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Fantasie Geschichte
von Söldner in
großer Armut

食い詰め傭兵の

幻想譚



The Strange Adventure of a Broke Mercenary

– Kuitsume Youhei no Gensou Kitan –

- Volume 1 -

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[Unlucky Slime]

- STORY -

After the soldiers' mercenary group where he used to work had been utterly destroyed, Loren, who survived the disaster, decided to walk the adventurer's path as a way to make a living. However, for Loren who had no acquaintances and nothing but an empty pocket on him, receiving a single quest seemed like a faraway aim. So, as he was contemplating about what he should do next, another adventurer called out to him.



「でも、どうして助けてもらえたのでしょうか？
他の皆さんは見捨てられましたのに？」

ロンは面倒くさそうに答えを返す。
「俺の気まぐれ。お前の運が良かった。
銅貨を借りたままだったから。
好きな理由を選べよ。きっとどれかが正解だ」

Chapter 1

Stuck After Running Away

There was a small rumor that a village was destroyed.

“That’s not an unusual thing to happen”, thought Loren, as he was drinking at a bar run by the Adventurer’s Guild.

It was unfortunate for the people in the village, but for a pioneered village that was developed to create more farmland, it kind of made sense.

It was a village that was built on land that people dared not to venture into.

To whatever that the land was home to, humans were the invaders.

If the conflict is between human beings, it would be an argument concerning right of residence. But since it is usually in lands untouched by humans, conflict with the previous residents most likely cannot be resolved by talking. If the previous residents are not happy with the new ones, destruction is the only possible destination they will end up at.

Loren then turned his slightly drunk eyes down towards the front desk of the Guild.

There he saw a board that gave adventurers, people who did things that normal people would not do for a living, jobs in the form of quests.

“Man, there are more of them now”

The board was filled up with pieces of papers advertising quests up to the point where you couldn’t see the board itself. Loren heard the adventurers in front of it, trying to decide what quest to go on.

“The village was south of Vesta. Well, it was close to the Forest of Chaos”

“But it wasn’t that deep into it. Does a monster that could destroy a whole village even live there?”

“Maybe it was a herd of them. That would be a catastrophe for farmers”

Although Loren was listening to their chatter, it wasn't the fact that the adventurers were loud and distracting or the reason behind the destruction of the village that was the problem. The problem that he was facing was, “I'm broke.....”

Loren was not originally an adventurer.

He belonged in a mercenary group, and he was a mercenary that would fight in wars for his clients.

He was there for as long as he could remember, and was there ever since, until recently the group was destroyed during a war. As a result, Loren was sitting in the back of the bar, with only a glass of alcohol to company him.

As someone who used to be a mercenary, Loren had experienced numerous victories as well as losses.

For a long time, the group was able to make it through the losses. But in the most recent battle that they participated in, their luck finally ran out. What looked like a won battle suddenly turned south, and Loren saw his group be split apart and many of his comrades being killed, but he managed to survive and escape.

Because of all that happened to him, it was not surprising that his wallet was almost empty.

The words 'mercenary' and 'saving' didn't go along with each other, and that was true for Loren. He did not have any money saved up, or even tried to. He even had to ditch most of his belongings at the battle site.

The only thing Loren had was the leather armor he wore, his great sword, and a few silver coins in his pocket.

That was all of Loren's possessions.

It was better than nothing, but it was clear that if he could not find a job, he would be wandering in the streets soon enough. While fingering the metal tag around his neck, he tried to think of a way to make some money.

The metal thing around his neck was his identification tag, which served as proof that

you were an adventurer.

The material used to make the tag reflected your adventurer rank, and Loren's tag was made of cheap copper.

As your rank goes up, your tag is made from a better, rarer metal, but to Loren that was of little concern.

What filled his head were ways to obtain a certain amount of money through quests that adventurers of his rank could take.

But there was another problem.

“There's no one for me to go on a quest with.....”

His comrades were either killed, or separated.

From the eyes of others, mercenaries were people who made a living from killing people, and were not viewed fondly.

It was natural to only know people from your own mercenary group, and have no friends or acquaintances outside of the group.

Loren was no exception, and being someone who escaped from the battlefield, there was no one he could trust.

That was also the reason that he chose to become an adventurer.

It was not hard to become an adventurer, with no background checks aside from criminal records.

He was easily able to become an adventurer by paying the registration fee.

But it was troublesome that he had no comrades to go on quests with him.

