

Chapter 358 - Interlude Mia 2

——Aah, Guu! Not again...

Ugh, it's cold~ But, the sky sure is pretty...

Eh? A large, black beast? Moreover, many people are riding on it from its head all the way to its back? I feel like I've seen that black head somewhere...

Then again I saw swarms of flying whales attacking jellyfish many times over at the transfer destinations of Guu.

Huh!? That black hair...

Aahh, the face is twisting—— Bending in front of me——

——Ugh, another sudden transfer...

It's dark, and cold...Total darkness is scary.

In that place where darkness and coldness coexist, "——It's pitch black~ But! I can see!", Guu's cheerful voice reverberates.

A series of transfers... A bluish-white afterglow remains in my eyes.

I repeatedly blink my eyes. Naturally winking my eyelids over and over again...

The black hair just now might have been...yeah, no way. Did my head get messed up?

"Pitch black~ Magic jellyfish~? Pffft, buhahaha!" [efn_note]A pun: Guu plays with the pronunciation of 真っ暗 (まっくら), stretching it, and then adding げ at the end, which turns it into まっ (ma) くらげー (kurage), kurage means jellyfish, so yeah, word game.[/efn_note]

...Guu is having fun with the sound of his own voice. He's probably having fun for real, but...the same can't be said for me.

The darkness and coldness causes waves of shuddering on my skin.

And then, while I rub my eyes, I ask in the direction of Guu's voice within the dark, "...Guu, let's go back to Pelneet?"

"Don't wanna! I wanna play more! I'll kill all the bad guys, so don't worry!"

Sheesh! I want to go back home, though!

Guu is having a blast. I can't see his expression, but I can tell from his voice. Guu is strong, whimsical, and cheerful.

And while blabbing 『Farts make pfhuuh~』, he's randomly teleporting all over the place while releasing smelly farts.

This is no different from the beginning...no helping it, I guess. I mean, he won't go back until he had his fill.

Guu is obviously enjoying himself, but...I've become capable of controlling, or rather, force my will on Guu to some extent with the Magic Wand Beerahl.

Thanks to that, I can accompany Guu on his teleportation trip. Moreover, I can't teleport with my own power, so I have no choice but to humor Guu on this.

At least that's how I try to suppress my unrest. But, it's impossible.

Just where is this place...? It's clear that there's no sun or sky. The surface, the nightly surface...no, going by the smell, the underground. The air here feels stagnant as if a sticky moisture has settled down here for many, many years. I can also smell the stench of burned grass.

...The underground following up on the sky, huh——?

While feeling unhappy with the whole situation, I quickly retrieve the light stone lamp I took with me in my waist pouch just in case. Grasping the wooden grip at the end of the cord tied to the lamp, I lift the grip in front of my chest, thus raising the lamp.

"——L-Light! Even though I'm already so bright!"

That's what Guu says, but getting some illumination is of utmost importance. For adventurers...brightness becoming an enemy is a timeless issue, but...this allows me to see my surroundings.

I can tell from the sensation at my feet, but the ground is hard stone. But, now I can spot trees and moss disorderly growing on my right.

How strange. Also, did the area get ravaged by a fire? ...At least the ground gives me that impression. The leaves have changed into charcoal, and there are also traces of trees looking like metal that was melted down by flames.

I extend my heel and toes on the ground, moving my foot up and down. Tapping it, I check the stability of the ground. Watching my actions, Guu tilts his head lightly, bashfully laughing while asking, "Ayla, you going to dance with me?"

It seems like Guu believes that I'm dancing. How silly of you!

He looks a bit rough around the edges with his rugged surface, but he does have some cute parts. His skin is mysterious as it looks like it consists of dragon scales with bluish-white and green colors. Various patterns are visible on its surface. Flames, skulls, ladybugs, birds, snakes, and even round grid shapes similar to fruits...

The skulls seem to be a bit scary, his voice is melodious and adorable!

"...Guu, I'm not dancing. This is no dance, but a cautious investigation!" I answer while returning a smile.

After responding with a bored tone, "You're so weird~", he turns around, looking into the direction of the darkness. Then he starts to walk while skipping, laughing. A movement as if he regards the darkness as a new playground...

At the same time, he's carrying a club he created with his mana. Unlike him, I timidly extend a hand towards the left wall. I've read a lot of various books and documents compared to my time when I relied on the textbooks of the Resonante Boarding School and the Magic Academy.

A special wall and space means that traps might exist... Monsters might pop out all of a sudden...

Despite me considering these options, the wall doesn't bite me or anything. I keep tracing the wall with my fingers. It appears to be an old wall made out of dried earth, similar to a brick wall. ...Maybe even man-made.

While tracing its uneven surface, I slowly advance. The wall continues deeper inside the darkness. It looks like it's also continuing upwards...

I look up while leaning my body against the wall.

——Oh, there's a painting.

A fresco depicting people dancing and entangling with other people. Does it show some kind of ritual? Is this place here close to a dwelling of people? No, it's different since this place is old...

