**Chapter 60: Taking a short break (5)**

With my back to Zirnier, I sat down on the small stool brought to me by Nos. 1 and 2.

Then, carefully, I removed my helmet.

The air felt fresher than it had in a long time.

Actually, it wasn't so fresh.

The air, cooked by the immense heat of the furnace, was quite hot and stifling.

However, there was a strange odor wafting from behind me.

I removed my helmet, sharpening my sense of smell and immediately recognized the smell for what it was.

'The body odor of Zirnier.’

I could smell the slight odor of iron from the hammer she'd swung earlier.

But more than that, the rusted scent of a sweaty female began to rise up, drowning out the metal.

‘Even with the body of a superhuman, the immense heat of the furnace can be felt.’

As I was contemplating this, I felt a movement behind me.

Zirnier had come to me and squatted down on the backless chair, just like me.

The distance is much closer than I thought. If I leaned in even slightly, my back would touch her.

To top it off, her body is quite hot, and I feel like my back is on fire.

"So, are we touching?"

Zirnier said, still in a nonchalant tone.

‘You're not interested in the opposite sex because all you care about is blacksmithing.’

An explorer and a blacksmith. Pretty good for business partners.

"Yes."

I nodded lightly, and Zirnier’s hands came into view, extending from behind me.

At first glance, they are rather crude hands.

Rough, callused, and scarred from past injuries, they were the hands of a master craftsman, built up through countless hammers and hard work.

As if even such a master's hands were only the hands of a mere female, Zirnier’s hands on my cheeks were softer than I could have imagined.

The two hands on my cheeks were quite warm. It felt like rubbing a hot pack against my cheeks on a cold winter day.

"I'll move."

"Okay."

Zirnier's fingers moved up to my brow, gently brushing the skin.

A hand, warm as a hot pack, wrapped around my eyeball and naturally, my vision darkened.

Only the tiniest bit of light filtered through the gaps between her fingers, and I could smell Zirnier’s scent through my nose, which was even more sensitive now that my eyes were covered.

‘⋯This feels like something very naughty.’

I honestly didn't think much of it until she touched my cheek, but now that my vision was blocked, it suddenly felt very stimulating.

"⋯hmmm⋯"

I hear Zirnier mumble, sounding strangely troubled.

-Kirik. Kiririk. Chirp!

A trio of mechanical arms clanked and moved.

-Rub. Rub. Rub.

Zirnier's hand moved slightly over my eyeball.

‘Such a simple task, to determine the wearer's field of vision.’

It was only because she was a Zirnier, after all. No other blacksmith could pull off such a trick.

-Rub. Rub.

"⋯⋯"

The longer it takes to do this, the more difficult the task.

-Rubbing, rubbing, rubbing.

The hand rises from the cheek, passes over the eye sockets and brow, and presses against the temples, forehead, and crown of the head.

Then it moved back down, skimming the bridge of my nose, stroking my jawline.

"Ms. Zirnier. This is..."

"⋯Don't open your mouth for a second. I need to concentrate."

Zirnier’s voice could not have been more serious.

‘Yes. I shouldn't interrupt the craftsman's work.’

I felt the craftsman's touch for a long time without speaking.

Her hands, crude and rough but with a feminine grace, caressed every inch of my face.

-Mmph.

Her index and middle fingers pressed firmly down the philtrum as they passed.

*Philtrum= the vertical groove between the base of the nose and the border of the upper lip.*

"Ouch."

I chuckled, finding the situation strangely amusing. Suddenly, a memory came back to me.

‘I never thought I'd have my face touched like this by a woman other than my sister.’

But the thought didn't last long.

The tiniest of laughs caused a giant snowball to roll and Zirnier’s concentration was broken.

"Oof."

Zirnier’s finger pushed past my lips.

Zirnier's other hand, which had been roaming my face, writhing eagerly, stiffened.

I felt Zirnier’s finger on my tongue.

An obvious accident. A catastrophe.

I reflexively clamped my mouth shut, embarrassed as much as she was.

I bite down on Zirnier's finger, very lightly.

"Hyaahhh!"

She let out a huge scream and Zirnier's hand was out of my mouth in an instant.

"Are you okay?!"

I reflexively turned around to look back but Zirnier grabbed my head by the chin and I stood rigid, unable to turn my head even halfway.

"⋯You don't have to look at me, I'm fine! I'm sorry. I've never seen anything like this before."

"Oh, no, it's me⋯"

She was only touching my face with her fingers, so this could have happened.

Moreover, even though it was an accident caused by my negligence, Ms. Zirnier said it as if it was her fault.

I don't know if this is the pride of a craftsman.

"⋯Yes, I'll keep touching it."

Zirnier expressed her willingness to continue working, focusing more on her work than on the series of accidents.

I nodded in admiration at her work etiquette.

Zirnier's fingers traced over my face again.

Out of the corner of my eye, I could see her fingers tracing my midsection once again.

I tried not to think about it, but the moment of catastrophe came back to me.

‘A little salty.’

I could still feel her fingers rolling across my tongue.

The vague sensation of touch, the vague sensation of taste, the vague sensation of flavor, kept floating around in my head.

