**Chapter 16: The story of how the party fell apart (1)**

Two seconds into the battle, I'm the only one of the party still standing.

The second to react in the rigid battlefield was, of course, the goblin next to me, who, in the blink of an eye, had her compatriot's hair blown off.

Tsk, tsk, tsk!

Before she had time to mourn her death, another goblin from the rear was thrown into the fray.

She was puzzled by the two goblins that had been slain in an instant, but she instinctively charged at me.

Tsk, tsk, tsk!

I sidestepped slightly and swung my axe. The goblin's head snapped off and she fell to the ground.

In just three strokes, I had decapitated three goblins.

The two standing in front of me, looking bewildered, and the third in front of the party.

'There are only three of them, so it should be easy enough.'

"Keh, Keh!"

Tsk, tsk, tsk!

Sensing their lives were in danger, they turned around, chased after the fleeing ones, and drove their axes into their backs.

This cleared out the five that had taken up residence in the rear.

Now all that was left was⋯

"He, uh..."

I turned around at the ominous voice.

One of the goblins in front of me was clinging to Adolf, nibbling at the nape of her neck.

"Off!"

Adolf screamed in agony.

Pfft!

I jumped up and kicked the goblin in the stomach, ripping it off of Adolf.

Damn. I should have protected the priest first!

Priests can only perform healing miracles, not hand-to-hand combat.

Adolf's staff began to glow yellow. She has instinctively healed herself to save her life.

Good, at least she won't die.

‘No, more than that, these bastards can't even defend the priest with two of them, so what the hell-‘

"No!!!!"

A tearing scream rang out from the other side.

I took a quick look and saw that the goblin with the knife stuck to Anya's temple was twirling the handle of the knife as if cleaning her ear.

Yellow brain matter mixed with the goblin's poison, like earwax, flowed from Anya's head.

Unable to fight back, she died instantly.

Jeremy's eyes had already rolled back in his head. He couldn't do anything but grip the spear tightly and shiver.

"What are you doing, wake up!"

I yelled, and Jeremy flinched.

Goblins weren't the kind of creatures to leave their terrified prey alone.

A knife flew past Jeremy's nose.

I quickly ran over, pulled Jeremy by the hem of his clothes, threw him on the floor, and immediately tilted my head back to avoid the knife.

"Kerrrrrrrrr!"

The goblin that was playing with Anya's body also joined in. The guys seemed to be shouting loudly and saying something.

But soon the panicked goblins looked around.

"Why, don't you have any friends to help you?"

Perhaps they were calling for their companions.

"I'm afraid all your friends have already crossed the Rainbow Bridge, but don't be too sad."

The goblins' faces hardened as their eyes took in the bodies of their fallen compatriots.

As I approached, they began to back away.

"You'll see them again soon enough."

Two chopping sounds rang out.

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I had just gotten off to the worst possible start in the Labyrinth.

We knew we'd be spawned in a randomized area when we entered the Labyrinth, but it was too bad.

We have 2 injured and 1 killed in a party of 4.

I'm the only one who fought, and I'm the only one who's still okay.

"⋯Thanks⋯ to⋯ grrrr, I'm alive. Thank you. Balkan."

"Stop talking and keep using your healing spells. It's a hassle if you die."

The dwarven priest Adolf revived dramatically.

If the goblin chewed on the nape of her neck any longer, it would have snapped off, but I managed to pull it off just in time before the worst happened.

"⋯Heehee."

Worse than that, it was ⋯.

"Jeremy. Are you okay?"

Here's this guy, distraught over the loss of a childhood friend, a girl he was probably in a relationship with.

"No, no, no, I had a weird dream, I dreamt you were killed by goblins, which is weird, why would I dream that? You're sleeping like this."

Jeremy cuddled up to Anya's body, whose eyes were closed, coughing up brain fluid and blood, and began to caress her cheeks.

"Your cheeks are a little chilly today. I told you to dress warmly, the Labyrinth is a bit chilly, so today, today, today, today, the Labyrinth?"

His eyes widened as he stared blankly at Anya.

"⋯⋯Anya⋯?"

His expression contorted, as if he'd just seen a reality he hadn't intentionally recognized.