"Ayla~ Looking at that flat thing is boring! Come this way."

"Oki. But, can't you call me Mia?" I tell Guu to use my old name.

【Scales of Gaia】 doesn't exist anymore, but...it's still not gone from my heart.

"No! The other day you told me that you're Witch Ayla, didn't you!?"

"Witch Ayla, eh? The other day I just confirmed it as a last resort."

"Nope! Ayla is Ayla. Anyway, come this way." Guu urges me pushily while looking somewhat unhappy.

He turns around and walks away while crushing the roots growing out of the ground with his thick feet. He's got plump and stout legs, but every now and then he nimbly jumps around as if his body is floating. Guu's body appears to be fat and sturdy, but...he obviously possesses a boundless amount of mana. The quality of the mana spilling out of his body isn't normal either.

While watching his bulky shoulders, I trail after him.

Alright...even though I look like this, I'm still an adventurer. If the other members of my party were

with me right now...

As I imagine that, I focus on taking one step after the other. Natural Guu acts as vanguard whereas I'm the rearguard. If Shuuya-san was here, I'd ask him to be our assault vanguard.

Using his magic and magic halberd, he defeated the members of **【Owl's Fangs】**, saving my life many times...and in the end, he even saved my heart. ...I won't ever forget this.

Meeting him in person...and thanking him is something I still can't do...

I wonder whether the letter I wrote after mustering my courage, and the stone full of my feelings has reached him without a hitch. Argh...I mustn't. This place is dangerous. If I start thinking about Shuuya-san...my head will be occupied with thoughts about him. I've got to pull myself together——

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The right side of this place feels spacious, and certainly dark and gloomy. Are we in Pelneet's labyrinth?

If that's the case, the area beyond the fifth floor is new for me, so...I'm seriously scared. The strong Guu is going to protect me, but it's slightly different with a party.

Or maybe it's not Pelneet, but some distant underground labyrinth...

The lamp I have with me is slightly special, but... Still, as a light source it's rather unreliable.

Just when I think that, a mana thread appears on the surface of Guu's club, and starts to wriggle.

"Ayla!"

"Hmm? What's up?"

"I'll brighten up this place with my special "Onigiri (magic)."" [efn_note]Well you know what an onigiri is, but in this case it's probably Oni Cutter.[/efn_note]

Onigiri? How's that related to the mana thread? I hear about something like onigiri magic for the first time. It's a quite enigmatic statement of Guu.

He swings the magic club in all directions as if performing a ceremony while making his meaty grease wobble. A small magic crest appears at the club's tip, just to vanish in the next instant. The appearance of him swinging the mana staff reminds me of a fairy sprinkling happiness. A fat and tough one though...

Guu creates a fireball in front of him with a method different from casting spells. Wait, rather than a fireball, it's lightning and fire, I'd say? The fire lightning sphere expands circularly as if creating a maelstrom, which is about one size bigger than Guu, in the air. The quantity of mana is terrifying. A

cluster of fire and lightning.

I don't know whether he created, summoned, or invented that magic, but I feel like it's more appropriate to call him an incarnation of destruction rather than a bringer of happiness... Guu might have intended to provide illumination, but...with Ruler Class-level attack magic?

If it's Ruler Class spells, I've happened to see them a few times when I went on requests on the fifth floor after forming huge parties including solo adventurers and the folks around Gomez-san from **【Fist of the War God】**. At those times, excellent magicians were with us. They belonged to the clan **【Magic Whip Club】**. They seem to be a clan adoring the S-Rank adventurer Katharina-san. Back then, a top-ranking magician cast the fire-based Ref Fald.

That Ruler Class spell was amazing. Maybe a court magician participated incognito or something like that? Or maybe a leader of the **【General War Sorcerer Association】**.

Still, Guu's fire lightning sphere packs more of a punch. I heard the Ruler Class Magid The Line has a lot of power as well. To the extent that it can purify the Ten-layered Hell at the bottom of the abyss with its flames.

Even as I'm pondering about all that, Guu's unique sphere flies forward while slowly fluttering. Suddenly, thunder roars from the sphere's maelstrom. It brightly illuminates the terrain on the right, accompanied by lightning.

The uneven floor is fairly wide. The ceiling...has an array of rock pillars, similar to sharp pointed stakes, lining up. It's going to become dangerous if those fall down. I gotta be careful...

Further down the ceiling, I can see a part that curves to the inside. The curving part is a hole. I feel like...I've seen the shape of the hole before.

Oh, I remember. It resembles the new sweet that's being sold in Pelneet! It's called "MisDo," a new item at Tanaka Confectionery. [efn_note]MisDo is an abbreviation for Mister Donut[/efn_note]

I enjoyed it together with black tea... Even now I can't get its texture out of my mind. The instant I tasted that round, soft sweet, I was wrapped up by happiness. ...The surface is crispy whereas the inside is fluffy... The faint sweetness and fruity flavor made the inside of my mouth melt, no, I felt it across my whole body. It was so delicious...