In whatever you do, doing it alone was not a good sign.

Whether the job may be slaying monsters, gathering herbs or stones, or looking for lost objects or persons, doing it alone was too dangerous.

It wasn't that he didn't have the confidence in his skills and abilities to fight and defend himself, but it was because if something happened and he was alone, it is most likely that he will face death.

"I guess I'll clean the ditches."

It was not a job he was looking forward to doing.

To Loren's surprise, there were many quests that seemed far from something that adventurers would do, such as cleaning ditches or going down into the sewers.

But it was less dangerous than other quests, and the rewards were unexpectedly high.

In order to survive and get food on the table, getting covered in mud and sewer waste was not a bad choice.

It wasn't that he wanted to be covered in mud and grime, but as a war veteran, if someone asked him to choose between battle trenches and sewers, he would choose the sewers. He was willing to turn a blind eye on smell and unfavorable working conditions if it meant earning money.

Plus, ditches and sewers were within human living areas which made the job safer than most, even when alone.

After deciding that it wouldn't be too bad, he was starting to get up to go to the board to look for a quest when he suddenly heard a voice, "Hey you. You're looking for a quest, aren't you?"

Loren looked up and saw a young man with blond hair wearing a new set of leather armor and a sword by his side.

The man sat down across from Loren without any permission, leaned over and continued talking.

"From what I can see, you're a swordsman, and alone as well. Seems like you want to accept a quest, but you don't have anyone to go with. If you're up for it, wanna join my party and help us on our quest?"

"If this were back when I was a mercenary, I would definitely refuse," thought Loren as he observed the young man sitting in front of him.

If you accepted every job offer that came to you, you wouldn't be able to live long as a mercenary.

Gathering information and performing background checks on the client, as well as the area of operation was the norm for Loren.

But this was an exception.

To put it simply, it was because he had no money.

In society, people won't take you seriously without any money to back you up.

The young man continued, "My party has enough people to form a party, but we don't have enough people to be in the frontline. From what I can see, you're an experienced swordsman. You should join my party and join us on quests. You won't be disappointed!"

Cleaning the sewers was safer, but if there was another way, he would gladly take it. While the young man continued to convince Loren to join his party, Loren was trying to decide whether the hand that was held out to him would save him or lead him to destruction.

"What kind of quest did you accept?"

Loren asked, thinking that the guy was looking for a frontline because he already had a quest in mind.

He was planning to decline the offer if the guy said he didn't pick a quest yet, but the young man, thinking that he had Loren hooked, told him, "It's a pretty easy quest. I have a thief, magician, and a priest in my party, but there might be a lot of enemies this time. I'm pretty worried about being the only frontline."

"Tell me the details, because I might not be much of use. As you can see, I'm copper rank," said Loren, holding up the tag around his neck.

"I told you, it's an easy quest. We just need to hunt some goblins that appeared in the forest," the young man laughed, while Loren could do nothing but nod awkwardly.

Chapter 2

Accepted the Invite

Loren knew in his head what goblins were.

Goblins were ugly creatures. Their color ranged from green to dark green, and were the size of a child.

They could be found almost anywhere and reproduced quickly.

They were ferocious monsters but had low intelligence, and were not that strong either.

But their high reproduction rates and strength in numbers were not to be underestimated.

There was an undeniable fact that goblins could mate and reproduce with almost any living thing that has reproductive organs, and fully grow during the span of a few days.

Although new adventurers hunt them day by day, they show no sign of going extinct.

“No wonder he says it’s an easy quest,” thought Loren as he gazed at the rest of the swordsman-like young man’s party members.

The young man’s name was Sarfe.

He was quite new to the job of an adventurer himself, and dreamed of being a hero. While Sarfe was going on and on about his dreams, Loren couldn’t understand what made Sarfe be this optimistic, despite being similar ages. As Sarfe went on, Loren decided not to pay much attention to him.

Sitting next to Sarfe was a girl with short brown hair dressed like a thief. She was looking at Sarfe, who was still going on about his dream to become a hero, with sparkling eyes and a small blush.

Loren recalled that her name was Naren.

She was Sarfe's childhood friend and left her village along with Sarfe to become an adventurer. With nimble movements and skillful fingers, she was the party's thief.

Although the class name is thief, they are not criminals.

The class 'thief' as an adventurer is completely different from the criminal 'thief', and as an adventurer, it is legal to introduce yourself as a 'thief'.

