**Chapter 4: No more ordinary days (4)**

"People!

I almost jumped in delight but my cool head prevailed and I gripped my axe tighter.

The long walk gave me some time to think.

‘Armored knights must be a rare breed.’

Not everyone had the morals of the armored knight who had saved my life without payment.

Even in the modern age of resources, there are plenty of assholes who stab people in the back, so why not here?

It's just as bad, if not worse.

Let's use common sense.

How many people in their right mind would come to a place infested with ugly beasts that prey on men and turn them into pleasure-addicted fools?

I patted the back of my head to make sure my helmet was secure.

I grip my axe tighter, my guard up as I would if I were facing a group of goblins.

They halted, just out of the light's reach.

The passage is roughly five meters across. They're pressed up against the left wall.

I cautiously approach with my back to the right wall to put as much distance as possible.

As I stepped away, their silhouettes began to reveal themselves. They must have gotten into my line of sight.

I quickly checked their armament, there were four of them, one man and three women.

The man had shabby clothes and a shabby body. Other than the fact that he was carrying a large luggage bag on his back, there were no significant features. He looked like just an ordinary porter.

I looked more closely at the women, who appeared to be the actual combatants.

They were all dressed in black walkers, bracers, leather armor and each carried a shield, wand and sword.

But there was something else that stood out.

"⋯Beastmen?"

Floppy cat ears and a swishing tail!

A group of beastmen with human faces but distinctive ears and tails were in front of me.

“⋯It’s a shame.”

“It sounds delicious.”

Gulp. I heard the sound of drooling coming from the beastmen.

-Kaaaah!

My grip on the axe tightened.

‘Delicious?’

Are these guys eating people, cannibals or something?

-Tub!

The wand-wielding beast girl mouthed something, then looked at me and covered the mouths of the two girls who said delicious.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to attack you, can we just go our separate ways?"

"⋯You go first."

"Okay."

As they drew closer, my wariness intensified. I braced myself for the axe to come out at any moment.

"Hmph."

"Hmph. Hmph. Hmph."

Sticky stares follow.

The one with the sword and the one with the shield mutter something, but I can't make it out clearly because they were stopped by the one holding a wand.

"⋯⋯"

The porter man at the back of the pack looked at me with envy, then turned and followed them wordlessly.

‘⋯Leash?’

The leash around his neck bothered me for a moment, but it was none of my business. I'm too busy trying to keep myself alive.

And with that, we walked past each other.

I lingered for a moment, watching where they were headed, just in case they changed their minds and attacked from behind.

But they went on their way without a second thought.

"⋯What the hell was that?"

I felt a sense of disbelief, but more than that, a sense of relief.

The worst that could have happened was a battle, but I'm glad it passed without incident.

'Cannibal beastmen, that's the worst.’

I thought to myself as I made my way back to the escape portal.

-Gulp.

My stomach screamed for food again but I'd been hungry for too long, and at some point the hunger became bearable.

It was thirst that caught up with me. A terrible thirst that burned my throat!

As I keep moving my body, I sweat, but no moisture is replenished.

Did they say that a person dies if they don't drink water for three days?

How many days have I not had water now? I don't know, but I'm guessing two.

About halfway down the second straightaway, I finally pulled out a potion.

A potion I've been saving for just in case.

Now I really need to drink this to quench my thirst.

"I really owe you one."

-Poof!

The potion bottle popped open with a cheerful sound and released an apple scent.

It's like opening a bottle of fine wine for a toast. Not that I've ever had fine wine before.

Unfortunately, the amount is really small. Not even enough to moisten my lips and drink but this is better than nothing.

-Gulp.

The amount was so small that I didn't even have time to savor the flavor.

It's even more exciting to drink just a little bit. But I squeezed my eyes shut and screwed the cap back on.

"Don't think. Just walk."

I still had a long way to go.

-Poof!

"Ugh...!"

When I woke up, I was leaning against the wall.

