**Chapter 9: Hot Night (1)**

I feel dizzy. It feels like floating on a tube in the vast ocean.

"Huh?"

I'm actually on the ocean. The world is blue. Surely I should have gotten an inn room and fallen asleep as soon as I walked in.

The crashing waves and cool breeze wrap around my body.

-Boom!

In an instant, the tube is gone, and I sink to the bottom of the ocean.

I swim and struggle as hard as I can, but it feels like something is pulling my legs from the depths of the ocean.

However the whole process didn't feel painful or sick.

I was just baffled by this unknown phenomenon.

‘What is this, a dream, or am I just too tired?’

When I woke up, I was standing in the dark. At this point, I can only assume it was a real dream.

The world was pitch black, but there was a tiny light in the distance.

It was the size of a mouse hole, but it shone so brightly in the darkness of the world.

The light was so dazzling that I had to squint slightly to see it.

Through my half-open eyes, I could see the figure of a woman bathed in light.

"⋯So-eun?"

Black hair and black eyes. A girl with a sickly, delicate air, but always with a dazzlingly beautiful smile.

My one and only sister, So-eun, was looking at me in the distant light.

"So-eun!"

I ran toward the light, mesmerized.

So much had happened.

I'd fought a bloody battle in a goblin mating lair, killed a human for the first time in my life, been stabbed in the back by a woman, killed her, killed the goblins, killed anything that got in my way, killed, killed.

That moment of blood and gore, of killing or being killed, should have been so hard for me in my modern life but it was strangely exhilarating and exciting.

The more I fought and killed, the more I hated and loathed myself for feeling such emotions that betrayed the morals and ethics I had been taught in the modern world but I can forget all that as long as I step into that light.

In the peaceful modern world, living a safe, bloodless life, with my sister but no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't get any closer to the light.

"So-eun!"

I screamed her name and ran, but as I ran, the light grew farther and farther away.

The light grew smaller and smaller. Still standing in the light, So-eun’s mouth opened with a small smile.

[■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■]

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"Hmph!"

I woke up from my dream.

The first thing I saw upon opening my eyes was the view of the inn room, half obscured by my helmet, and the status window I had seen earlier.

But I couldn't be bothered with all that right now.

"Whoa, whoa⋯"

I threw off my stuffy helmet and caught my breath.

I don't know how many minutes passed before my ragged breathing began to calm.

"Fuck. What the fuck is this?"

But my mind refused to calm down.

Part of me wanted to dismiss it as a dream and forget about it but it wasn't that easy. I usually forget about ordinary dreams as soon as I wake up, but for some reason, this one stuck with me.

I took a moment to recall the details of the dream. So-eun standing in the light and me running towards her.

"I don't know⋯"

I don't know what it meant. I felt a strange feeling in my heart that I couldn't understand.

I cleared my head, trying to get rid of the sticky, unpleasant feelings.

I shouldn't worry about this strange dream, let's focus on the reality of the moment.

[Nam Soo Jin Lv.3]

[Stamina:(4+10) Strength:(4+10) Agility:(2+10) Wisdom:(0) Finesse:(0)]

[Free Points: 3]

I stare at the status window that popped up in front of me.

I wish there was some kind of explanation, like in other media, but there isn't, so I'm left to make my own assumptions.

‘Am I supposed to take this literally?’

Stamina would be literal physical strength, while strength and agility would be being strong and fast. Finesse is like dexterity.

‘Wisdom 0 is kind of weird.’

I feel like I've just gotten a stupid certificate.

[Do you want to allocate your 3 free points to stamina?]

I glance at the free points and the stamina section, and a notification pops up.

‘No.’

I immediately canceled.

‘They're not 'free' points for nothing.’

Having them at my disposal also meant that I could be more flexible and improve stats on a case-by-case basis.

This means that tactics such as using stamina to endure in a situation where stamina is needed and using strength to attack in a situation that requires a powerful one-shot are possible.

"I must spend my free points more carefully."

What's with the pluses next to stats?

I noticed the +10 next to Strength and Dexterity. Why is that there? Is it an extra stat?