Their job is to locate and disable traps as well as pick and open locks. Loren had no idea as to why the class was called 'thief', just like the criminal 'thief'.

"I guess they couldn't think of a good name for the class," thought Loren as moved his gaze to the next person.

Next to the thief was a female magician wearing a blue robe and a staff propped next to her, and was listening to Sarfe with a bored expression.

Although she acted annoyed by Sarfe, Loren could see that she glanced at Sarfe every time brushed her blond hair out of her eyes and let out a small sigh.

It was obvious that she was only acting annoyed and was very intrigued by Sarfe.

Her name was Oxy, and although she didn't know Sarfe as long as Naren, she met them the day Sarfe and Naren became adventurers, and formed a party together.

She was around the same age as the two, but she graduated from a school for magicians, and her staff was proof of that.

Sarfe told Loren that she was able to use 3 spells a day, but Loren had no idea how impressive that was because he didn't know any magicians during his days as a mercenary.

Magicians were usually hired by aristocrats or royalty, and the ones who weren't were usually adventurers. Loren knew of no one who was a magician that was a mercenary.

Since Sarfe told him so proudly, he decided that 3 spells a day must be an extraordinary feat, but wondered if a person who can only use 3 spells a day be useful at all.

Since Loren didn't want the party to hate him, he decided not to say it out loud.

Loren believed that in order to survive as a mercenary, there was a need to read between the lines and not create a bad atmosphere.

Loren then looked at the last person.

Sitting next to Oxy was a girl wearing a white colored priest's robe and her black hair tied up in a ponytail.

Her name was Lapis.

As a priest she served the god of knowledge, and continually glanced at Loren with apologetic eyes and a troubled smile.

She was also invited by Sarfe to join the party, and she knew them longer than Loren but shorter than Oxy.

She became a full-fledged priest not too long ago, but instead of working for the church, she became an adventurer in order to see what the world was like to gain experience.

Priests prayed to their deity to perform divine arts, and Lapis told Loren in an embarrassed manner that her skill in divine arts was not that great, and she can only use divine arts twice a day.

Loren didn't understand why she was acting embarrassed, but assumed it was because she couldn't use divine arts as frequently as other priests.

Same with magicians, from Loren's knowledge, there were almost no priests that worked as mercenaries.

They usually worked in the church, and the few that did come out of the church would not willingly work as a mercenary.

Loren had never seen a divine art, but he had thought a number of times how having a priest that can use divine arts, which can heal injuries and poison, would be beneficial to the group.

By this time, Loren thought that Sarfe would get bored of talking, but seeing that he was still at it, Loren interrupted him by saying, "Can we talk about the quest now?"

Loren sighed inside as he looked at Sarfe, who looked disappointed being stopped from talking, and the two girls gave Loren dirty looks as well.

Although Loren was low on money, he couldn't shake the feeling that he joined a difficult party to work with.

One problem was that Loren just became an adventurer and had no experience at all, but the rest of the party did not have much more than he did.

The other problem was that everyone else in the party except for Sarfe was female.

The party was balanced class-wise, but was unbalanced gender-wise.

In a mercenary group, there are usually no women.

Loren heard from one of his comrades that it was because there were few women who became mercenaries in the first place, and because in groups with women, there was a high chance that problems would occur in the group.

It was a quite rude thing to say about women, but Loren had seen groups split up or straight up fall apart because of women, and thought it wasn't a story without any sort of evidence.

If he put that into consideration, it was a party with high chance of problems occurring within the party.

But Loren convinced himself that he wasn't going to be with them for long, and faced Sarfe again.

"I'm just saying that talking here isn't going to get us any money. Unlike you guys, I don't have much money to work with, so I want to talk about the job. Got a problem?"

"No, you're right. Now that we're introduced, let's get to the details of the job," replied Sarfe. But a sudden complaint from Naren stopped Sarfe.

"Hey Sarfe, are we really taking this guy along? He used to be a mercenary. You really think it's ok to invite a guy who would do anything for money into our party?"

"That's a misunderstanding," thought Loren, but he didn't speak up to deny the previous comment.

It was because there were in fact, mercenaries who did anything for money.

But if one asked if that was most mercenaries, Loren would have say it was incorrect.

Including the group that Loren was in, most mercenary groups chose what job to take and what not to take.

Although it was true that not many mercenary groups did anything for money, it was also true that groups that did do anything for money brought bad reputation on mercenaries.

Bad reputation was one thing that was very likely to become rumors and gossip.

