

The Tower 60

Chapter 60

The labyrinth of Payne was complex and full of traps, so the survival rate was not very high, and it took a considerable amount of time to escape. However, as more challengers began to climb up, more people had collected and gathered information about the labyrinth.

After putting together these pieces of information one by one, a map was created. Thanks to this, most of Earth's challengers got a map before challenging the 16th floor. Although the map was designed to help the challengers survive, the map was not a hundred percent accurate.

The biggest problem was that it was not easy to find the way out even if people looked at the map. Since the labyrinth was so large, there were hundreds of starting points and dozens of escape points. In addition, not all exits at the escape points were open. Only a few were open, and this was determined at random. Besides, the exits could open or close when the traps inside the labyrinth were activated. Therefore, even with a map, it was almost impossible to move with confidence.

'There must be something about this woman.'

There had been a few disagreements between Lee Shin and Alice along the way, but there also had been times when they were in sync, especially whenever the group was ready to move forward. In those moments, they would always need a clear route before they decided to proceed. It was an action that could not be done unless they had certainty.

"Hahaha! Why should we bring something to eat? We can escape before then! Are you okay, Mariel? You're already too skinny, so you have to eat well!" Fletta said, laughing.

"I'm fine, because an Elyos doesn't get hungry," Mariel replied.

"Wow! Really? You are so lucky!" Fletta seemed surprised.

"I've heard that the labyrinth is a difficult place, but I think it's fun. It's fun to defeat monsters sometimes," Mariel said.

"Mariel, you're beautiful, and you even fight well. Are all angels like you?" Fletta asked.

The two were blushing. The hardships that would soon follow had not crossed their minds.

‘Tsk.’

Lee Shin, who was slowly following them from behind, clicked his tongue and shook his head. He remembered every single road on the 16th floor. Thanks to this ability to never forget what he had seen once, Lee Shin was able to be sure of where he was now. Besides, the other thing that Lee Shin could be sure of was that Alice also knew the way exactly.

‘If we continue this way, we'll escape this place in two days.’

Alice was definitely taking the shortest way out of here, but she was pretending from time to time as if she did not know the way very well. It was clear that she either had the ability to master the map perfectly, or to find the way. However, one thing that was suspicious about her was that she seemed too confident that the exit would be open, despite the possibility that the exit could be shut.

‘We can't just go on like this.’

Kwoooahhh—!

Thud! Thud!

All of a sudden, there was a scream coming from the front.

‘Wait... this sound is...’

It was a cry of the monster, Devagar Cow, which was also known as a crazy cow.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

The walls and the ground shook as if there was an earthquake. Based on how loud the sound was, there was not only one or two of them.

"Is that a monster?" Alice muttered.

"Be careful, everyone!" Mariel shouted.

"Don't worry! I, Fletta, will protect you all," Fletta said confidently.

Thump! Thump! Thump! Thump! Thump!?

The noise was getting louder and louder. It was the sound of excited Devagar Cows running straight into the walls.

'Five times in a row.'

From the vibrations of the walls, it was clear that five Devagar Cows were headed their way. Previously, they had only encountered small monsters, which did not require the challengers to reveal their true skills. Those small monsters were easily knocked down by Fletta and Mariel with their spears and swords. However, if there were five Devagar Cows, they would have to show what they were made of.

"Hey! Why don't you fight with them this time instead of just staying behind?" Alice criticized Lee Shin with a slightly heightened voice.

Alice was also standing still behind Fletta.

"Then why don't you fight too," Lee Shin replied.

Frowning, Alice looked forward without responding to Lee Shin. Her gaze was fixed on the corner at the end of the long straight corridor.

This was the corner where the Devagar Cows would soon appear. In order to deal with their attacks without being hit by their strong body slams, it was better to wait for them before this long straight corridor. Devagar Cows were said to be medium-sized monsters, but by simply summoning Bark or Beltiar, they would be easy to deal with for Lee Shin.

The attack pattern of the Devagar Cows was merely about physical power which came from their large body size and weight. Just one tanker to counter them, even if there were dozens of them, would have been sufficient. However, since Fletta and Mariel were not tankers, Alice would have to show her skills.

