monster.

- Men who fail to overcome this pheromone are either doomed to spend the rest of their lives as rugs for the beast or commit suicide out of pleasure, and no man has ever been able to overcome it.

This seemed to explain why the goblins' victims cried out for p\*ssy.

- The stronger the man who is corrupted by the monster, the stronger the monster's seed. The growth period of the seed is up to⋯.

I don't know if I should be thankful that my pure, clean brain wasn't tainted, but at some point the pages of the book were torn out.

Considering what I'd read so far, I'm sure someone had torn out the racy illustrations.

It's a world without pornography, so it's understandable. Children in other worlds do the same thing.

There was nothing special about [The Mysterious and Amazing Labyrinth] either. It's a lively adventure story that seems to be full of fantasies about labyrinths.

If exploring the labyrinth was as bright and hopeful as it was in this book, I would have gone down to the depths of the labyrinth.

I also wanted to read the fairy tale of the Mother Earth Goddess and the Myth of Light, but time was short. I must go now to make it to the evening rush.

I paid half a silver coin to borrow the book. It was quite expensive because it was categorized as a luxury item.

I skimmed through it before I left, and was about to put The Mysterious and Amazing Tale of the Labyrinth on the return table when I heard a voice.

"Mister."

An unfamiliar voice came from right next to me.

I spun around to see a red-eyed elf staring straight up at me.

An elf girl with long, floppy ears, a large wizard hat and robe, a white t-shirt and tennis skirt, and sharp, round, mysterious eyes.

"The book, if you're not going to read it, give it to me."

It's a perfectly natural question, but I'm already scratching my head.

‘Mister?’

Me? Mister? I'm twenty-two, haha.

The moment I opened my mouth to correct the spoiled brat.

"But, mister, are you an explorer?"

I turned to face her eyes sparkling with curiosity.

"Then have you ever tried entering a labyrinth portal?!"

Naturally, my gaze drifted to the book she was holding.

[Ellie Ordia: Research Journal on Portals and Dimensional Magic 1]