**Chapter 180: Safe? Zone (9)**

Jubeel and Rubia forced a gag into Nuer’s mouth as she flailed within the fountain.

"Mmff, mmmph!"

Perhaps she was recalling the countless incidents she had caused and endured.

Even gagged, Nuer desperately resisted, her movements seeming to deny reality itself, as though insisting it had all been a dream and she couldn’t possibly have done such things.

Her emotions escalated further, and soon, magic began to seep from her fingertips.

As the magic in her hands began to form the shape of chains,

“Hold it right there! Little Nuer!”

She froze.

Balkan raised his voice, and at the sound, Nuer's body instantly stiffened.

The chains that had been writhing like dancing flames fell lifelessly to the ground as Nuer’s gaze locked onto him.

Ever since becoming “Baby Nuer,” she had been receiving Balkan’s “Child Happiness Care Package” services, including diaper changes, piggyback rides, and gentle lullabies. Her body instinctively responded to his words.

“If you keep acting up, no more piggyback rides for you. Ever.”

"Mm…mmph…!"

Tears welled in Nuer’s eyes, a response long ingrained from her time as a “baby.”

Her gagged lips were bitten nervously, but it wasn’t only because of Balkan’s words.

A nameless fear welled up within her. Her body and unconscious mind alike trembled.

She was genuinely terrified by the simple threat of “no more piggyback rides”—a remark one might reserve for a child.

It felt like being the oldest sibling who had always been showered with their parents’ affection, only to lose it all when a younger sibling was born.

She wanted to keep getting piggyback rides. She wanted to be pampered.

Those desires and cravings bubbled up unconsciously within her.

Even though her rational mind screamed that she shouldn’t yield to such urges.

"Mmm…"

But her body, long since corrupted by his childlike care, betrayed her. She nodded in agreement with Balkan’s words.

"Is that…really an advanced-level explorer?"

"...I no longer know what to think, my lord."

Jubeel snorted incredulously as she observed Nuer, and Rubia shook her head in visible bewilderment while dragging Nuer out of the fountain.

Balkan gazed down at the now-subdued Nuer, a satisfied smile forming on his lips.

She had been a real headache back when she was accusing him of being in league with succubi, but now she was much more manageable.

“Good girl. You did well.”

As he approached, he patted Nuer gently on the head.

Her hands trembled.

Shame.

She could feel the gazes of many others around her.

From passersby in the streets of Eden, to the adventurers lingering near the fountain.

From the thugs of the back alley clan he had captured, to the party members walking alongside him.

And, most piercingly, from the man who now stood before her, his large, warm hand softly stroking her head.

The other people’s gazes were humiliating enough, but...

When she met his eyes, for some reason, she felt her very existence shrink.

‘No. It’s a trick, a ploy of the Lustful Traitor! He’s surely suppressing me through some cunning means…’

The small seed of doubt in her heart shouted this. Yet deep down, Nuer knew the truth.

Even if he had thrown condoms at her, made her knead them, and was an incubus inexplicably followed by hordes of succubi...

The man known as Balkan was far from the scum who raped, devoured, and exploited others without hesitation.

How many men in this world would willingly dive into the maw of a desert worm to save a party member?

And how many, after rescuing that party member, would storm the lair of a criminal clan alone to avenge them?

He wasn’t someone who could be compared to the trash of the world.

What’s more, he had traveled to a temple and climbed to the 15th floor—all to free her from her mindless state.

Nuer, even in her addled state, had observed his deeds from close proximity and couldn’t deny this truth.

Finally, Balkan withdrew his hand from her head.

“Mmm…”

As the heat from that broad, strong hand disappeared, an involuntary sigh of disappointment escaped her lips.

Nuer struggled to calm her racing thoughts and pounding heart.

...It wasn’t easy.

**Eden Guild’s Regional Office, Guild Leader’s Chamber.**

“Stirring up trouble again, I see.”

Through the window, Idelbert chuckled dryly as he watched the members of the back-alley clan being dragged away in a line.

"My party got caught up in those bastards' games, so I had to clean up the mess."

“I wasn’t going to scold you, so don’t lower your head. In fact, well done. Whether here in Eden or Valerus, there’s no shortage of pests hiding in the cracks.”

Pests—an apt term for those who indulged in rape, pillage, and other crimes to line their own pockets.

Leaning back in her chair, Idelbert fixed her gaze on Balkan, who stood before her.

“Have you ever considered going into pest control on a more formal basis?”

Pest control.

Did she mean assigning him to a role similar to Nuer's?

The notion stirred something within Balkan.

