**Chapter 12: Preparation (1)**

I looked at the coins in my hand.

Nine silver coins are equal to 900 copper coins.

I had made a profit of 225 times my original investment.

It was a gamble and a reverse multiplier, but I had money in my pocket.

I wondered how and where to invest my precious initial capital.

I was going to pay off my debt first, but Diana smiled warmly and said,

"There's no point in trying to pay off the debt already. Don't worry about it, you can always pay it back when you have more money."

I could only bow my head in infinite gratitude.

With food and lodging out of the way for the time being, the only thing left to worry about was clothing.

I don't even have a spare pair of underwear. Who packs a pair of underwear for a trip to another world?

I've been wearing the same pair of boxers for days and it's killing me. I felt like my quality of life was suffering, and it wasn't very hygienic.

I realized that I needed to get a proper pair of underwear and two or three tops and bottoms.

Assuming that I had everything I needed for the immediate future.

What else would I need for my future, what else would I need to prepare to enter the Labyrinth?

"You mean I need to qualify as an explorer to enter the Labyrinth?"

"Yes. Technically, you need an identification pass, which is issued when you become an explorer. I'm not sure if that's still the case, but without it, you'll probably be stopped by the guards at the entrance to the Labyrinth."

My conversation with Diana yielded quite a bit of information.

"Balkan is new to the Labyrinth City, right?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

I just said it honestly. It wasn't exactly a lie. It was my first time, right?

"Because you had that look that people who come to the Labyrinth City from other lands have. You know, when they panic at the sight of a male or female, and⋯"

Diana's narrowed eyes turned to my face.

To the helmet I was wearing, to be precise.

Then she realizes she's staring too hard, and she looks away quickly, embarrassed.

"⋯I'm sorry. For hurting your feelings."

I don't know what she could have possibly misinterpreted to make her say that I hurt her feelings.

I didn't say anything at first, as Diana's mood softened even more as she looked at me.

"That's fine, but how does one become an explorer?"

"The qualification itself can be obtained by paying a fee to the Alliance. If I remember correctly, it was 20 silver coins?"

"Twenty silver coins?!"

Crazy. Twenty silver coins. Are the Explorers' Alliance guys money-crazed?

Maybe it was because I was too honest with my reaction. Diana, who had been looking at me for a long time, chuckled.

"You don’t have enough money?"

"⋯Not enough, at this point."

It's really tight.

Well, it's been that way for a long time. I've always been weighed down by money, and money has always held me back.

Eleven pieces of silver. Unless it was a special gamble like this one, a laborer could go months without eating, spending, or sleeping for that amount of money.

"So, would you be interested in working at my inn?"

"What?"

This is another out-of-the-blue offer.

"I'll pay you modestly. Your main duties will be serving and cleaning. Your hours will be from the beginning of the evening business until the end. I'll also provide dinner. You can try it out for a day, and if you don't like it, you can quit right away. I'll pay you a day's wages. What do you think?"

It was something I had never considered since I've only ever done physical work.

I didn't sell my body, but simple manual labor was my natural vocation.

"I saw yesterday that you've done a really good job of organizing, and I've been doing it all by myself, but I'm sure it would make a difference if I had another person around."

When I hesitated, Diana spoke up.

In a short-term job like this, more important than the intensity of the work is whether you get paid on time.

If the boss doesn't pay you on payday and keeps cutting you off, it's hard not to feel resentful.

If your boss doesn't pay you on payday and keeps withholding money, you can't afford to live.

In a world where there is no such thing as a labor agency, I could have lost all my hard work for nothing.

It makes sense to work for someone I can trust.

"How much do I get paid, exactly?"

Diana held up two fingers wordlessly.

"Two silver coins a day!"

"Oh, no⋯! That's a bit much⋯Twenty copper instead."

"Hmm⋯"

A typical laborer earns an average of 10 copper coins per day.

Considering the difficulty of the work and the fact that it's only shortened during peak hours, the conditions are incredibly good. It's not just good, it's ridiculously good.

And dinner? For someone like me who needs to save money right now, it's hard to beat that.

If I were to go and work somewhere else, who would take care of me, who has never been in this labyrinth city?

I'd be lucky if I didn't get stabbed in the back and sold as a prostitute.

The answer is pretty much settled.

"Hmph."

I pretend to struggle with my decision, even though I've already made up my mind.

But Diana's fingers don't move up another inch.

She already knew that her offer was sufficiently radical.

I take a moment to adjust the helm on my head.

"⋯Would you mind if I wore my helmet to work?"

It was insurance, just in case. I didn't want to show my face in front of the other customers.

Diana’s expression turned wistful for a moment.

"Of course. Of course. If anyone says anything to you about it, you can tell me. I'll have them banned from my inn for life."

"⋯And I'm a wannabe explorer, so if I end up in the Labyrinth-"

"You can take the whole week off. Rest is the most important thing before you go into the Labyrinth and after you come out."

"Can I report to work today, Boss?"

I didn't have to think about it anymore. The offer was too good to pass up.

"Fufu⋯ Boss is too formal, just call me Diana."

"Okay, Ms. Diana."

"Diana."

"⋯? Yes. Diana."

"⋯Yes."

Diana’s cheeks puffed up slightly. She was probably trying to be friendly with her employees as the boss, but it couldn't be helped.