"Here they come!"

The five Devagar Cows jumped out of the corner and slammed their bodies against the wall. They turned around and began to rush toward them. It was just a simple attack pattern that was nothing special, but considering their big sizes, fast speed, and overwhelming power, the challengers had no choice but to feel threatened.

Woong!

Fletta flicked the sword from his waist using his left thumb, and there was a sudden change in his aura. Fletta's previously frivolous demeanor disappeared and he started to look serious, even fierce. His calm eyes quickly scanned the opponents who were approaching.

'We have to kill that speed.'

Fletta, who clutched his sword tightly, rushed to the Devagar Cow on the left, and then kicked the ground for a boost to run over its head. It was Fletta's conviction to put on his serious mode whenever he held his sword, even though he could be a shallow person normally.

"Haap!" After organizing his thoughts, Fletta swung his sword. A blue sword aura cut through the Devagar Cow's thick skin and cut one of its eyes as well.

Whoosh— Splash!

His eyeball was slashed and blood splattered all over the place. As he twisted his sword, some blood landed in its other eye.

"Keaughh!" The Devagar Cow roared in pain.

One eye was blinded and he could not open the other one because of the blood. The Devagar Cow, who was struggling with pain, roared and turned away.

"Keugh!" Another Devagar Cow roared.

"Kaaaakkk!" The other Devagar Cow roared as well.

Boom! Thud!

The Devagar Cows collided with one another and their formation was ruined in an instant. The three Devagar Cows collapsed. The Devagar Cows, having lost their momentum, were now just preys that could be easily captured.

Another slash through the skin and into the tendon of the leg neutralized two of the monsters at once.

‘Did he already figure out the opponent’s strategy?’

Lee Shin, who was watching Fletta from the back, was surprised and showed admiration. While Fletta was in charge of the three Cows, Mariel also handled the other two Cows with little difficulty. The battle ended much more quickly compared to what Lee Shin had expected. Neither of them were tanker-like fighters, but they were able to beat the overwhelmingly powerful and agile Devagar Cows. The battle and the incompatibility with their opponents showed a difference in ability. Lee Shin nodded in acknowledgment of the high ability of the two fighters.

"Ha..." Alice sighed.

Alice frowned and snorted at Lee Shin as she watched the scene, because Lee Shin did not do anything this time, just like herself. Lee Shin did not even pay attention to her gaze, simply ignored Alice. Fletta had no complaints about them sitting out of this fight, because he was able to show off his skills in front of the beautiful women. Also, Mariel just did not care because of her stupidly kind personality. Lastly, Alice, who had read the personalities of these people with ease, made good use of them.

"Fletta, you're so awesome!" Alice complimented him.

"Hahaha! Was I?" Fletta was blushing.

"Yes! And thank you, Mariel. I was scared, but thanks to you, we survived," Alice said.

"No worries, it's natural for someone with power to help," Mariel replied.

Alice's attitude changed completely from what it was like before. Lee Shin did not want to say anything about her tactics for survival, nor did he look down on her because of that. Lee Shin thought that everyone had their own way of life and they all had different levels of ability to cope with situations.

"You... you seem like you're getting a free pass again this time," said Alice.

"Well, I think it's the same for you, too," Lee Shin replied.

"But, I'm leading the wa—" Alice paused quickly.

"So... were you leading the way for us the whole time?" Lee Shin asked.

"That's not what I'm trying to say. Anyways, if you're not going to do anything, don't disturb me and stay quiet." After realizing her mistake, Alice's facial expression got stiff and she stared at Lee Shin for a while.

'Hmm... I'm disturbing her...?'

Lee Shin reflected on her words, smirked, and went over to where the dead Devagar Cows lay. When Alice saw that, a fishy smile appeared on her face.

"I heard that it's quite tough to get the meat out of the Devagar Cow, because the muscles are strong and their skin is tough. But, if we get past that part, people say that the meat tastes really good," Alice explained.

"Is that so?" Fletta asked.

"Then shall we have a meal?" Alice asked.

