**Chapter 19: The story of how the party fell apart (4)**

"'Aaaahhhh!"

An agonized scream echoed through the labyrinth.

I brought the axe down with more force. I intended to end it once and for all, but my aim was slightly off. Instead of the side of her neck, I hit her in the collarbone.

"You, you fucking bastard-!!!"

Deluna dropped her casual tone and let out a thick stream of curses.

A strange energy began to coalesce in her hands as I felt the temperature around me rise.

I instinctively retrieved my axe and stepped away from Deluna.

‘What is that. Fire?’

My judgment was correct.

Before I could back away, flames appeared in Deluna's hands, and a fireball landed where I was.

Magic. I'd known of its existence from the conversations of the explorers in the tavern, but I'd never seen it with my own eyes.

The searing flames are so fucking hot. If I got hit with that, I'd be roasted in a second.

"Sister! Are you okay!"

"You assholes! Would you be okay if you were me?! What are you doing? Hurry up and kill him!"

"Yep- Kuck!"

The girl who was answering while hugging Jeremy got punched in the jaw and collapsed.

Jeremy, free of the woman's embrace, scrambled toward me.

"Ha, I got one!"

"Yeah. Good for you. But go get dressed."

I sheathed my axe in one hand and my dagger in the other, keeping as little eye contact as possible with Jeremy.

"My sister's enemy!"

"How dare you stab us in the back!"

You tried to stab me in the back first, and your sister isn't dead yet.

The four women charged, each with a sword drawn.

It's definitely a different feeling than dealing with goblins.

Unlike goblins, which all look the same in height, weight, and appearance, there are big ones, medium ones, and small ones.

 ‘It's hard to tell.’

A sword swung by a big guy has a different trajectory than a sword swung by a small guy.

Of course, different people handle swords in different ways.

With all these people of different heights and sizes, it was hard to keep track of the flow of the battle.

'Then I have to knock them out before they figure it out.’

The overwhelming difference in physical ability made it possible. My reflexes and agility overcame my lack of reaction time.

I pulled the axe from the large woman's neck. Along with a strange resistance, I felt the sensation of slaughter at my fingertips.

"Hmph, hmph, hmph, hmph, hmph, hmph, hmph, hmph, hmph. How can he slit someone's throat in one go?"

"It's not about strength, why is he moving so fast?"

The combatants looked baffled at first glance.

Clearly, I was outclassed in skill and experience, but my physical prowess made up the difference.

"What kind of man is that?"

It's probably a bit of a shock to the women of this world to be overwhelmed physically by a man.

I turned my attention back to the battle and sneak a glance to the corner of the battlefield.

I saw Deluna pressing her neck as if trying to stop the bleeding with one hand and extending the other toward me.

"⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯⋯"

Her mouth moved quickly, and she must have said something, but I couldn't hear a word.

‘Is she saying something?’

An unidentifiable energy was gathering in her hand. It's twice as big as the last one.

I'm going to be in a lot of trouble if I her finish.

As soon as I thought that, I moved and threw the dagger.

-Pow!

"Ugh!"

With the dagger in her stomach, Deluna opened her eyes. Who chants with their eyes closed?

Perhaps because she lost concentration, the unidentifiable energy subsided slightly. I'm going to go take care of it right away.

 -Pfft!

The kick came out of nowhere and I rolled on the floor. I'd been distracted by Deluna for a moment.

"Ouch, let go of me!"

"No. I won't let go!"

-Thud!

"Get off me!"

But I wasn't about to let up. I grabbed her by the calf as I was flying away from the kick to the belly, and drove the axe into her thigh.

-Thwack, thwack, thwack!

From the thigh, up the abdomen, to the skull, I put axe marks all over her body, like kiss marks.

As I cleaned up the mess, I locked eyes with the dead creature, dripping with brain fluid.

"⋯⋯"

My stomach churned for a moment, then the nausea quickly subsided.

My head felt cold. At the same time, my body began to burn with a strange heat.

‘Don't think about anything. Focus on surviving now. Swing the axe at least one more time, so I can live. Once I live, I can do something, whether it's finding my sister or finding a way back. So swing the axe! Behind!’

-Bam!

I slammed the axe into the shin of the one coming at me from behind.

Before she can fall, I pull the axe out again, this time aiming for her throat.

-Zzzzzzzz!

By the time it hit the ground, the top of her neck was already gone.

 "⋯hhh. Shit⋯"

I jumped to my feet, my heart pounding so fast I thought it would explode, and I saw Deluna cursing in a broken voice.

