**Chapter 78: Bath and Purify (3)**

As Balkan raised himself for the blessing check, his body was revealed to be clinging to a bathrobe soaked in holy water.

"⋯hhh."

A small intake of breath rang out.

It came from Serif.

As a devout follower of the Earth Mother, Serif was supposed to remain a virgin for the rest of her life.

Before she was a devout believer, Serif was a female who instinctively craved a male.

Her gaze instinctively travels down to his abs.

Balkan spontaneously turned his back to Serif and sat down in the tub.

The reason for Balkan's back was clear.

To feel blessings and curses, the priest's body needed to be closest to the heart.

"Is this how it's done?"

Balkan asked Serif.

"⋯Neh."

Serif swallowed hard, pushing aside the regret that was creeping up on her.

-Gulp.

She swallowed hard but didn't make eye contact.

Serif gently touched Balkan's back, feeling slightly less tense than before.

As she placed her divine hand on the viciously cracked muscles of Balkan's back, she was immediately met with the sound of a wildly beating heart.

-Thump-thump-thump.

Serif closed her eyes, concentrating on the sound of Balkan's heart.

'Honestly⋯⋯'

In the back of his mind, she remembered Balkan's words.

Serif realized that her consciousness had been sucked somewhere else.

And she looked up at [something] in the sky somewhere.

Something so distant, [something].

It was the same view she'd seen before, when she'd confirmed the Balkan Blessing.

The [something] had been staring at her from somewhere in the distance.

She didn't think Balkan has noticed it yet, but if the day comes when he does.

Will he be able to withstand this gaze?

Of course, one day he will.

Balkan has come a long way in less than half a year since they first met.

But what about the months and years ahead?

Serif was half sure that in the not-too-distant future, he would be a force to be reckoned with in the Labyrinth City.

That was all. He would be a bright light in a world tainted by evil, as the Mother Earth Goddess had revealed.

But after a moment's consideration, Serif shook her head.

It was too soon, not yet.

[■■■ ■ looks at Serif Adeline who invaded ■■.]

 [She is banished.]

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I felt the warmth of Serif's hand on my back.

A few minutes before I feel the warmth of an unfamiliar hand and the holiness radiating from it, running through every inch of my body.

"Blessing confirmed, it's done."

Serif's voice sounded calmer, and I turned my head slightly in response.

Serif, who was breaking out in a light sweat, as she had during the previous blessing check, immediately pulled a wand out of thin air and swung it around.

Then, out of nowhere, paper and a pen flew in front of her.

The pen began to move of its own accord and scribble on the paper.

Serif soon snatched the paper out of thin air.

"In addition to this blessing, you've gained another in the meantime. Congratulations, Balkan. As you promised, you've grown a little stronger."

During our second meeting, when I confirmed the blessing, Serif asked me for a favor.

To keep heading into the Labyrinth, to be stronger than you are now.

"I tried."

I hadn't set out to become stronger, but entering the Labyrinth made me naturally seek it.

Serif laughed at my short answer, her tail flicking.

I stared at Serif for a moment, then looked at the paper she handed me.

Blessing of the Battle, with the Blessing of Radiance.

[◆ Blessing of the Hour of Judgment]

- Once a day, you have a moment of judgment.

- If there is a danger to your life that you don't recognize, it will appear unconsciously.

The contents of this new blessing were also written.

- Wisdom +3, +10 if all prerequisites are met.

There were also additional stats in the status window that were more powerful than the Temple's appraisal.

Overall, I was happy with the blessing.

It gave me a small boost in wisdom that I lacked.

'Most of all, I like the blessing itself.’

The uncanny focus I used to have unconsciously when I felt my life was in danger.

This blessing allows me to deal with it consciously.

It was a tremendous benefit. It would give me a lot more leeway in future battles.

"This is an interesting blessing. I've only ever seen one of these before."

It was such an unusual blessing that even Serif looked at it curiously.

I was dealt an unusual hand but that was it.

"Serif."

"What?"

"Is this really all I have to show for my blessing?"

The piece of paper Serif handed me had only three blessings on it.

There was no question mark blessing.

"⋯⋯"

Serif's face tightened slightly as I sounded convinced there was another blessing.

"⋯⋯"

"⋯⋯"

An odd silence hovered.

The humid, warm air of the purification chamber made Serif's face break out into a slight sweat.

"⋯Did you know?"

It was a meaningful question, but I realized it was about the question mark blessing.

It was a de facto confession, a confession that she had checked the blessing, but hadn't been honest with me.

"I have a guess, but I don't know for sure."

I knew from the status window that I had a Blessing, but I didn't know what it did or how it functioned.

Serif purses her lips as if considering my words, then raises her hand as if swearing an oath.

A white glow of holy power enveloped his hand.