"Huh? Is it already time to eat? But wait, can you prepare the meat from this, Alice? How can you handle such a big guy with such frail hands?" Fletta asked as if he was worried.

"How would I do that?" Alice asked back.

"Huh? Then how are you going to eat this guy?" Fletta asked with a puzzled look.

Fletta could not understand Alice's intentions, so he tilted his head, eyes wide. Alice's expression hardened for a second but quickly realized it, and spoke to Fletta with a bright smile.

"Will you do it for me, Fletta? I don't think I'm strong enough to do that..." Alice said.

"Oh... but I don't have the sword to slaughter him," Fletta replied.

"What do you mean? You have one right there. Can't you just use that?" Alice asked.

For the first time since he had been here, Fletta looked uncomfortable. He looked at his sword and then at Alice, and let out a tentative 'Ah'. Many thoughts seemed to pass through Fletta's mind.

"This sword contains my mind, and it's definitely not made to get meat from these monst—" Fletta got interrupted.

"Fletta, pretty please? I'm hungry," said Alice.

Alice put her face close to Fletta and her big eyes sparkled. Seeing that, Fletta could not refuse her request. He accepted it reluctantly.

"Thank you so much! You're the best, Fletta," Alice said.

When the delighted Alice flashed her big bright smile and gave Fletta a hug, he blushed and stood rooted to that spot.

"Mariel, come eat with us. You've done a lot to catch this," said Alice.

"I don't get hungry, so it's okay," Mariel replied.

"But you can still taste the food, no?" Alice asked.

"Oh... that's true, but I don't know how to cook..." said Mariel.

"That's okay. You've worked hard, so you should eat with us," Alice said.

"Okay then, thank you for the meal," said Mariel.

After thanking them, Mariel waved at Lee Shin who was a few feet away.

"Mr. Lee Shin, you—" Mariel muttered but was soon interrupted.

"Why should we eat with him when he didn't do anything? We're doing all the hard work, so he should be grateful that we have let him come along while we clear the way," said Alice arrogantly.

"But still... He's in our team, so why don't we help each—" Mariel was interrupted again.

"Mariel, humans have their own rules. I understand your kindness, but you can't do that. Do you understand?" Alice asked.

Mariel looked at Lee Shin with a puzzled look on her face when she saw how determined Alice was.

"I'm fine, you guys can eat. I'll take care of myself," Lee Shin said.

"Ha, I think he's fine, so let's not worry about him," Alice said.

After hearing what Lee Shin had said, Mariel, who had nothing else to say, just nodded. Since Fletta did not have any experience butchering before, he was struggling to cut the skin of the meat. When Alice saw him mincing the meat, Alice was annoyed but she just watched him do it because there was nothing else she could do. They could eat the meat as long as they cut it and roasted it.

At that time, Lee Shin approached the Devagar Cow that had collapsed to one side. He took out the knife he had on his waistband.

"Huh, wasn't that a sword that he wore as a decoration?" Alice laughed at him and watched Lee Shin. 'Let's see how much he would struggle,' she thought.

The sword was pure white and it seemed so elegant that it would not have been a surprise if it were a royal family heirloom, passed down from generation to generation. Alice did not know much about the sword because it was always in the scabbard, but now that Lee Shin had taken it out, the sword did not seem to be ordinary.

'No way... Is he a talented player or something?'

Alice thought about the possibility for a moment, but most of the people who usually carried both a sword and wand were not that great. In fact, almost everyone was like that. While Alice was wondering whether Lee Shin was the son of a high-ranking family, Lee Shin began to cut the flesh of the Devagar Cow without hesitation.

- M-m-master! What are you doing right now?

Splash! Swish! Swish!

As he began to cut the flesh apart, Martyr began to scream.

- Ahhh! Arghhh! I've never cut anyone properly before— Argh!

"Shut up. It's dead, so can't you cut it?" Lee Shin said.

- No, but still! Argh!

When Alice saw Lee Shin wearing the robe and holding a wand, she thought he was a wizard. However, when she saw him cut the thick skin of the Cow without much difficulty, she was frozen on the spot, her mouth open with amazement.