The mysterious energy that had gathered in her hands had already scattered cleanly everywhere.

"I wouldn't have touched him if I'd known he was such a crazy monster."

The one who casually beat people and sold them into slavery called me a monster.

"Heh, heh, heh, don't come, don't come!"

Deluna began to cower and run away, her once calm and bold demeanor fading.

‘Yeah. Monster or whatever.'

I can be worse than a monster to fulfill my purpose.

"You, do you know who's on top of me, huh?! No!"

"I don't know, bitch."

Fuck!!!

I slammed the axe down.

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"Ahhhh."

Denshi blacked out and woke up, looking around dazedly at her bloody surroundings.

The master who had spent the last decade demanding one-sided loyalty and obedience from her was dead.

Not only that. All of those who had done violence to her under her master command were also dead.

Denshi felt her heart clench with an unknown emotion.

It was the most complicated feeling she had ever felt in her life.

It was a dizzying mix of emotions, but one thing was certain.

It's not an unhappy emotion, like sadness or depression, but something closer to elation or joy.

Denshi felt the magic in her soul change.

Slave-binding magic, the magic that made a slave exist as a slave wavered uneasily as it lost its object of attribution.

She was not completely freed from slavery but had only temporarily lost her master.

'Time is running out⋯'

The magic of slave binding, specially modified to prevent harm to the master, will take the life of the slave if he is not indentured to a new master within three hours of the master's death but she’s in the Labyrinth and there was no way you could find a new master right away.

And even if she did, it wouldn't be a normal master.

'Even if I get out of the Labyrinth and rejoin the organization, I'll probably end up working for a bitch like Deluna again.’

With a life like this, is it even worth living?

"Grumpy."

The familiar voice made her shoulders twitch. Instinctively, Denshi wound throbbed with pain.

Automatically, her mind flashed back to what he'd done earlier.

How he'd casually driven his axe into a woman's throat, and how she fought like a wild beast.

She turned around, and there he stood, covered in blood and dripping with fat and red flesh, clutching his axe.

Her whole body relaxed.

Denshi had been through a lot of rough things, but his appearance now was so intimidating she couldn't help but pee.

She could feel her underwear getting wet, and she started to soak the floor.

"Huh."

She couldn't see his face through his helmet, but she knew he was looking at her.

He chuckled in amusement, then pointed the axe at Denshi.

Immediately, Denshi realized.

Ah. I still want to live a little longer.

Earlier, she had briefly considered death, but it was a stupid idea.

The way she was shaking like this, it was clear that she wanted to live, even if it meant being a slave again and living a miserable life.

"Whose side are you on?"

⋯Whose side is it?

‘Are you telling me that I still have a choice?’

"You told me to run away from that bitch. Why did you do that? For what reason?"

He must have wondered why the woman who had once tried to sell him into slavery, and worse, rape him, was trying to help him.

Denshi's face flushed.

‘How can I say that, how can I say that⋯!’

It was never for the right reasons. She hadn't even realized it in the first place.

Instead, Denshi had hanged herself.

She could feel the collar he'd tied around her neck with the magic rope.

It had been a month since the incident, and she still hadn't taken it off.

She had put off taking it off for reasons such as it was a nuisance and it was fashion, but only now did she realize its true meaning.

"Master, it is a slave's duty to protect you⋯"

"⋯What?"

Hmph.

Denshi knelt down, bowed her head to him and held out her palm above her head.

On top of her palm was the handle of the leash.

Forehead to the ground, she trembled, handing him her lifeline.

"Please be my master."

An indentured servitude can never be broken by the will of the slave, unless the slave can pay the price, or the master frees him.

If you mess up, you can be enslaved until you die.

She would give this man everything she has, even her life.

As a woman, she felt a tremendous sense of defeat and humiliation, but it was quickly transformed into an indescribable pleasure.

And most of all, Denshi knew what face was hidden beneath that helmet.

'I rather like it⋯'

Honestly, it was a profitable business.

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"Don't sugarcoat it, say what you really mean. Make it easy to understand."

"⋯I'm destined to be a slave. I'd rather roll under a man than roll under a woman⋯"

"You said that long ago but you haven't changed at all, you're still the same low-life sex freak you were when I first met you, but you're a hundred times better than those slutty bitches. Okay. Pass."

-POP!

The leash was pulled.

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In the stillness of the night, a woman opened her eyes.

Immediately, she saw thousands, tens of thousands of dolls.

The woman stared at the dolls, whose threads had just broken, and closed her eyes again.

"One bug died⋯"

Sissy said.