He suddenly grabbed her shoulders and began shaking her.

"No. No. No. Wake up. No!"

Then he put his ear to her heart, his hand under her nose, and looked back at Adolf in shock.

"Oh, Adolf, she's not breathing, she's not breathing!"

"⋯⋯"

"⋯⋯"

I and Adolf were speechless at the sight.

It was insane.

Unable to come to terms with the brutal reality of their sudden situation, his mind collapsed.

“Now is not the time to use healing miracles on Adolf. Uh, we need to heal Anya quickly…”

His hands trembled, and he grabbed the spear.

"Oh, heal Anya, quickly, now!"

He started toward Adolf, pointing the spear at me.

I stopped him.

I know he's grief-stricken, but this is way over the line.

"Stop. Nothing good will come from us fighting, so just stay calm and-"

"Calm down?! Don't be ridiculous! You think I can be calm?!"

Jeremy snapped at me, his eyes bloodshot and spitting.

"I don't know. I've never been in your situation, but one thing's for sure, we'll be safer at the escape portal if we have the priest with us."

"Not us, you! I have no reason to live anymore!"

My heart sank with pity.

That's right. I needed the priest to make me safer, to make sure I could explore the Labyrinth safely.

But aside from that, there was no reason for me to listen to his bullshit as it drained my mental energy.

'⋯Just this once. Just once.’

It's a waste of energy. With no priest and no spearman, I'd be fighting alone, just like last time.

I must use him as much as possible. My plan has been screwed up since the beginning, but it could not have gone any worse.

"Stop whining, male."

I try to think of something to say that will soothe Jeremy and spur him to action.

Adolf, who had finished healing her wounds, lay down and glared at Jeremy.

"Honestly, what did we do in this battle? We were just defenseless and almost died. If it weren't for that guy over there we’d be dead right after transferring to the Labyrinth. That was our fate."

The dwarf studied me for a moment, then nodded in understanding.

Adolf didn't stop there, she even winked wryly.

'Could it be... is she picking a fight on purpose to get on my good side?'

Oh, no. No way.

I shook my head, feeling an intense sense of foreboding.

No. Don't say more. Please don't provoke him. Shut up.

You've been in the labyrinth three times. You've done well. Please, let's just go in peace-

"Jeremy. Let's put the spear down and talk-"

"It's your fault your girlfriend died. You were right next to her, so why couldn't you stop it? Well, I knew this would happen when I heard you slept with her the night before entering the labyrinth."

Ah.

"Hm."

Jeremy let out a short laugh.

I quickly swatted away his spearhead but the damage was done.

"Yeah?"

Adolph looked at the spear lodged in her throat, unsure of what had happened.

Immediately, her eyes rolled back in her head, and her body began to collapse.

"Heh, heh."

Bam!

The maniacally laughing Jeremy struck the nape of her neck, subduing her.

Atop the tangle of goblins and human corpses, I was the only one standing.

I laughed at the absurdity of it all.

"Haha. This is fucked up, man."

Fifteen minutes into the labyrinth.

The party was destroyed.

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A familiar voice caught her sensitive ears.

"What's up, Denshi. Did you find anything, some guys worth some money?"

"Oh, nothing, I think you misheard me."

"Really? That's a shame. Denshi misheard."

The woman's hand stroked Denshi's hair. Denshi felt a strange chill and fear at the act.

"You're still alive thanks to your one useful ear, and you mishear a sound."

"⋯Sorry⋯"

Denshi, the girl who had been called Grumpy, felt something lacking in the woman's touch as she stroked her hair.

It was light and small. Short in length.

Surely, once upon a time, this act would have been frightening, but not so much anymore.

Denshi remembered the huge fist that had crushed her dignity.

Every single finger was long, thick, heavy, rough⋯and huge.

Denshi shook her head, feeling her body heat up for a moment.

'I must have misheard. No, I must have misheard. He shouldn't be here.’

"Well, then, let's get back on the road, when you're done robbing!"

"Yes!"

The shouting woman was followed by five puppets.

The scent of blood lingered in the air as they left.

With each step they took, red blood dripped from the knives in their hands, forming a long trail of blood.

It was too thick to be the blood of a monster.