**Chapter 55: The 6th floor (7)**

When I was a kid, there were a few things that lit up my relatively passive childhood and made me jump at them.

For example, a cool, delicious popsicle after volunteering at the orphanage, or a favor from my sister or the stamps of approval from my teachers.

Each time I received a praise stamp on the back of my hand, whether it was a flower, butterfly, star, or palm, a strange feeling of pride filled my heart.

It's no exaggeration to say that I am the person I am today, with a clean and clear moral spirit, thanks to those experiences.

As you can see, the praise stamp was originally meant to be a small stamp on the back of the hand⋯ but I don't have a stamp right now.

‘Then, what am I supposed to do with the praise stamp?’

As I pondered, I heard a grunt next to me.

I turned my head to see Ellie still clinging to my arm. She shuffled her feet and stared at the inn.

Her face was tense. She was nervous to see her adoptive mother after so long.

"Hey. It's them."

"Wow. I'm so fucking jealous that she's so much younger than me."

"Arms crossed at an inn in broad daylight, haha. Life."

But judging from the comments made by passersby, that wasn't the only reason.

Ellie's ears perked up and her paws pricked up from the ears to the back of her head whenever she picked up on what people were saying.

Of course, from a third party's point of view, we looked like a couple trying to copulate in broad daylight at an inn.

I didn't want to be misunderstood anymore.

"Shall we go in?"

"Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah! Let's go in!"

Ellie swallowed hard and took a step forward.

She wanted to lead the way, so she walked a little faster.

She pushed the door open.

Ding-ding-ding-ding.

The door wouldn't open.

"Huh? Why won't it open?"

Normally, Diana didn't lock the doors of the inn even when the curse was raging, she only locked her own door.

Even if the inn's doors aren't always wide open, they're not chained shut.

It was Diana's way of making sure that those who were out in the cold could always come in and have a hot bowl of soup.

The door of such an inn was now closed as tightly as a castle wall.

Just as I was feeling this way, the door opened from the inside.

"Hmm? You?"

The first thing that caught my eye was the pure white armor.

The armor was similar to the armored knight from the goblin lair, and the muffled voice was strangely familiar.

The one who had appeared after the battle between Idelbert and Diana.

‘The head of the Royal Knights?’

Why is she here?

"Ellie Ordia? You've grown a lot since I last saw you. I heard you were recommended to be a Royal Mage."

"Uh, who are you⋯?"

"Heh. You were too young to remember me. Never mind, just think of me as an old lady passing by."

Ellie looked at the head of the royal knights with a blush.

They had seemed to have a connection when she had spoken to Diana the other day, and she even knew about Ellie as a child.

"But the man next to you..."

The knight gaze fell on me, and I immediately felt a tremendous amount of pressure.

"Huh!"

It was a similar yet different sensation to that of wearing a gravity-controlling artifact.

Whereas the artifact directly burdened my physical body, now it felt like my soul was being crushed.

I stood as stiffly as I could, as unfazed as possible by the sudden turn of events.

Surprisingly, I didn't sense any particular malice in the knight's behavior.

‘No one in high places would be so brazen as to make a fool of me, so this is a test.’

As if I hadn't been wrong, the pressure immediately dissipated.

"Ho-ho, you made it through this, most of them don't last a minute."

No wonder my heart was pounding and cold sweat was pouring down like in some hardcore manga— it felt like a technique straight out of a supreme ruler's playbook, pressing down on people.

I replied with a rather nonchalant face, feeling unnecessarily vindictive.

"It's easy."

"Hehe! You're pretty bold for a guy! Yeah, I know. A man should have that much guts!"

I wonder if it worked, because the knight smirked and looked back and forth between me and Ellie.

Then, with a hint of amusement in her voice, she asked.

"Are you, by any chance, Ellie's boyfriend?"

Immediately, a furious response erupted.

"Uh, uh, well, that's not quite right, is it?!"

"What did you just say⋯?"

Ellie, ears flapping and blushing at the sudden boyfriend declaration, and Diana, who had rushed over from a table in the back of the store.

"Bar, Balkan⋯Ellie?"

"I'm back, Diana."

"Hey, foster mom. Oh, it's been a while⋯"

Ellie reflexively tensed up as soon as she saw Diana.

-Ko-o-ok-.

