**Chapter 21: At the temple (1)**

"I want to die."

That's what Jeremy said as soon as he regained consciousness.

He looked down at his chest, then back up and passed out.

After another ten minutes of helplessness in front of the labyrinth, Jeremy woke up.

"Why, why can't I wake up from this dream? Yes, it's a dream, a crazy dream. If it's a dream, there's no explanation. There's no way I could have turned into a woman."

I don't know what it's like when a man turns into a woman. To be honest, I don't really want to know. I'm sure it's fucking terrible.

Still, I couldn't waste time like this. I walked over to Jeremy.

"Jeremy. Wake up."

"No, brother⋯this is ridiculous. I still have Anya. She likes me as a man, not me as a woman. She's straight, not a lesbian. She's⋯"

"Anya is dead."

"⋯ah."

Jeremy's face went white. Reality was starting to set in but I still remember what he said.

This would give him hope.

"And you said you'd bring her back from the dead."

"⋯⋯!"

"You promised yourself that you would grow strong and obtain the miracle of resurrection that exists somewhere in the Labyrinth, didn't you?"

"⋯Yes, I did."

Jeremy nodded slowly but his face remained stony.

"But. Even if I get stronger, even if I get a miracle, even if I bring Anya back to life⋯it won't mean anything⋯if she doesn't look at me."

"Meaningless. You'll be strong enough by the time Anya is resurrected, and you will have the money to erase the blessing."

"Ah!"

Yes, blessings and curses can be erased at the temple.

The only problem is that the cost of removing a blessing or curse skyrockets the more you do it.

The mere realization that a blessing or curse could be removed was enough to change Jeremy's complexion in an instant.

"Yes, first I get stronger and resurrect Anya, then I remove the blessing and turn myself back into a man!"

I nodded in agreement, visibly excited by the newfound hope.

"I can be with Anya again!"

"I know. We've got a long way to go, and now you're standing here despairing like this?"

"No!"

Jeremy jumped to his feet, his despair at the state of affairs he had just been in.

"I have a long way to go to destroy the goblins, save Anya, and become a man again⋯"

Jeremy squeezed his eyes shut and repeated his goal, then turned back to face me and bowed his head deeply.

"Thank you, brother! You've really brought me back to my senses."

"Yeah. That's it."

It was fucking awkward to see the guy who was a guy just a moment ago turn into a girl and bow down to me like a brother, so I just nodded.

"How does a man's goal turn into a woman⋯ phew⋯"

I smacked the head of Grumpy, who laughed quietly behind me.

"Ngit⋯"

It felt like a slap in the face to get this reaction.

"Why did you hit me all of a sudden?"

"⋯You don't know a man's heart, you vicious bitch."

"⋯Ah. I know. He’s a man at the top of the love pyramid, and he just plummeted to the bottom, so it's understandable."

"⋯No, that's not what I meant⋯"

A man turns into a woman and the first thing she thinks about is the dating market, is this a proper human idea?

Where did you throw away your pride and dignity?

'If it were me, the moment I switched to a woman, I would have killed myself.’

Whether it boosts experience efficiency or not, if I can't see it I just feel like I'm losing the will to live.

At the same time, I realized the dangers of the blessings and curses that I had only vaguely felt.

‘If I get the wrong one, I'm fucked.’

When I think about it, despite losing the symbol of masculinity, getting a hole instead, and growing breasts on his pectorals, it's quite remarkable how Jeremy regained his sanity by thinking about his girlfriend.

"Come on, let's go, this is no time for this, let's get back to the labyrinth-"

"Not there, you crazy bastard!"

I shouted back, interrupting Jeremy as he was about to enter the labyrinth again.

I quickly canceled the thought I had just had. This guy is still crazy.

"Let me ask you a question."

While we were making a ruckus in front of the labyrinth, a man dressed as a priest approached us.

‘Doesn't that look like what Adolf was wearing?’

Adolf was a priest, and there is only one other organization in the Labyrinth City that dresses like that.

