**Chapter 56: Taking a short break (1)**

I've never felt tingling in my hands so much in my life.

I've been stabbed and blindsided in combat since my trip to this world, but I've never felt so much sensation in my hands.

Every finger, every knuckle, every joint, including the palm of my hand, is meticulously controlled.

‘Snap!’

"Hmph!"

Again. I patted Ellie's ass and recognized the strange sensation.

It was a blur, like I was going to fly away at any moment, so I slapped Ellie's butt again and again, trying to recall the realization.

“Hic!”

"Hiccup!"

This time, I didn't take my hand away immediately, but clutched her ass tightly. The soft, plump flesh of her ass popped out between my fingers.

I needed something to hold onto, I needed to feel more of this sensation.

If what I was holding was a hard, cold axe instead of a soft ass, would I have a new realization?

Mechanically, I raised my hand again.

"He, he, he, he!"

I heard Ellie's voice, mixed with a cry and I snapped back to reality.

I looked down at my palm, which was stained red. It looked like I had been slapped a lot.

I lowered my head a little further and saw that her skirt and robe were rolled up and her ass was half exposed.

A big, round, chubby ass. What would normally have been a smooth white ass was stained red with palm prints.

Literally, palm prints.

⋯Gulp.

I couldn't help but salivate.

"Oi, that's not a pat, that's a full slap! It hurts so much!"

"Uh, sorry. I was concentrating."

The strange sensation of being caught made me concentrate harder than I should have.

Ellie was holding her reddened buttocks with tears streaming down her cheeks as if they were very sore.

The sight reminded me of someone.

"If it had been Grumpy, she would have just said it was good and gotten beaten up badly."

She would do anything to get hit. I do miss the feel of the slap and the pull of the leash but Ellie’s the one in front of me now.

"⋯Do you want me to put a potion on you?"

"I'd be grateful if you did⋯ Oh, no, I'll do it⋯!"

Ellie gulped down the potion I gave her.

The effect is the same whether you apply it or drink it, and if her ass is wet, her skirt and panties will be too.

'White⋯'

For reference, Ellie was wearing a pair of plain white panties with a cute rose on them.

I didn't plan to look at them, but I couldn't help but see them as her skirt and robe rode up and exposed her butt.

‘⋯Seriously. I didn't have any other thoughts.’

I would have put my parents on the line to prove my innocence but now that I think about it, I don't have a mom.

"Ugh, it's already time!"

Ellie looked at the clock and exclaimed angrily.

I hadn't noticed the time either but it was time for Ellie to go back to the academy.

Maybe I should see her off with Diana.

I opened the door and stepped out.

Bam.

"⋯?"

There was a pool of water in front of the door.

It was so much water that it seeped through the cracks in the wooden hallway, but it didn't absorb enough to form a puddle.

‘What the hell.’

Instinctively, I stepped in the puddle, flicked it out like a cigarette, and lifted my foot.

The liquid that dripped on the soles of my shoes was strangely sticky and slippery and didn't seem like ordinary water.

Shrugging off the odd sensation, I walked out of the room with Ellie.

"⋯!"

Diana, who was nonchalantly wiping down a bowl at the bar, looked at us, startled, and smiled awkwardly.

"Did the conversation go well?"

Apparently, Diana thought the conversation was the reason Ellie had come to my room.

"Yeah, yeah."

"It went well."

There was no way in hell I was going to say to Diana, "Your daughter asked me for an ass-whooping.”

What if Diana found out that Ellie had asked me to slap her ass?

Ellie would hang herself in shame.

Seriously.

"⋯I see."

Diana stared at us for a moment, her face expressionless, and then nodded.

And that was the end of Ellie's butt stamp saga.

No, if I say it like this, it sounds like I praised her ass, so I praised her ass with a stamp.

No matter what I did, it sounded weird, so I just ended it with a compliment.

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I saw Ellie off with Diana at the door of the inn.

"Hey, foster mom, do you think you'll be able to come to my graduation?"

"⋯Of course. Even if it's not graduation, feel free to call me anytime."

Before we parted ways, Ellie told me about the graduation ceremony.

The Academy's graduation ceremony is held at the end of February every year. There was still about a month left until graduation.