A "happiness sweet" that calms my heart by just remembering it. I really, really love the sweet called ice cream, but MisDo was a totally new experience.

Thinking about it now wakes the urge in me to eat it again!

It was really popular with Daisy and my friends from **【Fist of the War God】**. Even Sheila-san praised it full of delight. Well, I think it's only natural since it's not only popular among adventurers like us, but also the students of the Magic Academy.

And back when we saw a demonic beast handler with a black panther and a squirrel as a guest at Tanaka Confectionery when I approached it on the way back home with my friends from **【Fist of the War God】**...

"A gentle tiger boasting the strength of a fierce god...it reminds me of Shuuya-san."

"That story again ~ssu? Give it a break ~ssu, ufu."

It was a coincidence during the conversation between Sheila-san and Jio-san, whose cheeks reddened suspiciously, but the topic shifted to Shuuya-san while comparing him to my favorite tiger fairy-tale.

Argh, I ended up recalling a story about Shuuya-san again...

Shaking my head to focus my mind...I try to take a peek further down this cave. I keep gazing in that direction with Guu. The hole in the ceiling with the strange shape...looks like it has a huge blowout, almost like a shaft continuing endlessly.

Oh, a box at the place where Guu's sphere passed by?

It's a rectangular box bordered by a plaster-like outline.

——Something is inside the box!

In a hurry I ready Beerahl in front of my chest, charging mana into it. Guu, who's connected with Beerahl through mana, immediately reacts. Orchid, inflated mana clads the surface of his body.

"Thanks, Ayla! I'll defeat that flabby thing!"

"Flabby?"

Even as I ask him, I'm getting the advanced fire spell Inferno Heat ready. Though Guu might teleport during the battle again since he's whimsical... Either way, I'll prepare the offensive spell!

"Fire Spirit Irness, feed upon mine mana, exceed your calling as fire spirit, and exhibit the truth and proof of perfection of the flames continuing since ancient times —— Inferno Heat!"

A curtain of fire unfolds around me. Small flame waves that can also be used for attacking float close to me. This is a spell capable of defense and offense. Many sorcerers desire it.

At that moment I see the reason why Guu called it flabby. Is it fluid? No, maybe clay? It's a liquid clay combining yellow and pea green colors. At the same time, those colors make strange sounds as they graze each other and glitter.

Creatures similar to parasitic mites and milk teeth are being born one after the other from the strangely shining place... And those creatures keep growing in number. Are the milk teeth having a falling out? They tremble furiously as if flustered.

Anyway, it means it's a mucus-shaped monster with many baby teeth sticking to it. Since its colors are dense, I can't see any slime-like core.

As of yet I have only experienced the labyrinth down to the fifth floor, but...it might be a type of

monster not existing in Pelneet.

"Flabby! I'll bring you down!" Guu declares with his fleshy, fat face wobbling.

He's named it Flabby on his own accord, but it might be the perfect name. And then he swings his stout, big arm as if announcing that he's found his prey, gets ready, and jumps while disheveling his green hair. Mana threads flutter from the club in his hand.

He's got a big build, but he's nimble. Having jumped high into the air, he swings his club down at the Flabby from holding it overhead. The club clashes against the Flabby. In that instant I can see how thorns spout from the club. The thorns run into the Flabby, and vanish as if evaporating.

But, thick sounds of multiple flies colliding with bzzts and thumps are audible. The Flabby might be unexpectedly hard.

"——Hmhmh~hmmhm♪"

While humming, Guu keeps wielding his club with a speed I can't follow with my eyes. I just know...that mana drops are sticking to the club.

Soon enough the mucus monster turns into dust and disappears. Guu is really powerful...

Even my magic was meaningless. But, seeing how no magic stone has been left behind, we aren't in Pelneet right now.

At that moment, Guu stops humming. After skilfully rotating his club sideways, he shoulders it. And then he moves his head towards the long box which was occupied by the mucus monster.

"...Did you find something, Guu?"

Guu lifts his face from the box, looks back at me, and answers, "Yep, Ayla! What's this?"

He stretches a thick finger inside the box

Isn't it an ancient box...? I approach the box, and peek inside. It has a bean's protruding part in the center that seems like a dense bud.

This is a trap. Comment: Old Man Picel

Eh? The characters are messy and jagged, but those words have been carved into the box in common language.

"Can I touch this?"

"I think it's a trap, so no——"

So I say, but Guu presses the protruding bean part anyway.

In the next instant, I scream, "Hyaa——", while Guu delightfully squeals, "——Falling!"

We land on our backsides with a thud. Apparently we've fallen on a smooth floor.

"——Ahahaha."

"This isn't the time to——"

My words are immediately being left behind. Guu's joyful voice vanishes behind me, echoing like the wind. It seems I'm gliding, but strangely my butt doesn't hurt.

I had no choice but to simply enjoy the slide. But, peeee is....nooo——

Uuhh—— Guu, you idioooooooooooooot!