**Chapter 179: Safe? Zone (8)**

The green foam bubbling from her mouth gradually began to subside.

“Ku, huuk⋯”

Balkan gazed down at Bio, who lay crumpled on the floor.

She was still moving—proof she was not dead.

Having expended all her mana in that last sword strike, she no longer had the power to maintain the deadly poison.

“This⋯ can’t⋯ be⋯ I’m⋯ the chosen⋯”

Mumbling incoherently, she dragged her bloodied body across the ground, crawling toward something.

Balkan, now feeling lighter as the poison wore off, followed her slowly.

Like a soaked mop leaving streaks of water on the floor, Bio left a trail of blood as she crawled forward. Eventually, she stopped.

It wasn’t far—about six paces from where the fight had taken place.

There, under a shelf, was a small table.

On top of it sat a box.

Though it was small enough to fit in one hand, its appearance was anything but ordinary.

A radiant silver box shimmered, reflecting the scene of Balkan standing still and Bio reaching out desperately with a pained expression.

The silver box gleamed like a polished mirror, its surface spotless and pristine. Anyone could see it was no ordinary container—it was a vault for storing something precious.

“Damn. For all your bravado, there was a reason, huh? What’s in this fancy vault?”

“Uh⋯ aaaah⋯!!”

As she stretched her arm toward the box in desperation, it was snatched away before her eyes.

Her bloodshot eyes captured the sight of Balkan grinning greedily, exuding an air of triumph.

“Give⋯ it⋯ back⋯! That is not something a lowly bastard like you should possess⋯!!!”

“Is that so?”

Crouching down, Balkan brought the box closer to her face.

Bio attempted to grab it, but—

**Smack!**

“Kuuaaagh!”

Balkan’s kick twisted her already battered arm further, leaving it grotesquely bent.

Smirking cruelly, Balkan once again brought the box near her face.

“Password.”

“⋯⋯”

“It’s a safe, but there’s no keyhole or mechanism to unlock it. Tell me how to open it.”

“I refuse—”

**Thud!**

Balkan stomped on Bio’s head mercilessly.

Her jaw slammed into the wooden floor, shattering it, and her face pressed into the ground as foam bubbled from her mouth. She lay limp, her eyes rolled back.

She still didn’t seem to grasp her situation.

If he repeated this enough times, eventually she’d break and beg to reveal it herself.

‘What could possibly be inside that she cherishes so much?’

Balkan’s gaze turned toward the box, his anticipation building.

A strange silence enveloped the room.

The atmosphere was so tense and frigid that no one dared to move.

“No⋯ it can’t be. Potion! Someone bring a potion quickly!”

A desperate clan member broke the silence, shouting with trembling urgency, spittle flying from his mouth.

“Bio-sama couldn’t possibly lose like that! Everyone—”

**Thud-thud-thud-thud!**

Blood droplets scattered through the air. As something flew through the void, the splattered blood dyed the clan members’ heads and their territory crimson.

**Splatter!**

The sticky sound resonated as their gazes instinctively turned to the source.

The corpse that had been hurled through the air now lay sprawled and crushed on the floor.

The face, already mangled from earlier, was now completely unrecognizable, smashed into the ground and drenched in blood.

The body of someone who had once mercilessly slaughtered foes and helpless victims alike with her poisoned sword was now rigid, stiff from post-mortem rigidity, utterly motionless.

Faced with the grim end of their leader, the clan’s soldiers dropped their swords in despair.

Their leader—far stronger than any of them—had been obliterated without resistance.

Confronted with such reality, few could summon the will to keep fighting.

**Creak. Creak.**

The eerie sound drew the attention of the clan members.

The man who had ruthlessly crushed their leader was leisurely descending the wooden stairs, his steps deliberate.

“Haha.”

Amel Drexia watched him, a faint admiration in her eyes.

‘He said he was recruiting for a 15th-floor party.’

When she’d previously attended his party interview, the group she observed seemed average at best.

Neither particularly flawed nor exceptional, they had struck her as thoroughly ordinary.

She had only considered joining because the premise sounded exciting, not because the party appeared especially formidable.

But that assumption had been shattered to pieces during the overwhelming display of combat she had just witnessed.

‘This is no mere 15th-floor-level party.’

Though Bio had been rapidly declining in power recently, she had once been a notable figure in the 15th floor’s underbelly.

Her poison, effective even against mid-tier monsters and rival adventurers, had consistently been in demand.

So Amel’s attention naturally turned to the man who had withstood her.

In the labyrinth, as one descended deeper, the dangers became increasingly insidious and depraved.

Some levels featured traps that tortured people to the brink of death, or psychological snares that destroyed minds.

For someone capable of enduring Bio’s poison unaided, it was clear his mental fortitude could withstand even the labyrinth’s cruelest trials.

He was the kind of teammate any explorer would find irresistible.

“Ah⋯ aaah⋯”

While Amel admired him silently, the sight was nothing short of a disaster for the clan members.

Their leader had fallen.

Now that the head was gone, it was only a matter of time before the body—and every limb—was ripped apart.

“What⋯ what do you want?”

Kneeling before Balkan, they gripped the shredded remains of Bio’s ankle.

Balkan glanced at them and muttered softly.

“Speaking informally?”

“⋯What is it that you desire, sir?”

The newfound respect in their tone brought a faint smile to Balkan’s face.