"Wow, that was amazing, Mr. Lee Shin!" Mariel shouted.

"Wow... where did you learn that? That was amazing." Fletta complemented Lee Shin as well.

Mariel and Fletta expressed admiration when they saw Lee Shin butchering with a long sword that was unsuited for it. One of the essential skills of climbing the tower was the skill of preparing meat. The challengers never knew when they would starve, or when they could replenish their food.

Although he was a wizard, preparing the meat was child's play to Lee Shin. Alice grinded her teeth as she watched Lee Shin prepare the meat from the Devagar Cow. Then, she looked at the meat that Fletta had prepared.

Fletta had tried to cut it well, but since he did not have the skills, such as separating fat or draining blood, the meat was badly damaged. Even if one only glanced at it, they could tell there was a significant difference in quality between the meat prepared by Lee Shin and the one by Fletta.

‘At least he won’t be able to cook the mea—’

Click! Swoosh!

With a snap of the finger, Lee Shin created a small bonfire over the fat and skin of the Devagar Cow. Lee Shin stuck a big piece of meat on Martyr and placed it on fire. Soon, the juicy meat was ready. The outside was crispy and the juice that oozed from the meat would make anyone salivate.

- Ah! It's too hot, master!

"Says you who can endure the heat of hell," Lee Shin muttered.

- Ahh, sob. This isn't nice, master.

Lee Shin did not care even if Martyr was whining, but he soon turned around when he could feel a gaze on him. It was Mariel, who had said she was not interested in eating.

"Come here and eat," Lee Shin offered.

"What? Really? Can I do that?" Mariel asked.

"Of course, you caught it. You have the right to eat," said Lee Shin.

"Thank you!" Mariel replied in happiness.

Mariel came over quickly and ate a piece of meat that Lee Shin had prepared with the Martyr. Surprised by the taste of the meat that melted in her mouth, she exclaimed after each bite. When Fletta saw that, he wanted to ask to try a piece; but after looking at Alice, he was pressured and did not ask for one.

"Hey, Fletta! What is this! The meat's gone bad!" Alice yelled at Fletta.

"I mean... I tried my best..." Fletta muttered.

"Ugh! Why is the fire so weak?" Alice shouted in annoyance.

Normally, just being able to grill meat was good enough, but the equipment that she had brought could not control the intensity of the fire with as much ease as Lee Shin's magic. Moreover, Fletta had no skill in grilling meat as much as Lee Shin, so the difference in taste was obvious. Some parts were tough, some were undercooked. Alice took a few bites of the grilled meat, then threw it away, as if she was annoyed. When Lee Shin saw that, he reached out to Fletta who was very discouraged.

"Fletta, come over here and eat," Lee Shin said.

"Huh?" Fletta asked.

"You had a hard time catching it, too. You deserve to eat," said Lee Shin.

"Huh? Oh, do I...?" Fletta asked.

Fletta, who was conscious of Alice, slowly went to Lee Shin's side and started eating the meat.

"Wow! It tastes like the best meat dish I used to eat in my hometown. Is your class chef by any chance?" Fletta asked.

"Nah, it's not," Lee Shin replied.

While the three enjoyed themselves, Fletta could feel the gaze from behind him. His face became stiff.

"Well... Wouldn't it be nice if Alice joined us, too?" Fletta asked.

"Why would you ask that? If she wants to eat, she'll come and ask me," said Lee Shin.

Surprised to hear Lee Shin's blunt answer, Fletta kept quiet and began to eat the meat again. Alice, who did not say anything because of her pride, could not resist the smell of the meat and turned away. She realized that it was her own loss if she remained proud like this. It was not that she did not have anything to eat, but she did not want to eat this unappetizing food alone, when they had to stay together for the next two or three days.

"... I... want some," said Alice quietly.

"What?" Lee Shin asked, without even turning to face her.

Crunch—

It could have been the sound of the bonfire, or the sound of her teeth grinding.

"Let's eat it... together," Alice said again.

When Lee Shin heard Alice's trembling voice, he smirked.