**Chapter 75: Get out alive (4)**

As I opened my eyes in the darkness, I saw the face of a smiling Paladin.

Her face was beaming as if she had just received a romantic and emotional event, but the way her body had been severed from the neck down was quite grotesque.

"⋯"

I swallowed hard and looked away. The bodies of other Paladins and priests floated around in the darkness.

‘Why is my body still intact?’

My memory of being stabbed by the Paladins and eaten by the Abomination was a blur.

I'd been chewed up and almost digested, but my body couldn't have been in better shape.

It was a far cry from the shattered state I was in before I was eaten.

I suddenly remembered what [She] had said about miracles.

Since I don't have the Healing Factor or anything, I wondered if my recovery was a product of that miracle.

If there are no more miracles, does that mean [she] doesn't have any more advice for me?

I don't know.

I was very curious about the truth, but there were more important matters at hand.

‘I need to get out of here.’

There was no good to be gained by staying in the belly of the unpleasant creature.

Fortunately, I still had the axe in my hand, the key to my escape.

Firmly enough that the hard handle was slightly dented with handprints.

I hadn't let go until I was about to experience death.

Keeeeeee-!

With a short, sharp start-up sound, the axe was bathed in a pure white light.

The light emitted by the Radiant Blessing was even stronger than before. I wondered if the Blessing was growing.

Thanks to that, the surroundings became even more apparent. I suppressed the feeling of nausea and looked away from the corpse.

As I swam through the corpses of the priests, I touched the wall. Skin, perhaps.

'Though I'm not sure the dark-clad abomination has skin.’

If I poke the fuck out of them, they'll respond to something.

-Tsk, tsk, tsk!

[KEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!!!]

I slammed my axe down on the wall with a glowing beam of light, and the creature, which hadn't even been touched by the fireball, began to writhe.

Inside the creature's body, I felt the shock of the world turning upside down.

I couldn't help but grin.

"You! Fucking asshole!"

-Tsk, tsk, tsk, tsk, tsk!!!

[KEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!!]

A thrill of pleasure shot through me as I pierced the creature's hide with my axe.

My body burned hot as the hideous abomination twisted and writhed and screamed in agony.

‘As much as I got. No, ten times as much as I've been given.’

The sensation of slicing through the darkness with light was eerily similar, yet different, to the sensation of cutting through the flesh of a beast with an axe.

Each time the darkness screamed and scattered, the light shone ever so slightly brighter as it devoured him.

The light grew progressively stronger as it tore through the darkness.

Countless axe marks had been made on the hide of the abomination and each one was large enough to see through.

At some point, only intermittent seizures could be felt, and the creature's screams could no longer be heard.

’Not enough.’

But even if I wasn't angry I wanted to vomit out this emotion that's been simmering inside of me, all at once.

Zirnier's axe was coalesced with magic.

"Great."

The axe, enveloped in light, rapidly grew in size in the abomination's belly.

The floating investigators were pushed out of the creature's belly, and the glowing axe blade sliced the creature's head in half.

[⋯]

The mysterious abomination that had awakened from its black egg, the [Darkness] itself, volatilized into light and began to dissolve into thin air.

-Ting!

Something landed in the place where the giant abomination had disappeared.

A monstrous crystal. A soul stone.

It was similar in appearance to a normal monster soul stone, but the aura it emitted was strange.

It was unnerving and ominous, but at the same time, it had a tremendous amount of energy.

[⋯!]

As I approached the spirit stone and tried to take it in my hand, it trembled.

It was as if it was extremely afraid of me.

The abomination's soul stone stiffened up like a punk who had just met the first officer in charge.

"Hmph."

[⋯!!!]

I grabbed the soul stone with my Radiant Blessing hand, and it begged me in great pain.

It was clearly disciplined by the fierce violence.

‘I'll keep it just in case.’

I had a surefire way to subdue him. I slipped the Abomination Soul stone into my pants pocket.

I lowered my head and caught sight of my body.

The leather armor Diana had given me had been ripped and torn in many places, reducing it to a rag.

My belly in particular was riddled with puncture marks and sharp sword marks, the marks of dog-trolling by the Temple's investigators.