"Greetings, my name is Sorvel, apprentice cleric of the Order of the Great Earthmother."

The Order of the Earth Goddess. The big boys of the temple district located south of Labyrinth City.

"Me, a man⋯ hehe, me, a man⋯ me, a man⋯ me, a man⋯ me, a man⋯ me!"

"⋯Yes? Ah, yes⋯"

Sorvel's face turned white as he looked at the woman who was acting like a man and making me want to stay away from her and pretend I didn't know her.

He began to backpedal.

"I'm Balkan, a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Sorvel."

"Ah, yes, it's a pleasure, Mr. Balkan."

Grabbing Jeremy by the scruff of the neck, I stepped forward, and Sorvel looked a little relieved to see the same man.

"What brings you here?"

"Ah. Yes. After watching from afar, it looks like you've been cursed this time, is that right?"

‘It was business.’

It can only be one of two things.

You either get a blessing and rejoice, or you get a curse and despair.

If you get a blessing, go to the temple to check the details of the blessing, and if you get a curse, go to the temple to get rid of it.

One way or another, this leads to the temple and Sorvel is supposed to lead those people to the temple.

"Hmm. If it's a curse, it's a terrible curse, and if it's a blessing, it's an efficient blessing."

"Example⋯⋯?"

"Well, once a man turned into a woman."

"Kahahahahaha!"

"⋯⋯?"

"⋯⋯⋯⋯Ah. Hmm. Hmmm.

For a moment, a hint of mockery and pity crossed Sorvel's face.

Somehow, this girl wasn't worried about the man's dignity, but about his fall in the dating market.

"I, please don't look at me like that⋯ I'm begging you⋯"

Even the priest was at a loss for words, and Jeremy was even more frustrated by the comforting words he was given.

"But don't worry too much," said the priest, "we have the blessing of the Great Mother Goddess to solve the most terrible disasters in the world."

Sorvel's expression instantly changed to that of a salesman.

"Did you know that the Adventurer's Guild and the Earth Mother Church have recently started offering free blessings verification for explorers?"

"Ah. Yes. I am aware of that."

I'd heard about it from time to time when I served at Diana's tavern.

-Has the once stingy temple gone senile or completely crazy? They are now verifying blessings and curses for free if you get one!

-Oh, I heard about that too. They even pay you to have it appraised if it's a unique or newly discovered blessing or curse.

"As far as I know, there hasn't been a horrible, ugly curse that turns a man into a woman ⋯ ahem, no, a blessing. Well, you're in luck, because if you come to the temple and confirm the details of the blessing, I'll give you a whopping five silver coins. You and the rest of the party, of course!"

Sorvel glared at us as he said that.

Jeremy was now listening as well, a curious look on his face.

Meanwhile, I thought,

‘⋯Fucking cheap.’

with a sense of foreboding.

'This is what it's all about, selling your personal information and getting rewarded.’

Of course, it was safe to say that the Temple was the most trustworthy organization in Labyrinth City.

They were one of the living consciences of the Labyrinth City, often taking care of the weak in the streets.

However, there was something of a nuisance next to the temple.

Explorers' Union⋯.

For a moment, Deluna's face flashed in my mind's eye. The weight of her head in my backpack suddenly felt much heavier.

'Oh, my God. I'm getting so suspicious.’

I can't trust anyone. Am I overthinking this? Who should I let in, who should I keep out⋯?

Let's keep it as simple as possible.

Do I need money right now? No.

Five silver coins is a lot of money, but I don't need it right away.

I do owe Diana’s money for lodging and food, but I'll be able to pay her back through my work at the tavern and future exploration of the Labyrinth. For now, I haven't even gotten paid for what I got from the Labyrinth this time.

So is there a reason to go to the temple? Yes, there is.

I felt the weight of the staff and cross necklace on my backpack.

No matter what, I must deliver Adolf's death to the temple where she belonged. It's the least I can do to be human.

