**Chapter 256: Labyrinth Saint (2)**

-Drip.

Red blood flowed across the surface of the swamp.

Following the blood that flowed like a river, Denshi's abdomen with a fist-sized wind hole came into view.

Never-before-seen organs threatened to spill out through that hole as red blood pooled.

The moment I saw that sight, my chest tightened and dizziness swirled in my head.

"Why did you..."

I squeezed out the words in a situation where my heart was so constricted I could barely breathe.

"...cough, kuup...!"

Trying to answer my words, Denshi coughed up a mouthful of red blood.

I instinctively ran to her side, knelt down, and examined her.

"Don't open your mouth! Stay still, please. Just stay..."

"...hehe..."

Even while dying, she looked at me and smiled faintly with her pale complexion as if telling me not to worry.

That sight made me feel like I was losing my mind even more.

"...Denshi."

Ellie's voice was heard. I blankly listened to the words flowing from her mouth.

"Even during battle, she occasionally checked the battle situation on your side. She also provided support with the crossbow."

I know. Who wouldn't know? I received plenty of that help even when beheading the Elder Lich.

If Denshi hadn't destroyed the Elder Lich left arm, the one who would have become fertilizer after death would have been me, not the Elder Lich.

"But right after that, there was an explosion, and Denshi, who was at the front line to check both sides..."

Got caught in the Elder Lich explosion.

The bone fragments of the Elder Lich, imbued with magi and exploding like a grenade, pierced straight through Denshi's abdomen and forearm.

"We need to treat the injury, but we've used up all the spare potions during battle..."

Looking at Jubeel and Rubia's injuries, healing potions must have been scarce.

"Even the Priest, the only one who can use healing miracles, has used up almost all his power..."

Hope's complexion, who was keeping Denshi alive, was already deathly pale.

The side effects of overusing holy power are similar to mana exhaustion.

Despite being unable to heal such severe injuries as a lower-ranked intermediate priest, Hope was somehow keeping her breathing.

The only means to save an injured person in the labyrinth, potions, were all consumed in intense battle, and the priest's healing miracle had hit its limit.

"...20th floor."

I barely managed to squeeze out my voice.

"We're on the 19th floor, so the 20th floor. If we go to the 20th floor, it'll work. If we go to the fountain on the 20th floor and sprinkle healing water, we can save her. We can save her, right?"

"...Mr. Balkan."

Rubia glanced at my anxious face and answered with a guilty voice.

"From the swamp cemetery to the edge of the 19th floor, it would take at least 8 hours even going as fast as possible."

"...If I squeeze out mana to create an ice path and run as fast as possible, we could arrive sooner—"

"That...that time already includes considering that."

Someone with a fist-sized hole in their abdomen, nearly dead.

Someone who might die at any moment when the healing miracle wears off, carrying them for 8 hours, crossing two portals, and then running to the fountain on the 20th floor to submerge them.

Even as I said it myself, I could tell how unrealistic and foolish it was.

It was the very definition of a stupid judgment.

Since that was the only way to save her, I desperately tried to force an answer to somehow save her.

"......ah......"

Suddenly all strength left my body.

An unbearable sense of futility created a needle.

-Thud!

When the needle fell into my chest, something inside my heart shattered, creating cracks and holes.

Something flowed out from within my chest.

The moments shared with Denshi flow out through that hole.

From our somewhat rough first meeting, the moment she became my slave with a collar around her neck, when I rescued her from being exploited by the outlaw clan, to the moments we parted due to a sudden accident.

Meeting again after being separated, exploring the labyrinth together, her getting jealous or trying to get my attention to be hit, mixing our bodies together, sharing nights, greeting mornings together...

The time I had built with her in this strange world flows out.

My reason began emptying out my feelings for Denshi to prevent myself from breaking down.

If she dies, could I continue my explorer life normally?

Maybe someday I could. After she dies, in a few years, or perhaps decades, I might somehow get up again.

But even after getting up like that, I would just eat away at life, drowning in my own powerlessness and self-loathing.

Denshi...is no longer just another person to me.

She was a companion and party member who shared hardships, my woman who mixed bodies with me, and my slave.

No one can touch what's mine.

Even if it's death, or rather, because it's death, I won't let it take what's mine.

I won't let her escape, nor let something that can't be resisted take her away.

She was my possession, and she is mine.

-Kwaaak!

I clutched my heart.

I caught with my hands the emotions flowing out through the cracks and holes in my heart.

I block the emotional hole that gradually widens with my hands, gather up the spilled emotions and forcefully stuff them back inside.

So that no more memories of her empty out, so that memories of the one I shared time with don't meaninglessly disappear.

-Swoosh.

Something touched the hand that was gripping the pierced crack.

Cold, delicate, and small...a woman's hand.

When I opened my eyes, Denshi was holding my hand and smiling faintly.

"...I'm not, going to die... Master..."

"......"

"I absolutely won't die like this... I still want to... by Master's side... cough...! There's so much I want to do..."

"......"

Denshi, who spoke while coughing up blood, looks at me with unfocused eyes.

Hope, who had been continuously using healing miracles, carefully withdrew their hand and shook his head.

The only priest's holy power had completely run out.