"⋯Mister, can you come to the graduation ceremony?"

"Shall I go?"

"Woohoo! Come on, don't be silly!"

"Okay, I'll come."

I patted Ellie's head, who flicked her elf ears and looked up at me with fierce eyes. The kid's reaction was amusing, almost teasing.

"⋯⋯"

I felt a strange gaze beside me. Diana was staring at me and Ellie with a puzzled look on her face.

I took my hand away from Ellie's hair.

"⋯Ah."

Ellie moaned, sounding a little disappointed.

Hmm. Hmm.

Trying to regain my attention, she cleared her throat and leaned closer to me, speaking in a whisper.

"I think the portal research you asked for will take a little longer. I've been analyzing it for a while, but it's a bit difficult⋯ I think we'll have to do it later."

Apparently, portals were a mystery that even Ellie couldn't easily figure out but that's okay.

I didn't expect to have an answer in a matter of days or weeks anyway.

"You can take your time. You need to focus on your work first. You've got reports and magical research to do before graduation."

"⋯Yes. I'll be stuck in the Great Library for a while, but I'll do some research in my spare time."

The Academy's Great Library. I had heard it was a treasure trove of knowledge, much larger than the Temple's library and filled with specialized books.

I was a little curious.

"Okay. By the way, can I go to the Great Library, too?"

"Yes. As long as you're accompanied by an Academy student."

Ellie swallows the last word as she looks at me. I wonder if it's just my mood that makes her expression seem strangely mocking.

"I suppose it's possible."

"⋯No. Just come with me, and if you don't understand something, I can explain it to you."

Ellie smiled sympathetically. Damn. Look at that smug, highly educated smirk.

The Wisdom 0 in the status bar was even more annoying today.

"Heehee. See you later, Uncle!⋯Foster mom too!"

"Goodbye."

"⋯⋯Be careful."

Diana and I waved goodbye to Ellie, who was gradually walking away.

"⋯You and Ellie got along really well, didn't you?"

"Yes. I think it helped that we were together in the Labyrinth."

Hmph⋯

Diana crossed her arms and looked at me with wide eyes.

I wondered why she was looking at me like that, but then I realized that I would also look at a man who claimed to be close to my daughter with a strange expression.

Or, in this world, I'm supposed to look at her like a son, or something? I'm still a little confused.

"Still, I'm glad that you and Ellie seem to have reconciled, at least a little."

Aside from that, this was genuine.

Diana's expression when she talked about Ellie was so full of regret.

Ellie's expression when she talked about Diana was similar.

Both mother and daughter harbor similar regrets.

But what about now, they're reunited, they've talked, they've shared stories, and they've waved and smiled as they parted ways.

I think it was the best thing that could have happened under the circumstances.

"⋯That, yeah. If it weren't for your efforts, Balkan, I honestly wouldn't have been able to talk to Ellie, but⋯"

Diana nods in acknowledgment, then opens her mouth to say something, but closes it.

"But?"

"⋯Yes. No. I said it wrong. We should get going, too. You must be tired after the labyrinth, and you should get some rest in your room."

Diana shook her head as she said that. It felt like she was about to say something, but held it back.

I had a sneaking suspicion that she was trying to say something, but she had a lot of secrets, so I figured I'd just go with it.

Oh, and the room reminded me.

"Hey, Diana. I just realized that there was some kind of water in front of my door and the hallway was wet."

"⋯Uh, uh, uh?!"

Diana's face, which had just been submerged in the water, stiffened slightly, then quickly turned bright red.

"I'll go and mop it up-"

"Oh, no! I'll do it! I'll do it! Balkan can rest!!!"

"Uhhhhh."

Diana replied in a tremendously booming voice and headed up to the second floor.

There was not a trace of her usual laid-back demeanor.

I don't think I've ever seen her so urgent before.

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The next evening Joy Hog laid out a luxurious pouch of gold and silver coins and a glittering soul stone on the inn table.

I could hear the admiration of the party around me.

Human eyes always twinkle when they find treasure and riches and my heart pounded with excitement too.

"Now that we're all here, let's settle the bill."

Yes. Pay up.