“Pests come in different types. Some are relatively harmless if left alone, while others are an eyesore, cause direct harm, or pose real dangers if left unchecked.”

Petty criminals, rogue elements, crime clans, and even deeper, hidden threats.

“Dealing with those kinds of scum would give you more experience quickly. Both Diana and I honed our skills by cleaning out back-alley trash in our younger days.”

Balkan’s eyes widened slightly at the unexpected remark.

He briefly imagined Idelbert and Diana as a party, hunting down rogues and criminals.

Idelbert? That seemed fitting. Beyond fitting, it was almost his calling.

But Diana?

Her skill made it plausible, but somehow it felt odd.

“I’ll think about it carefully.”

“Do so.”

With that concise response, Idelbert gave a brief nod, then turned her gaze to the side of Balkan.

“And what’s with her?”

There stood Nuer—crawling on all fours like a baby, gag in her mouth, looking up at Idelbert.

Startled, Nuer scrambled to her feet.

“Mmm…”

“Spit it out. Spit it out.”

She removed the gag, sticky with saliva, and bowed apologetically.

“My apologies, Guild Leader. It’s become a habit…”

The apology wasn’t solely for her infantile actions.

Though she had found a lead on the Cult of Lust, she had also severely misstepped.

She had no face left to show.

“Enough. It’s clear you’ve recovered—or at least mostly. Now, go.”

“Baa-baa—ah, I mean, yes!”

Nuer nodded frantically and scurried out of the chamber, nearly bouncing as she moved.

Watching the door shut behind her, Idelbert returned her gaze to Balkan.

“What do you think of her?”

“…What do you mean?”

“She’s got a high opinion of herself, but she’s also a bit naïve. Still, she’s competent enough to keep around and put to work, don’t you think?”

Her abilities were decent, true. But between changing diapers, feeding her, and her penchant for babyish antics, she was high-maintenance.

“Well, anyway...is she the one you mentioned?”

Idelbert’s gaze shifted again to the side of Balkan.

This time, her eyes weren’t kind. They were sharp, predatory, brimming with intense hostility.

“How dare you address the one destined to be my mate so casually, woman.”

Belle stepped forward to shield Balkan.

Yet beneath her bravado, she clung to his cloak, trembling like a leaf.

‘What...what kind of monster is this woman?’

She quivered.

Belle’s instincts screamed at her that the woman before her was overwhelmingly powerful.

Charging at her with the intent to die might at best take one of her arms or legs.

Among the cultists of Lust, how many could stand against this woman?

Few. Certainly not herself.

Even so, Belle knew one thing for sure:

‘I must protect my future mate from this woman!’

Even if it meant being torn to shreds.

A sly smile crept across Idelbert’s face as she observed Belle’s trembling yet resolute stance.

“Well, she’s certainly better than the garbage out there. Very well. She’s acceptable.”

Idelbert spoke as she withdrew her killing intent.

If it had been a lesser individual, they would have wet themselves or fainted from the overwhelming aura. However, she withstood it steadfastly, even stepping forward as if to protect him.

She hadn’t used him as a meat shield to preserve herself, despite the disparity in their abilities. Instead, she stood forward to protect him.

Such behavior could only come from someone who harbored an understanding of hierarchical relationships or something equivalent.

Typically, when demon worshippers are captured, they are tortured for information before being executed.

However, the gluttony worshippers were not as notorious as other demon worshippers.

Few had witnessed their activities, and they did not engage in radical or overt external operations.

There remained latent dangers, but...

*Glance.*

Idelbert looked at Balkan.

If her disciple could make a demon worshipper follow him so thoroughly, perhaps it was worth entrusting them to him.

Balkan retrieved a slave contract from his waistband and asked,

"Then, may I proceed?"

"Go ahead."

Idelbert admired her disciple, who even sought to demote such a demon worshipper to the status of a mere slave.

Regardless of the disparity in power, fame, or authority, if the opponent was a female, she inevitably fell under Balkan's control.

*Flinch, flinch.*

Why was it?

Her backside, well-developed under his touch, trembled strangely.

**[Currently Bound Slaves: 2 - Denshi, Belle]**

*Whizz!*

“W-where are you aiming?! Y-you almost hit me with the crossbow!!!”

"... ..."

Wind Valley's Chirp Chirp scolded Denshi, who was blankly staring into the distance.

“Pull yourself together! We’re in the middle of a battle!!!”

Whether it was a battle or not, such trivial concerns didn’t reach Denshi in her current state.

Her trembling lips, tightly closed, parted cautiously.

“Master... got another slave...?”

Her face displayed an expression of foreboding, with a touch of nervousness creeping in.