Denshi, whose lifeline that was barely holding on had been cut, smiles at me.

"I haven't particularly lived with any dreams..."

"......"

"But, I want to keep staying by Master's side. Now, that's my dream..."

"Stop talking."

I cut off her words.

I had no intention of letting her speak any last words.

"Show me with actions."

I had no intention of quietly listening to last words either.

"If you want to stay by my side, live... get up properly again, and show me with actions."

Denshi didn't answer my words.

She just smiled with an even paler complexion, as if telling me not to worry so I could be at ease.

I gritted my teeth and grabbed her hand.

Kiiiiing—

With a tearing noise, I activated the blessing with the feeling of grasping at straws.

[Blessing of Radiance]

That power containing pure and pristine holy power, that power that had taken root so deeply it had become part of my soul, I slowly drew it up.

I can feel the holy power flowing through my body.

Unlike the mana refined and pooled in my heart through the dragon heart blessing, this power floats around disorderly and unorganized in my body.

—Breathe in naturally, and gather the holy power in one place.

Serif's teachings engraved in my mind ripple in my ears.

I gather that holy power floating in my body and soul.

Where?

Not the heart. That place where blood and mana circulating throughout the body gather is already full. There was no room to accept any more power.

I needed empty space. Searching my body, I saw an empty place.

The dantian is located much lower than the heart, in the lower abdomen. That would be where the holy power would reside from now on.

I gather the wandering holy power in one place to use it more efficiently.

All the holy power manifesting through the Blessing of Radiance gathered in the dantian.

The method of use isn't much different from mana. Rather, the holy power existing through the blessing moves much more naturally than mana.

The holy power that started flowing from the dantian circulated throughout the body for a more effective release.

The holy power drawn up from the dantian dwelled in my fingertips.

—Then you just need to sprinkle that gathered holy power on me.

What comes to mind is the pure white cat saint who descended on the temple's infirmary.

Warm and cozy, comfortable and peaceful holy power, the miracle of healing that gives comfortable relief to those crying out in pain.

As I recalled that saint's figure watching over countless sick people, at last dazzling holy power gathered fully in my hands.

'This is not an axe blade for cutting down enemies.'

I need to change my thinking.

[Blessing of Radiance]

- The primordial light dwells in you.

- Has absolute influence on darkness.

The Blessing of Radiance is a blessing that supplies pure holy power.

I am the one using it.

If I think of holy power as an axe blade, it will become a sword aura that cuts enemy necks.

If I think of it as medicine that embraces wounds, the holy power will gladly transform into healing light that embraces the sick.

There are no enemies threatening my life here.

There is also no one making me take up arms and jump into enemy lines.

This place is a peaceful paradise without any killing intent.

It's a place where someone precious who was solely devoted to me is dying in pain.

It's a place where a fragile one who sensed their own death is dying, trying to smile so those left behind won't be sad.

'What's needed now is not killing intent and sharp axes for cutting down enemies.'

A heart solely for the other.

A heart wanting to embrace the other.

A heart wanting to block with one's whole body instead of the wind trying to extinguish the spark of life.

"...What kind of holy power is this...?"

"Impossible. How can an explorer not affiliated with the temple..."

I could hear the voices of Priest Hope and Paladin Beer who couldn't continue speaking after seeing that dazzling holy power, but I couldn't hear well.

The holy power blooming at my fingertips heads toward Denshi’s abdomen and forearm.

-Swoosh.

Her body that was torn apart by the Elder Lich bone fragments gradually regains its original form.

The organs that were broken and flowing out returned to their places, but it wasn't enough. It couldn't fill in the flesh and create muscle.

There was some holy power left but it was blocked by the wall of Finesse.

As if saying this is as far as you can go with your current level.

But

[Would you like to invest 16 free points in Finesse?]

Just breaking through limits is enough.

[Technique:(21+11)]

The change came instantly.

My thoughts accelerated and the world slowed down.

Roughly beating heart, rapidly circulating blood, writhing muscles, mana pooled in the heart and holy power drawn from the dantian.

All those things making up my body were felt incomparably more clearly than before.

The holy power handled as naturally as moving a part of my body begins healing Denshi’s body again.

The holy power flowed the same as before, but the results were clearly different.

The nerves and blood vessels, flesh and muscles exposed to the light of holy power slowly regain their original form.

Color returns to her pale complexion and warmth returns to the woman's body that was growing cold.

Her heart that was slowing as if preparing for approaching death begins beating again.

That power that had only cut down enemies until now embraced another's wounds for the first time.

Denshi's eyes that were closing hazily looked up at me.

"Master..."

Perhaps the fatigue remained even though her body was fully recovered.

"...Have I become an undead...?"

I lightly flicked her forehead as she muttered nonsense in a sleepy voice.

"Oof...!"

"...Does it hurt?"

"...It feels slightly good..."

The undead cannot feel pain or pleasure.

Only living humans can fully experience those sensations.

I tightly hugged Denshi who was scratching her cheek with an embarrassed smile.

"Ugh, I'm still hurting..."

"Think of it as punishment and stay still. A slave making their master worry..."

"Hehit..."

Hearing her frivolous laugh, tension naturally eased with deep relief.

Today no one from my party died.