"Kerrrr, kerrrrr!"

The goblin's knife had just sliced through my left forearm.

-Pfft!

I kicked the goblin in the stomach with my foot, and it popped up and rolled to the other side of the wall.

"Keruk, kelek, keruk."

Four more goblins gathered around me as I finally got to my feet.

‘Fuck. When did they all get together like this, and did I even fall asleep?’

It was as if I'd fallen asleep after a short rest.

It had been two days in my mind, and I hadn't eaten or slept in that time, so I let my guard down.

It was a big mistake but beating myself up in hindsight won't change anything.

"Kererek!"

I dodge the goblin's furious lunge and drive my axe into it.

Thud!

"Kerlek!!!"

Damn. It was shallow.

My health is drained and my axe blade is dulled by the goblin's blood and fat.

With the axe halfway through her throat, she swung the knife just before she died.

"Kerrrrrrr!"

In a flash, I grabbed the goblin's forearm and twisted, and it let go of the knife as it screamed in pain.

I picked up the knife and held it to the goblin's throat, threatening the others.

"Don't come any closer. If you make a rash move, this one will die."

"Keruk! Keruk!"

The goblin horde lunged at me as if to say, "Fuck you.”

"You bloodless, tearless, heartless bastards."

-Kwak!

I slashed at a goblin's throat with the goblin knife and plunged it into the skull of an oncoming creature.

It was a monster's weapon, so it cut through with ease.

"Keruk!"

Finally, the last one began to shiver and run away.

-Boom!

The knife pierced through the air and plunged into the goblin's heart.

An old favorite pastime of mine was playing catch. No one could catch what I threw, though.

Well, since the goblin accepted it with its heart, I guess this is a kind of catch.

When the battle was over, I slumped to the ground, feeling weak.

I feel like I just spent all my strength in battle.

I need to get up, I need to keep walking, I need to escape the labyrinth on foot.

I'm really weak now. I'm sleepy. I'm hungry.

“⋯Wake ​​up, it’s me⋯”

-Turbuck, turbuck.

"⋯!"

- It must be delicious.

A chill ran down my spine.

If I encountered a bunch of them now, I'd be a meal without the strength to resist.

The footsteps are getting closer.

"What the hell?!"

The explorers' eyes widened as they spotted me beside the pile of goblin bodies in the passageway.

I observed them silently through my helm.

A girl with the plain appearance of a country maiden and a gruff-looking woman were each equipped with a dagger and bow.

Both were carrying small backpacks, but no plausible armor.

Their gazes swept over my body.

Could I beat them if I tried? In this condition?

I hastily tried to grip my axe, but my hand was not strong enough.

They were getting closer and closer to me.

Damn it, I'm going to die at this rate!

"Are you okay? You're still alive, right⋯?"

⋯?

The girl with the plain appearance held out her hand with a worried face.

I stared at her hand in a daze.

What? Why are you being nice?

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"How can I repay this favor?"

Merciful Grace Season 2. The armored knight is gone, and a new light has come.

"Oh, never mind. Fellow explorers helping fellow explorers."

The girl, who looked as unassuming as a country girl, smiled wryly.

I wonder why all do-gooders say the same thing.

Even when the world is fucked up, there are still good people.

-Tap-tap-tap-tap

The goblin corpses were piled up like a wall, ready for any possible attack, and we sat in a circle with a bonfire in the center.

The sassy girl kept watch, while the demure one simmered a pot of soup.

It's nice to be in a group, I thought, to relax.

"Here. It's ready, have a taste."

The simple girl handed me a plate full of soup.

"Ah⋯ thank you very much."

I took the soup gratefully. My hands trembled with joy as I took the soup.

My head is filled with thoughts of soup.

Distracted by the food, I took off my helmet without a second thought.

"⋯⋯!"

"⋯wah."

I didn't even realize that the atmosphere around me had changed.