“What do you want from us to have attacked our clan? Was it because we sell poison? Or perhaps—”

**Smack!**

Before he could finish, Balkan’s backhand sent the speaker flying.

Crashing into the wall, the clan member convulsed before hastily kneeling again as Balkan approached.

She lowered her head in fear, avoiding eye contact with him.

Balkan squatted down to meet her gaze, his expression cold.

**Tap. Tap.**

Without a word, he lightly tapped the clan member’s cheek, then muttered in a low voice.

“I don’t care if you kill people, rape them, or sell them into slavery. None of that concerns me.”

**Tap—tap-tap.**

“But.”

Though his touch wasn’t forceful, the menace in his presence was undeniable.

“When you mess with what’s mine, the story changes.”

His hand lingered on her cheek, as if to remind her he could take her life at any moment.

If anyone dared touch what belonged to him, no matter how large their organization, his retribution would be absolute—fueled by the fury of a berserker.

“Keep that in mind.”

**Tap-tap.**

The clan member, her cheek marked with his handprints, desperately nodded, still kneeling.

"Wait."

At the sound of the voice from somewhere, Balkan, who had been dragging Bio out, turned around.

A centaur and Amel Drexia. She was the one who stopped Balkan.

"If you round up all the people here, it'll be a contribution bomb. You're not going to take them in?"

"..."

Balkan, who had paused at her words, looked at the clan members who were staring at him silently.

Filled with fear and terror, they didn't even think about moving.

"Hey. Go grab a rope."

"Y-Yes...!"

Scratching the back of his helmet for a moment, Balkan struck the head of a nearby clan member as he gave the order.

With a satisfied look, Balkan raised the rope handed to him and muttered softly.

"Anyone who wants to keep their life intact, gather in front of me now."

**15th Floor Safe Zone.**

It dawned on him that calling it a "safe zone" was utter nonsense.

Of course, there were no dungeon monsters here. And no traps either.

But there were humans no different from monsters who committed vile acts.

Those who, driven by all manner of greed and malice, would set traps for their fellow humans.

No different from other floors. Monsters, traps, and all sorts of other methods tested those exploring the labyrinth.

Perhaps the monsters and traps of the 15th floor were humans themselves.

"Damn it! Balkan! I like you!!"

In that sense, Balkan thought he was rather lucky to have good companions.

Jubeel, whose complexion had eased after recovering from the poison eating away at her body, rushed toward him, drooling like a baby.

As he easily sidestepped her, Jubeel fell and rolled on the ground.

"Urgh—! Aw, that's just mean!"

"Who would want to embrace someone coming at them drooling like that?"

If it were Diana drooling, maybe. But to be honest, Jubeel's drool smelled.

"Balkan, is that group behind you...?"

"Yes, they are."

Rubia, who looked noticeably more at ease, pointed behind him and asked.

Not only Rubia but also Hitolis, Lammel, and the others around the fountain were all looking in that direction.

"Wait. That blood-soaked woman... Isn't that Bio?"

"Oh, yeah! That poison dagger! Then, could it be that the ones behind her are...?"

Roughly twenty people, their wrists tied with ropes, being marched along.

He had captured the entire clan that ruled the back alleys, stringing them together like sausages. No wonder it drew attention.

"Lord. Lord."

Feeling the eyes on him, Belle, who was following behind, tugged at the hem of his clothes.

"Um. I didn’t eat any humans."

"...Good job. But next time, put up some resistance, will you?"

"Heehee. Okay!"

Belle and Fusilini group had also been rescued. Thankfully, they had been locked in cages rather than harmed, likely intended for sale as slaves.

Being a place that focused on slave trade, they even had contract papers. The document for a contract with Belle hung conspicuously from his waist.

The party members had been healed, and the loot had been collected.

Bio, like a giving tree, had handed over the slave contract papers and even a safe that seemed to hold valuable items.

Oh, and if he handed in the captured clan members, there’d be reward money and contribution points too.

For the amount of trouble he'd gone through, the outcome was pretty good.

With a satisfied smile, Balkan turned his attention to the final matter at hand.

“Ddu-ddu-da?”

The infantile murmur of Nuer.

Now, it was time to treat her.

Submerged in the water of healing, Nuer felt as though she was floating in the ocean.

Incredible freedom and a sense of buoyancy surrounded her as she swam in an expansive sea.

Her eyes, which had been dulled by madness, slowly regained their light, glimmering with clarity.

But as Nuer’s body swam freely like a fish in water, it began to stiffen.

The more she swam, the greater the unease grew.

Finally, when the sense of unease reached its peak—

–Aw, our little Nuer, were you hurt? Let me kiss it better~

–Oh my, you’ve made such a big mess. Let’s change that diaper, okay? Don’t cry now~

–Aww, good girl! Good girl! Here’s a candy for you. Say “ah~.”

Her mind was filled with [memories that should not exist].

"...Ah..."

Nuer stood still, feeling the 'thing' strapped to her lower half.

A baby diaper.

The undergarment meant for infants who couldn’t manage their own bathroom needs was...heavy.

Drip.

Tears rolled down Nuer’s cheeks.

And then—

Crunch!

"Hey!! She’s biting her tongue! Stop her!!"

"Get a gag! Quickly! Get a gag!"

It took a long time to calm Nuer down.