She hugged my arms even tighter and I could feel her soft breasts being crushed by my strong arms.

"⋯er?"

Diana's mouth dropped open as she looked at me and Ellie with our arms around each other.

She was so startled that even her softly closed eyes were half-open.

Her normally nonchalant and relaxed face gradually cracked.

"Hehe, this is a funny situation."

The knight watched us like an elderly woman watching a soap opera.

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An awkward air hung over the table after the knight left the inn, as if being chased away by Diana and we explained the situation properly.

"⋯⋯"

"⋯⋯"

Diana closed her eyes again and looked back and forth between Ellie and me.

Ellie continued to fiddle with the cup of water Diana handed her and stared at me.

With both women's eyes on me, I sat stiffly in my seat.

"⋯⋯"

"⋯⋯"

Despite their mother-daughter relationship, the conversation between the two women didn't seem to be going well.

Diana was unsure how to approach Ellie, and Ellie was in the midst of a fierce battle with her own inferiority complex.

"Diana, do you happen to have any soup? I've been thinking about your soup since I've been in the labyrinth for so long."

I interjected.

I actually missed Diana's cooking, and I wanted to make something of a topic.

"Uh, yeah. Sure. Sure. ⋯Would you like a bowl, too?"

"⋯Ah, yeah, yeah. Me too."

They dramatically exchanged a single word.

It was a small step, but relationships are built on small steps.

Diana brought the warm soup, wafting with smoke.

The subtle scent of garlic tickled my nostrils. It was a simple soup, neither too watery nor too thick, just as it should be.

I stuck an iron straw through the tiny slit in the mouth of the helmet and sucked the soup down.

It was gross, but I had no choice. It's weird to go to my room and say, "I'm going to get some soup," and then come back.

'Wearing a helmet all the time makes my life so uncomfortable.’

This is a thought I've always had, but in this situation, it became more dramatic.

Suddenly, I remembered the image of Zirnier with her mask on, drinking all the drinks and eating all the food.

"Come to think of it, she asked me to come to her workshop.

I'll have to ask him about that mask when I get a chance.

"⋯Ellie, how's the soup?"

"Ah, yes. It's delicious⋯⋯⋯ It reminds me a bit of the old days⋯"

"⋯Hoo-hoo. I'm glad to hear that⋯I'm so glad."

With something in their mouths, the conversation started to move forward.

It started with the flavor of the soup, and then it turned to catching up.

Diana tried to talk to Ellie very cautiously, and Ellie seemed to sense this and began to answer her hesitantly and awkwardly.

It's not like their relationship was a rock and a hard place to begin with.

It's just like a parent dealing with a daughter who has reached puberty and has been away for a long time.

It was just a lack of communication between a child who felt inferior to her parents and craved affection and attention from others.

All they needed was a little bit of connection.

‘I just wanted to provide that.’

Conversation is the most basic way for people to communicate.

It's how we clear up misunderstandings, heal each other's wounds, and more.

Any relationship can be rebuilt if you're willing to talk to each other.

I quietly slipped away from the table as they began to talk without my interruption.

It would be nice to have some mother-daughter time.

Hopefully, they can get back to their old ways.

⋯Five minutes after I went up to my room, Ellie came to my room.

"Aren't you going to give me a praise stamp⋯?"

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"⋯Thank you, foster mom."

Diana smirked at Ellie, who ducked her head.

Despite being the child of a dead party member, Diana had raised Ellie as if she were her own daughter.

Even if her foster daughter, whom she had raised with love and care, had gradually changed after entering the Academy, Diana had chalked it up to her new surroundings and society.

By the time she realized something was wrong, the relationship between her and Ellie had grown apart.

'To Balkan, I can only say thank you so much⋯'

However, Balkan's intervention made up for three years of miscommunication.

Although it will take a long time to get back to the way things were before.

For now, I'm happy with the distance, because I never thought I'd be able to talk to Ellie again like this until a few days ago.

"Uh, I should probably get going, my free period is almost over."

"Ah⋯ I see. Do you need anything? Anything I can get you⋯"

"No, it's okay! I can't just keep relying on others forever."

Waving her hands in the air as if to say that she really didn't mind, Ellie looked at Diana with an awkward but genuine smile.

"⋯Oh, it's been ⋯good to see you after all these years, ⋯foster mom."

"Me too. ⋯I hope you'll visit often in the future."