"Faithful servant of the Mother Earth Goddess, Serif Adeline, High Priestess, prays here now."

A white powder descended upon Serif's head, dissolving instantly.

"From now on, I swear to the divine that I will never speak a false word against you, Balkan, for the rest of my life."

An oath to the divine.

Serif had enforced a rule upon herself that she would never break.

From this moment forward, Serif would not tell me a single falsehood for the rest of her life.

"No, what the..."

I opened my mouth, dumbfounded by the sudden declaration of oath.

"Even if I didn't mean to, I ended up deceiving you, and I felt it was the least I could do to make you trust me in the future."

Serif smiled bitterly.

"I do apologize for not being clearer about the blessing you have, Balkan, but."

There was sincerity in her red eyes.

It was, perhaps, the most sincere and honest look I'd ever seen from Serif.

"I just want you to know one thing. The reason I didn't mention the blessing was because I thought it would be more beneficial to you now, Balkan."

"⋯Is that true?"

"Yes. I can affirm it on faith."

Not knowing the content of the blessing would be more helpful?

It was completely contrary to conventional wisdom.

Get the blessing, and then increase my mastery of it, that's the fastest way to get stronger.

[◆ The Blessing of ???]

- ???

- Stamina+10 Strength+10 Agility+10

‘What kind of blessing is this?’

Serif's mind kept trying to wander off, but the eyes of the man in front of her drove it away.

That other person was a level 50 powerhouse, one of the top powers in the Labyrinth City of Valerus, and was treated with special treatment by the Temple.

Such a being had asked me to trust her, even swearing an oath of divinity.

There had to be a good reason.

‘No, rather, isn't this an opportunity?’

Serif can't lie to me now.

If I force her to tell me the details of the Question Mark Blessing, she'll reluctantly open her mouth.

‘⋯No, that's not possible.’

That would undermine Serif's trust right out of the gate.

The question mark blessing is a nagging mystery, but not knowing right away won't kill me.

However it was clear that Saint Serif's unconditional favor would be of great benefit, both now and far into the future.

In the end, the mental scales tipped in her favor.

"If you’re willing to go to such lengths, there must be a reason."

Serif's tail, which had been twitching nervously, stood on end.

"⋯! Mi, do you believe me?!"

"Why wouldn't I? Last time you performed a miracle yourself, and this time you even swore an oath to prove your words."

Actually, the oath was a bit too much this time.

How could I not believe her when she said that?

"Thanks to the miracle you granted me then, I was saved from a great danger in this labyrinth. Thank you."

It's true that Serif's miracle did save the day.

As I bowed my head in gratitude, I saw Serif clasp her hands together as if in prayer.

"I, for one, thank you for believing in me, even when I forsook my duties as a priest. One day, I will tell you of your blessing, Balkan, with my own words."

"Someday" implies that there is something lacking in my current knowledge of the blessing.

And that lack is most likely powerlessness.

So I have no choice but to be strong.

"I see."

Serif looked up at me and replied, her tail wagging gently.

Her expression brightened, as if a great worry had been relieved.

"So, are we done with the bathing?"

"Ah, yes! You may come out now⋯"

I lifted myself out of the tub before Serif had finished speaking.

My body was quite hot and I was even feeling a little dizzy from the constant soaking in the hot holy water.

My bathrobe, soaked with holy water and clinging tightly to my body, sagged.

"⋯Waaaah!"

I heard an exclamation from behind me.

Serif, who was kneeling, had her gaze set right on the inside of my thigh.

"Ugh-"

The cat's tail, which had been flicking gently, moved swiftly to cover Serif's mouth.

The fur on the white tail bristled as her white ears twitched frantically, and her white face turned apple red.

Our eyes met through the helmet and Serif quickly averted her gaze.

"What is wrong with you all of a sudden?"

I asked, puzzled by the sudden change, and Serif, still tucking her tail and squeezing his eyes shut, muttered.

"Earth Mother⋯teach me⋯!"

"⋯yeah?"

I couldn't understand what he was saying because her pronunciation was slurred.

Suddenly, as I turned to leave the bath, leaving behind the praying Serif, I realized where her gaze had been.

Between my thighs.

'⋯She's a holy woman of the temple.'

A saint in a group that is so sensitive about sexual matters that they blush, even saying that sleeping together is unclean.

‘She almost said, Look at that dickhead⋯’

Suddenly, I realized that the oath Serif swore was an oath to be truthful.

"⋯"

Just in case, I turned my head to look at Serif again.

"Aaaaahhh!"

Suddenly, I heard a scream and the voice was familiar.

My perceptions immediately expanded to the men's cleansing room on the first floor.

There the screams of Hope, a priest of the Gellan party, rang out.

⋯It wasn't a long scream.