The modest girl smiled quietly, and the sassy girl looked at the modest girl with an exclamation.

When I took off my helmet, I felt a sense of liberation, as if I had taken off a restraining device, expanding my vision and freeing my breath. Honestly, I've been so stifled.

I warmed myself by the campfire, warmed my heart with the soup I was handed, and carefully took a spoonful.

The soup was white and watery. In fact, it was more like water than soup. It's not chunky, and it doesn't have much flavor.

After two days and eight hours on an empty stomach, I pushed the soup into my stomach.

My stomach is warm and my heart is racing.

I feel strangely disoriented. Yeah. This is it. This is it.

Tears of gratitude rolled down my cheeks.

I drained the bowl of soup in a flash.

"I'm sorry, could I have another bowl, please?"

“Why are you sorry about that? The portion is sufficient, so please eat a lot.”

"Thank you!"

I took the soup that the plain girl handed back to me.

It would have been easy to just pour the soup into a bowl, but for some reason it took a little longer this time.

‘⋯What's wrong, why is it suddenly so cold?’

Also, unlike the first soup, the second soup had a sour taste and a strange aroma. The flavor was so strong that I frowned slightly.

'Don't complain, asshole. Just drink it gratefully.’

"How does it taste?"

"Well, it's really good."

"Hoo-hoo. Good for you. Sip it. Sip. Sip."

"Ah. Okay."

"Here's some bread for you to eat. It's hard, so you'll need to soak up a lot of the soup."

"Thank you."

I shoved it into my mouth out of ignorance and almost got stuck on the hard bread.

"⋯⋯"

The bread absorbed the soup and I took a big bite. The soup definitely made the bread moist and soft, even so, the sour taste didn't go away.

When I had almost finished my new soup I felt strangely tired.

I was tired to the point of falling asleep, but the warmth of the soup, coupled with the warmth of the kindness, seemed to put my mind at ease.

"Oh my. You must be tired. We'll stand guard, so you can rest first."

"Are you sure you want to do that?"

"Of course."

"Great. I appreciate it."

"Hoo-hoo. No, we're the ones who should be thanking you."

‘⋯Thank me⋯?’

I sigh and close my eyes. My consciousness seems to be slipping away.

"A favor, you repay with your body."

Through my blurred vision, I see two women smiling broadly.

It's a smile I recognize from somewhere and quite recently.

‘Ah. The goblin. The one with the tongue hanging out on my crotch.’

That's exactly what she looked like.

"Uh, eh?"

A chill ran down the back of my neck and I snapped out of it.

‘Fuck. I've been hit!’

"Eh, fuck!"

"Uh-oh. Did you just realize? Don't get up, go back to sleep. You were tired, weren't you?"

Tsk-!

The girl with a plain-looking face shoved my forehead.

"Eating soup spiked with sleep poison without questioning it. How naive are you?"

My whole body went limp. I couldn't resist so I lost consciousness in an instant.

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"Haha, haha, my God, I've never seen anything like this before. My body feels like a rock, and my uterus is fucking shaking⋯How much would I get if I sold him on the slave market?"

"Even with his pants on, it's almost as big as my forearms⋯? Gulp. His face is so beautiful...It's worth 30 or 40 gold coins."

"Isn't it too wasteful to sell him right away? How about a little taste?"

I heard several conversations in my foggy mind. They were talking about selling me into slavery.

My head grew colder and colder.

Ah. I had vowed to be careful, and now I've fallen for it.

But the temptation was too sweet: warm food, a warm place, and rest. What more could a weary man in a labyrinth want?

'Thanks to you, I'm definitely rested.’

My fatigue melted away as if I'd just slept. I'm in the best shape I've ever been in.

"You know what?"

I mutter quietly, and the rustling around me stops instantly.

I slowly opened my eyes to see the face of a bland bitch with a panicked expression on her face as she pulled down my pants.

"I drank potions all the way here."

I clenched my fists.