The protective gear was nowhere to be seen, and most importantly, the great helm was also...

‘It's broken.’

Somehow, the breeze has managed to get in.

The lower part of the helm, where the mouth and breathing holes are, is half blown off.

I realized that if someone else looked at me, they would only see my left cheek and lip.

I could already picture Zirnier fuming at me for destroying her first creation.

"Kuluk, kuluk!"

A cough woke me up and I looked around to see the rest of the Joy Hog party, each with their own injuries.

"Joy Hog! Lammel! Jubeel!"

"⋯Not dead yet."

Joy Hog, who had lost an arm and was coughing up blood, pointed.

"Hey, take care of Lammel over there first. Her injuries are worse. And pick up my fallen arm on the way. It can still be reattached."

Lammel injuries were serious. Her right leg was completely blown off and she was unconscious.

I picked her up and quickly dipped her into the fountain.

The fountain didn't shatter, thanks to the giant axe that had withstood the creature's attack.

The fountain was still spewing out its miraculous healing water and Lammel's complexion gradually relaxed as she soaked in it.

She looked like she was about to pass into eternity, but her injuries were healing much more quickly than with a potion.

‘Even if it’s not possible to completely remove it, if we just find the severed part…’

I also noticed Jubeel submerged in the fountain in an uncomfortable position.

Luckily, Jubeel was holding her left arm in her right hand.

She reassembled her torn left arm and attached it to her torso.

Then the healing water began to seep through the arm and torso, connecting them together.

A healing that even the most advanced potions could not accomplish. The healing water, the original potion, was indeed a marvel.

"Kkkkk, thank you. Balkan⋯"

"Are you awake, Jubeel?"

“Yes. Today is a particularly hot day for mating. Won’t you take my virginity?”

"You're fine."

It was the usual Jubeel, spouting bullshit.

It's amazing how she can talk like that after having her arm torn off.

Joy Hog quickly reassembled her right arm and dipped it into the fountain. She looks around at her party and, as if relieved, falls unconscious.

Gellan's party members, Fusilini and Aldente, were also dipped into the healing waters.

Aldente had been completely blown to bits, and all we could salvage were five intact pieces of slime.

In the healing waters, the burst pieces of slime began to clump together.

"What the hell."

But then I realized what was happening.

"Tut-tut-tut-tut-tut-tut!"

Like the green jelly monster from the original AOS game, the resurrected Aldente had shrunk from a six-foot-tall behemoth to the size of a newborn baby.

Like a dead adult Groot resurrected as a baby Groot.

‘The curse of the Slime. Isn't it actually a blessing?’

Even with the help of the healing water, it was a crazy ability to revive a half-dead person.

'I guess I shouldn't have removed the curse.’

I wondered if curses had their own way.

"Ugh⋯"

Aldente stared at me, then bowed low to me.

She didn't seem to have any memories of the adult Aldente, but she seemed to instinctively realize that I had saved her life.

I patted her head a few times, feeling strangely cute, and Baby Aldente rubbed her slime ball into my hand.

I left Baby Aldente behind and moved on to the next patient.

"⋯⋯"

Hitolis and Hope, the two half-crazed priests, barely regained their senses as the abomination breathed its last.

"⋯⋯"

Hope was still drooling from the corners of her mouth, but her focus was gradually returning.

Hitolis sobbed softly, tears dripping down her cheeks.

-Zap!

I slapped Hitolis on the cheek to wake her up. Now was not the time for sobbing.

"Hitolis. Are you awake?"

"We can talk about why you lost your mind later. Just calm down. You still have your miracle powers, right?"

"Ah, yes, yes⋯"

"Then use a healing miracle."

By now, Hope had regained her senses. I slapped her on the cheek and told her to work his miracle.

A powder of light descended over the heads of the party members immersed in the healing waters.

The miracle of healing accelerated their recovery.

'Except for Lammel, we're done with first aid.’

I walked toward the porter's bag lying in the distance.

"Krug, Krug!"

I saw Gregor hiding behind a large packer's bag, tears streaming down her face in terror.

It was too much trouble to deal with so I stunned her with a blow to the nape of her neck and checked the bag.