As I questioned this, another status window popped up.

[Current Blessings and Curses]

[◆ ???'s Blessings]

- ???

- Stamina +10 Strength +10 Agility +10

[◆ Blessing of Vicious Struggle] NEW!!!

- The harder you fight, the stronger you become.

- 2 Stamina, +2 Strength, +2 Agility when conditions are maxed.

"Hmm⋯"

I clenched my jaw and stared blankly at the status window.

Blessings and curses.

I didn't know the details, but I was vaguely aware. It was one of the things I'd been told by Cachile before we left through the escape portal.

‘A mysterious power that is acquired at a low probability while exploring the Labyrinth.’

Exactly how it works is unknown. I was also told that to confirm the acquisition of a blessing or curse, you need to go to a temple and pay for an appraisal.

But I can clearly see what blessings I have thanks to the status window.

‘Does that mean other people don't have a status window?’

I thought it might be good for my mental health to think so.

So, yeah. I didn't fall off the face of the earth without a cheat after all. I'm glad I have at least one status window perk.

‘But what about the question mark blessing?’

While the second Blessing of Vicious Struggle had a clear name and description, the first one was obscured by a question mark.

‘My basic stats are 10.’

The Blessing of Vicious Struggle grants me an additional 6 stats, but only if I fulfill all the prerequisites.

"But the Question Mark Blessing gives me a total of 30 stats, unconditionally.

I can smell it. I smell a gimmicky blessing.

Why isn’t there something like that in games too?

Like a skill with a bunch of conditions is stronger than a skill with a bunch of descriptions, or a skill that simply says, "Throw a spear really hard.”

I closed the status window, just knowing that the question mark blessing gave me more power and that I had it.

Staring at it doesn't make me see through the question mark.

I did some quick stretches before getting up.

My head felt refreshed after a good night's sleep.

It was evening outside my window, so I realized I had slept all day.

My mind was clear, but my body was stiff as if I hadn't moved in a long time.

Even in modern times, my body was my only resource.

As I warmed up by stretching carefully, focusing on my joints, I smelled a musty odor coming from somewhere.

It was my own body, of course.

I hadn't washed up in the Labyrinth, and I was covered in dirt, sweat, and blood, so I couldn't help but smell unpleasant.

"There is no bathroom in the room."

Maybe I was expecting too much from a medieval environment.

I thought I would have to pay for a bath at a public bathhouse or something but there were towels and a wooden bucket with water in the room.

I compromised and soaked my towel and wiped my dirty body, thinking about what I had to do next.

"Money. I need money."

Investigate the Labyrinth's portals, find a way home, and find my sister who was swallowed by a magic circle. Sounds good. A lofty goal.

So big, in fact, that I have no idea when I'll be able to fulfill them.

Exploring the Labyrinth is never easy. I almost got lost on the first floor a few times.

Exploring the Labyrinth will come later, but first I need to lay the foundation for my life in this world.

Food, clothing and shelter, the three essentials of human life.

If I don't dress properly and wear only than a piece of fur, I'll be raped for being scantily clad.

If I don't eat properly, I won't have the strength to resist being grabbed by the hair and dragged away.

If I have no place to live, I would sleep on the streets and be attacked and raped by beggars in the middle of the night.

To prevent this from happening, I must enter the Labyrinth with the bare minimum of clothing.

Clothes, food, and shelter are all things that can only be done with money.

'Anyway, the portal to the Labyrinth only opens once a week⋯'

For the time being, I'll have to find a part-time job or go to a labor office or something.

I carefully cleaned my dusty fur blanket and wrapped it around my body, then put my pants back on.

I wiped the blood off my helmet and put it back on.

As soon as I opened the door and left the room, I heard a lot of noise. The source was the first floor of the inn.

As I walked down the stairs, I could smell the delicious aroma wafting up.

At each table, I could see people mingling, drinking, and eating.

"Valerus, the Labyrinth City~ What a dog of a city, what a dog of a labyrinth. Alas, bastard city, bastard people!"

"Dude, you look like shit."