Zirnier’s index and middle fingers pressed firmly against my upper and lower lips.

"This is necessary to pinpoint the location of the entrance hole."

"Ah, yes."

Zirnier didn't have to say anything, but she excused herself.

For about 12 minutes, Zirnier pressed, stroked, and patted the area around my lips, taking the sensation into her hands.

"Mmm, mmm," she said, "there you go. You can use your helmet, but keep it on the side while I get it repaired."

Finally, it was done. I felt strangely exhausted, even though I hadn't done anything.

I put on the other helmet Zirnier had brought me and rose from the chair, another helmet with no special features.

I turned around and saw Zirnier standing there, looking nonchalant. I can't see her expression through the mask.

Her left hand was wrapped tightly around the index finger of her right hand.

Maybe it was on purpose, but it was the same finger that had been in my mouth.

"Are you sure you're okay?"

It was obvious what I was asking. Zirnier wrapped her fingers tighter around her own and replied in a nonchalant voice.

"Huh? Me? Huh? Uh, yeah. I'm fine. I'm really fine, right? Number one."

-Tsk, tsk, tsk. Chirp. Clack!

The trio of mechanical arms huddled together, their forearms and fingers crossed.

What the hell, they're broken.

-Puck!

Zirnier kicked the trio into a corner.

"It shouldn't take long to repair the helm or make the axe, I've got the framework, I just need to work on the details with the minotaur soul stone you gave me."

I made an appointment to visit in three days and bowed to Zirnier.

"Thank you. I don't have much I can offer you, but if you come to the inn later, I'll pour you a glass of dwarven brew."

"Hm, hmm. How the hell did he know I liked that stuff?"

"You've been drinking it every time I see you, so I knew you liked it."

"Hmm. So you have an eye for more than just weapons, I see. I'll be there soon, so clean your glass."

Zirnier spoke with a smirk and clapped her hands.

I followed her lead and exited the underground workshop.

Outside, I saw the customers still looking dumbfounded.

They looked like they wanted to say, "I've been waiting for a long time.”

"Sorry for your trouble~"

What can I do about it? If they're upset, they should have managed their connections better.

I'm realizing that I owe a lot to Diana.

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Zirnier recalled the sensations left on her fingertips.

Lips that were strangely hard and rough at the same time, a soft tongue⋯ sticky saliva⋯

Zirnier’s fingers twitched in her mouth.

Her nose was inexplicably drawn to the finger.

In her defense, it was the curiosity of an artisan.

She sniffed the air and smelled a strange minty scent. He's surprisingly good at self-care.

But more than that, there was a strange smell that made her stomach tickle.

‘⋯What is it?’

I can't say it, not when I've created one of the most satisfying pieces of work in my life.

A shiver, strangely similar to that one, shot up her lower stomach to the peak of her chest.

"Hick⋯"

Zirnier sank back in her chair, her legs trembling at the strange sensation but her back strangely relaxed.

She pulled her finger away from her nose as soon as she realized what was wrong.

This is dangerous. I shouldn't smell this anymore.

‘⋯Why did my mind wander.’

Zirnier shook her head to clear away the faintest trace of his scent.

She began to focus on her work.

She looked at her first creation, the Great Helm, and looked for ways to improve it but to do so, she had to recall the sensation of touching her face again.

From the crown of his head to the tip of his chin, she recalled the shape of the face she hadn't seen with her eyes, only with the sensation of her fingertips.

His short-sleeved forearms were covered in pockmarks and scars, and she expected the same for his face, but to her surprise, there were no such marks.

When she touched the skin, it was surprisingly good, and when she calculated the viewing angle by looking at the ratio between the forehead, brow, and eyes⋯ it was surprisingly good.

The face is small, the bridge of the nose is high, and the jawline is tough, so even if the pitching size becomes a little smaller⋯

Hmm⋯

Zirnier pondered, pressing her tongue against her index finger, which was now wet with saliva.

The vast majority of people would never be able to deduce a human face from this little information but not Zirnier, one of the Labyrinth City's finest craftsmen.

"It's not exactly the same, but it's a rough sketch."

As she visualized his face in her mind's eye, the tingling sensation in her chest grew stronger.

Her bandaged, sweaty breasts flinched at the tingling sensation.

After a moment of red-faced distress, Zirnier absentmindedly remembered her former comrade.

"Ha."

Suddenly, she wondered why she'd taken in a part-timer she'd never cared about before.

"Diana bitch...how cute is he?"

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I finished a big job early in the morning.

I made my way to the Explorers' Alliance for my next routine.

Ignoring the strange stares, I headed straight for the training room, where I found Idelbert training alone.

Her pale copper-colored skin exuded a healthy glow, and her body was lean and toned to perfection.

She wore a shocking leotard that precariously hugged her breasts and buttocks, which were the height of her athleticism.

She's someone you can't get used to looking at.

"You're here, apprentice. It's been a long journey."

"Yes. Thank you for your concern, Master."

"Prepare for the duel, I'm curious to see how much you've improved."

With that, Idelbert gestured to me.

Master⋯ Even if she said that with an emotionless expression⋯

I think it's a bit too much to demand that from a student who's just returned from a near-death experience.