‘I can't help but use honorifics.’

It was hard to treat her like a friend because I had received so many things.

I also realized that Diana was actually a level 70 powerhouse, and her warm and cozy atmosphere felt like a powerhouse's comfort zone.

Her beautiful appearance, like a fine wine or cheese, was also a big part of it.

"Come here. I'll show you around the bar first."

I followed Diana, who gently beckoned me, and began to learn the basics.

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When I finished and checked the time, it was around 15:00. I still had about two hours before the dinner rush.

I decided to utilize the remaining time wisely so I went to buy clothes first.

I headed to the market in the eastern section of Valerus, commonly known as the Explorers' Quarter, and found a suitable clothing store.

The saleswoman, who was mesmerized by my body, said in a confused tone.

I held my head in my hands. I had already left the store after hearing the same thing three times.

It was hard to complain, though, because as I walked down the street, it made sense that there were no clothes for me.

Everywhere I looked, the men were small and skinny.

It was so bad that they were beyond frail and looked thin.

At least, I hadn't seen a single man of my size all the way here.

'Were the men who were raped by the goblins the ones who were somewhat better off?'

I suddenly remembered when I first fell into this world, I saw five men raped by goblins.

It's not a pleasant memory, but in my mind, they had big bodies.

‘⋯Is it because they're explorers?’

I was half convinced that it was.

[Dario Lv.0]

[Jill Hemisphere Lv.1]

[Naimus Lv.0]

[Dorelle Lv.0]

[Porcio Lv.2]

I didn't just go out to buy clothes.

I was also using the status window to observe the people on the street and check my current level.

'The skinny ones, probably the normal ones, are level 0. The ones with a bit more energy have levels.’

The overwhelming majority of men were level 0, with the occasional level 1 or 2.

When I first checked my status, I was level 3.

And I had just slaughtered dozens of goblins at that point. I was probably level 0 at first too.

‘Do I level up when I kill monsters?’

[Dorre Lv.0]

[Stamina:(2) Strength:(2) Agility:(2) Wisdom:(0) Finesse:(4)]

[Porcio Lv.2]

[Stamina:(3) Strength:(2) Agility:(4) Wisdom:(0) Finesse:(3)]

‘10 base stats are randomized, and everyone with a level has additional stats.’

I could only assume that stats were automatically distributed as you leveled up.

‘There are no free points.’

So I noticed that other people didn't have free points in their status window.

This was information that could be put to good use.

Having free points in a close battle means that I have a card that can throw my opponent off balance, I can also eliminate unnecessary stats and only allocate points to the stats I need.

"Customer⋯?"

As I was plotting my next move, I was interrupted by an employee's voice.

"Oh, yeah. If you don't have my size, I'd like the biggest and sturdiest one you have."

"Yes, yes⋯!"

Without any fashion choices, I was handed a black t-shirt.

There are no private rooms in a medieval marketplace. I unbuttoned my fur and pulled the t-shirt on.

"Wow. Crazy."

"Thank you, Mother Earth, for giving me my daily bread again today. Thank you⋯!"

I squeezed into clothes that didn't fit, so of course they were tight. It felt like my hands were handcuffed.

I wonder if this is what it feels like to wear a corset. I can't wait to take it off.

However, as I wore it, it stretched slightly, so it wasn't uncomfortable to breathe.

-Thud-thud-thud

As I strained my muscles to move my body, the sound of thread popping echoed through my clothes.

I resented my muscular body, which had always been so strong.

"⋯⋯"

"Wow. Pectoralis major."

I made eye contact with a confused-looking employee.

Ah. Let's just buy some clothes.

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I bought two pairs of sturdy pants and six pairs of extra panties with 28 copper coins. After that, I went into about two more stores, but I couldn't get a t-shirt. In the end, my upper body was left in a state of fluffy emptiness.

- This, this. The boss told me that sales were up because a lot of women were coming into the store.

I'm not sure about the cause, but I received a t-shirt as a service. It was the one I broke but I was happy they didn’t ask me to pay for it.

After some reasonable shopping, I solved the last problem I had with food, clothing, and shelter: clothes.

Now it was just a matter of working my ass off to save up the money and get my explorer's badge.

As I walked downstairs from my room after a free, hearty dinner that Diana had made for me, she looked out at the crowd that had already begun to gather and said to me.

"Mmm, I think you'd look better in a torn shirt."

"What?"

"Because drunk people can't see."

Diana smiled bitterly as she stared at the front door.

"Hmm?

At this point, I was looking down on the bar girl.

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I looked at the inn in disarray.

Overturned tables, sprawling chairs, broken plates, smashed food, and strewn oak barrels and mugs.

When I looked down at my body, I saw pants that were wet from the cow's milk, beer, and wine, and a blanket that had been stretched and loosened here and there.

The real enemies of the establishment were not the missing orders, nor the serving mistakes, but the customers.

"Ms. Diana."

"⋯Yes."

"Ms. Diana."

"⋯⋯I'm listening."

"I'm quitting my job."

"⋯30 copper coins."

"It's no use trying to hold me back with money, I've made up my mind."

"40."

"I've made up my mind to bury my bones. Just order anything, boss.”

"What? Anything⋯?!"

I sighed and grabbed the broom and dishcloth.