"But it's true, let him be more fucked up."

A drunken rabbit man and a human woman, singing a strange song, wrapping their arms around each other's shoulders and doing a strange dance.

“Wow, milk smells fishy, ​​you crazy bastard!”

I was blankly watching the crazy scene where the cow girl suddenly got excited and started spewing milk from its tits, causing the others to run away in horror.

"Oh my. Did you just wake up?"

Diana, busily weaving through the crowd carrying food, spots me and asks how I'm doing.

"Uh, yeah. I was a little tired."

"You've been sleeping for two days and two nights, you must be really tired."

"⋯I slept for two days?"

I realize that I've been very stiff since I woke up, so I must have slept for two days and nights instead of one.

"Yes. Look at the cracks in your voice. Why don't you sit over there for a minute and I'll get you some water."

I nodded at Diana's kindness and sat down at a table in the corner.

There was nothing else to do, so I looked around the inn, where the party was still going on.

"Drink! Drink more! Drink until you die!"

"Grrrrrr!"

A petite dwarf and a human woman engaged in a drinking battle, slamming their mugs down at the same time and passing out.

Ouch. That was delicious. I'm pretty good with alcohol, too. I'm sure a cold beer would make me wish for nothing.

Chin!

"Oooh. Male, are you alone?"

I felt something cold on my back and turned around in surprise, to see a Lizardman⋯ no, Lizardgirl⋯ holding a large mug of beer in each hand.

If it had been a human or human-like figure, I would have been a little wary.

It was rather reassuring to see a reptilian figure with no human features whatsoever, save for her awkwardly dangling green breasts.

"Uh, I'm alone."

"Hmph. Well, that's good, because I'm alone too, and I'm feeling a little sore on the side. How about a drink?"

"You're buying?"

"Not for free."

Lizardgirl's long, slit reptilian eyes scanned every inch of my body.

"You have the body of a very fine warrior, very fit for battle."

I suppose it's a compliment, but I'm not sure how to react.

"Uhhhh...is that so?"

"Yes, of course! Those strong biceps and pectoralis major! You have the best body of any man I've ever seen in my life. You must be a great warrior, so I propose to you as one too!"

Boom!

Two beer mugs shattered loudly on the table, and Lizardgirl plopped down in the chair in front of me.

She put her elbows on the table and her hands on her hips.

Ah, yes. This is a battle every man has fought. The battle of trusting your body, of putting your pride on the line.

"I dare you to arm-wrestle me!"

A moment of silence.

"What?! Is that real!"

"You're crazy! You have no conscience for asking a guy to arm wrestle, but it looks like fun!"

"I can't stand by and watch this kind of entertainment, I bet! I bet Gregor one silver coin!"

"I bet 12 silver coins on Gregor!"

"I'll bet 1 silver coin on the man with the helmet! This is the thrill of betting against the odds!"

"Don't you dare talk about betting against the odds with just one silver coin! Three silver coins in Gregor!"

In an instant, all eyes were on us.

The drinkers quickly started a betting pool on the outcome of the arm-wrestling match between me and the lizard girl, Gregor.

I secretly threw in four silver coins, my entire fortune.

"Gregor, I've got everything on you!"

"You crazy bitch. If you're not careful, you're going to be screwed."

"What's the point? The outcome is obvious. It's a safe bet."

"Win, Gregor! If you go easy on him just because he's a man, you're dead!"

The atmosphere quickly heated up.

The inn's guests became spectators, surrounding the table, and we turned to face each other, listening to their shouts.

"Are you scared? If you're not confident, you can back out."

Gregor, who was snapping her fingers, gave me a provocative look and said, "Oh, I thought I'd just do it in moderation.”

Thud!

I slammed my elbow into the table and grabbed Gregor's hand in an explosive grip.

Gregor's eyes grew serious as she felt the force of my grip.

"I can't lose to you."

I won't.

[Gregor Lv.8]

[Stamina:(4) Strength:(7+2) Agility:(4+1) Wisdom:(0) Finesse:(3+2)]

It's a piece of cake.