After all, I must accompany her to the temple.

So is it necessary for me, with a status window, to go to the temple?

In my personal opinion, yes.

[◆ Blessing of ???]

- ???

- Stamina +10 Strength +10 Agility +10

This mysterious blessing has been there ever since I could see the status window.

I don't know exactly what it's called, or when, or where, or how I got it, though I'm enjoying its effects.

Did I get it when I first came to this world, did I get it when my status window synced, or if not, what the hell is this blessing?

'If the temple, which has been dealing with blessings and curses for hundreds of years, appraises it, shouldn't they be able to uncover the true nature of this blessing?'

It was a plausible enough idea worth a try.

I opened my eyes to find Grumpy and Jeremy staring at me. Suddenly, I was the decision maker among the three.

“⋯Okay, let’s go.”

Sorvel grinned.

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“The Earth Mother gives a great blessing to this world, and soon the labyrinth will be colored with light...”

"Don't you ever get bored with all that nonsense?"

The nun who had been silently reciting the revelation slowly opened her eyes.

A black, unholy demon was in front of her.

"What's the point of giving revelation after revelation, when have they ever been true to their word?"

"That's because we don't understand what he means. His revelations have always been right, and we've always been wrong."

"Who doesn't have a way with words? The barking of a passing dog is a prophecy if you interpret it in all the right ways."

"⋯What are you doing here all of a sudden? Are you here to settle a score?"

"No, nothing like that."

The demon pulled something out of his pocket and threw it in front of the nun.

The nun silently maneuvered the wand in her hand to catch it.

"A necklace with a ⋯ cross on it?"

"Yes. It's a holy relic to find the 'right one' you've been searching for, for four years."

"⋯⋯!"

The nun sucked in a quiet breath.

"⋯You must have gone to great lengths to bring it here, so why would you just give it away? What is its purpose?"

"⋯Purpose."

The demon pondered for a moment.

Then, snap!

"Serif Adeline, I have come to visit a group of people who have been cursed⋯nay, blessed⋯with a terrible and unusual curse."

The apprentice priest outside said.

"Alas. I'm afraid this is the end of our meeting."

"⋯⋯"

"Make good use of it. I'm not sure if there will be anyone suitable among the people coming to this cramped temple, but if there is, the necklace will vibrate and let you know. It'll shake just as intensely as a magic dildo. Pfft."

The demon that had sneered at Serif in a bloodthirsty manner was already gone by the time the light of the grate shone once.

"⋯Whoo."

Sighing unnecessarily, Serif looked at the necklace with reluctance for a long moment, before finally putting it on cautiously.

The cross settled into the center of her cleavage as if it had found its rightful place.

I don't know what the demon's intentions are, but this is the holy relic I've been searching for all these years, all the way into the labyrinth.

I wanted to test it, at least.

Ding!

"Serif Adeline?"

Serif clasped her hands together to greet her visitor and gave a faint smile. It was so easy to create such a fake smile now.

"Yep. I'm ready, please come in."

As if on cue, the heavy door swung open. Light streamed in through the cracks, and three people entered.

A woman with a sharp expression, a woman with a face that seemed filled with unjust suffering, and...

"⋯⋯What?"

"⋯You are⋯"

Boooooooo!!!

"What⋯?!"

The holy object that she just put on shook frantically, irritating Serif's chest.

Serif looked in the direction of the necklace with a puzzled face.

It must have been two meters tall. A warrior's body, so massive and muscular that it wouldn't look out of place in a large, clunky Great Helm, a fantasy brought to life.

It was a body she had seen only once in her life, though it was not one she was used to seeing as a woman of the clergy.

‘A month ago, when I went down to the Labyrinth⋯!’

"It seems we meet again here."

The man bowed his head and said hello.

Buuuuuuuuuuu!!!

"Hmph!"

"⋯⋯?"

The necklace twitched frantically as he moved.

As if he, himself, was the one she had been looking for, for so long.