‘One, two, three. They're all there.’

Gurmimi, Reichem, and Gellan were all there. It was as if they were perfectly restrained and couldn't escape.

Except for one more thing…

"⋯Monster⋯"

"You, you⋯ who the hell are you?"

After regaining their senses, Reichem and Gurmimi's reactions were strangely different.

Instead of gritting their teeth and vowing to get back at me for this, they looked as if they regretted having touched something that shouldn't have been touched.

"The one who came to get you."

"⋯"

The two fell silent at the simple answer, their complexions turning even paler.

I dragged my legs, which had become much slower, to the fountain and sat down.

‘I'm tired.’

I was tired, even though the strain was light compared to the frenzied use of the Blessing of Radiance and the use of the Giant Size, but tired was tired.

I dipped my legs into the healing water and rested, but kept my mind alert.

I didn't feel anything unusual, but I couldn't let my guard down completely.

With all the combatants in the healing water and unconscious, I had to stay alert.

Hui-yi-yi-

A cool breeze blew from far away, from where the monster village was located.

Perhaps it was my mood, but I could hear an unknown voice in the wind.

‘It sounds as if the Labyrinth is crying.’

I felt the wind, and I thought to myself that the Labyrinth was crying sadly, as if it had lost something very important.

[⋯!!!]

I slammed the Abomination Soul stone in my pocket in anger.

A little bit of Radiant Blessing flowed into it, and the creature whimpered.

I still shudder to think of all the trouble caused by this little bastard so I had no intention of letting him go easy.

I passed the time by supporting the Soul stone with Blessings of Radiance in between healing sessions.

Often, I would open the mouths of my party members and feed them a mixture of healing water and preserved food.

With no one else to fight, I stayed awake through the night, protecting my party alone.

Exhaustion overtook me, but I chewed on the jerky Diana had made.

Over the next two days, one by one, the party members began to regain consciousness and open their eyes.

And then, the fountain transition portal opened.

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"⋯Ha. Fuck."

Nate Elin cursed as she stepped through the portal, wiping her forehead at the sight that met her eyes.

‘I thought it was just a mental thing.’

Nate Elin cursed herself for her complacency in the labyrinth.

She should have been more cautious.

Even though she rushed to Balkan's side as soon as she heard the ominous sound over the communications artifact, it was too late.

In the distance, the corpses of the investigators, clumped together like cow dung, reeked of rot.

Seven futures were lost but there was something more serious on her mind.

The end of the fifth floor was filled with an unpleasant aura but she hadn't felt it before on the fifth floor.

Furthermore, it didn't belong on the fifth floor at all.

‘At this level, it’s in the upper-middle class even among the middle class⋯’

No, this unpleasant aura could not even be compared to a simple monster.

It was far more ominous and disgusting.

Then, the party that must have encountered the malicious aura came into view.

"There you are."

The sound of jerky chewing could be heard and a tired-faced Balkan faced the investigators.

His half-shattered helmet and leather armor, and the wounded party members lying in the fountain behind him, told them that a life-and-death battle had taken place here.

Nate Elin, who respected and followed only one person, remembered a favor saint Serif had asked of her.

-If you ever meet Mr. Balkan in the Labyrinth, please help him out of harm's way. Do you understand, Nate Elin?

"Hah!"

Balkan suddenly let out a scream as he looked at Nate Elin, who was sighing and clutching her head.

He gestured in agony, as if he was going to faint at any moment.

“Ah, aah! My body was injured because of the monster that hatched from the egg that the Paladins of the temple had⋯! Ugh! That’s why my comrades are in danger⋯! Kwaaaaak! My stomach that was stabbed and pierced by the Paladins of the temple⋯!”

The more he spoke, the more Nate Elin bowed her head and sighed deeply.

Balkan watched and thought to himself.

‘First things first, I'm going to collect alimony.’

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A special wing of the temple. A purification chamber filled with holy water.

“From now on, I, Senior Priest Serif Adeline, swear to serve you, Junior Explorer Balkan, faithfully.”

I stared at Serif, barely clad in a bathrobe, speechless.

How did this happen⋯?