Diana cautiously approached Ellie and hugged her precious daughter tightly.

"I've missed you. Ellie."

"⋯Me too."

Ellie was unfamiliar with her adoptive mother's embrace, but she didn't hate it. Carefully, Ellie wrapped her hands around Diana's waist.

They hugged for a moment, then pulled apart again.

"⋯Ah, right. I'm going to go check on Mr. Balkan."

Ellie said and hurried upstairs.

‘⋯Mr. Balkan?’

Diana questioned herself since Balkan shouldn't be old enough to be addressed like that.

‘Does Ellie know Balkan's bare face, by any chance?’

Diana had never seen Balkan's bare face beneath his helm, but the morbid way he covered it up suggested something was going on.

Rumors have started to trickle in recently, claiming he has a massive scar and is unimaginably ugly.

Diana wasn't the kind of person to believe unfounded rumors so easily.

Even if the rumors were true, it wouldn't change the way she treated Balkan.

He always said she had given so much, but now she had received so much from him.

‘⋯A little bit, I'm curious.’

Apart from that, she was curious. As a former explorer, she had an intense need to satisfy her curiosity.

Diana cautiously ascended to the second floor. Just off the hallway was Balkan's room.

Whenever she passed Balkan's room, she was often overcome by an unknown impulse.

So during the curse rampage, she had m\*sturbated in Balkan's room for days on end without realizing it. It was an embarrassing memory.

"You want me to do that, that, that, there, Ellie. Are you out of your mind?"

"I'm sorry, I guess you can't do it⋯? I'm so sorry⋯Please don't hate me⋯!"

"⋯⋯No, you don't need to apologize so much⋯"

A normal person wouldn't be able to hear this clearly, but Diana's heightened senses made it possible.

"⋯?”

Diana silently shook her head at the sound and movement coming from inside Balkan's room.

Her mind's eye automatically envisioned the scene in the room.

Balkan, sitting on the bed, sighing and furrowing his brow, and Ellie, standing next to him, bowing her head in apology and embarrassment.

"Sigh. This is the last time, Ellie. Don't do this again next time. And don't ask other guys to do it either. You'll end up in jail if the guards catch you."

"Uh, if it's not Mr. Balkan, I'm not going to be⋯"

"Don't talk shit. Okay?"

"⋯Yes⋯"

After a conversation full of questions, Ellie made her way to Balkan's bed.

She lay down on her stomach on top of Balkan's thighs.

Her soft breasts pressed against the side of his thighs, her butt high in the air, an embarrassing position.

Diana's face lit up as she took in everything in the room in a blur.

‘Gee, what the hell!’

-Are you, by any chance, Ellie's boyfriend?

She remembered the knight words to Ellie and Balkan. It was something Diana hadn't paid much attention to until now.

At the same time, she remembered the way they were holding each other's arms affectionately, and the way Ellie's eyes often followed Balkan as they talked.

This, too, was something Diana had been forcibly ignoring.

"⋯Ease up, Ellie. It hurts more if you push."

"Um, that's... it's not working out as I planned... Just please... do it quickly..."

-Gulp.

She heard Balkan swallow hard.

"⋯Yes, I will."

Snap!

"⋯Hmph!"

Balkan slapped Ellie's ass. No, it was more like a swat. As proof, Ellie let out a sweet moan.

"Mmm, sorry. Did that hurt?"

"Oh, no⋯ it actually felt good⋯ oh, no, it was fine⋯ so spank me a little harder⋯ give me a pat on the back⋯"

"⋯⋯"

Hearing that, Balkan raised his hand once again.

Aaaaah!

"Heeeeeeeee!"

Ellie's big, round elf butt jiggled like a spoonful of pudding.

She couldn't see the color, but it must have been red. Like a palm print.

Diana covered her mouth, which was gaping open to let out a stupid moan.

There was no common sense understanding of what was happening in that room right now.

But there was something else that was even more incomprehensible.

"Hmm... ♡"

Why does he body still get aroused in situations like this?

In a blur of darkness, a pink womb symbol began to appear on Diana's lower belly. She could feel the dampness of her panties soaking through.

Diana sat down in the hallway, leaning her ear towards Balkan's room.

Listening to her daughter's moans and the sound of flesh against flesh from inside the room, she carefully moved her fingers.