“Naren you agreed to get another person to be the front line with me, remember?” said Sarfe.

“I did, but it can be someone else and not this guy, can’t it?” replied Naren. But then Oxy said, “It can’t be helped. We’re a party with very little experience, and most adventurers wouldn’t want to join us. But since he has battle experience, at least he will be useful to our party.”

“That’s true, but still..... Well, what do you think, Lapis?” said Naren, not ready to give up. Lapis looked at Naren, then at Loren, then cocked her head and told her, “He doesn’t look like a bad person to me.”

“Haaaaa, you’re so naïve. You say that because you don’t know what mercenaries are like,” sighed Naren.

“Well it’s true that I grew up in the church and I don’t know what mercenaries are like, but I’m confident in my ability to judge people,” “I’m not asking you guys to let me join the party,” Interrupted Loren, “I’m just asking you to bear with me just for this quest.”

“I’m fine with letting you in the party if it’s fine with you,” said Sarfe.

But Loren didn’t answer him. He had no intention in staying in a party where he wasn’t going to be liked by the members. He knew that there wasn’t going to be any merit for him to stay in that sort of group.

He had already made up his mind that once he earned enough money, he would leave them and search for a different party to join.

“The quest is from a village and they want us to hunt goblins that appeared in the area. The village takes around 3 days by foot.” continued Sarfe, but Naren said, “It’s the village of Ain, right? If we’re going there why did you pick a quest for hunting goblins and not a different kind of quest?”

As Sarfe was scratching his head with a troubled expression, Oxy said, “You mean exploring the recently discovered ruins? There’s no way the Guild would let us take that sort of quest. It’s obvious that they will ask more experienced adventurers take it.”

“But at this rate, we’ll never be able to take good quests,” complained Naren.

“Come on Naren, we just need to be patient. As soon as we finish some quests like this one, we will have a good reputation, and then the Guild will let us take better quests.” Sarfe told her, and Naren didn’t say anything more.

“What an unorganized party,” thought Loren, but he was glad that they would finally be able to move on.

“So, do you have any idea how many goblins there are, or how large the herd is?” asked Loren.

“I’m not sure. Apparently, some hunters from the village saw them in the forest but ran straight back as soon as they did. But they’re just goblins, there’s nothing to worry about.” replied Sarfe in a carefree manner.

Although Loren was worried about Sarfe’s easy going manner, it was also true that goblins weren’t that hard to deal with, so he decided not to say anything more.

Sarfe continued, “I’d like it if we can depart tomorrow, if there’s no problem with that.”

“Hmmmmm, seems all right.”

“Then it’s okay if we each get ready for the trip and meet up tomorrow morning, in front of the east gate?”

There were no objections to his suggestion.

Loren then brought back his thoughts to his wallet.

It had almost nothing left, but there was enough to buy rations to last for 6 days. It meant he was going to run out of money, but he was certain that they would be able to hunt things on the way for food.

He then thought that maybe it would be fine if he sacrificed a meal or two in order to buy a blanket to use. With these thoughts in mind, the group disbanded to get ready for the trip in the morning.

Chapter 3

Departure and Disbelief

The next morning, Loren showed up at the east gate. He had his supply of food in a small cloth bag, his great sword strapped around his back, and wore his battered leather armor.

It was not much, but it couldn't be helped because he had to leave everything in the battle site and did not have any money to buy proper equipment.

He seemed to be early, since he couldn't see Sarfe or anyone else from the party.

So he decided to have a little chat with the guards until the rest of the party came.

While talking with the guards, Loren finally found out the name of the city he was in, which was Kapha.

Loren knew nothing about this city at all.

He assumed that it was a city within some country, but since mercenaries weren't confined to one specific country, and since he barely escaped from the battlefield, there was no way Loren would've known anything about Kapha.

"It's a good city. It's not as good as the capital but the food is good here and people are nice. Plus it's my hometown as well," said the young guard.

Loren couldn't really understand the meaning or significance of a hometown.

For as long as Loren could remember, he was a mercenary, and kept on moving from battle to battle.

For someone like Loren who was never able to settle in one place, he couldn't help but feel slightly envious of the guard, who looked like he believed from the bottom his heart that Kapha was a good city.

But settling down meant quitting being a mercenary, which meant thinking of a

different way to make a living.

If one's group disbands, it could mean two things. Either join a different group, or quit being a mercenary and look for a different job.

As Loren was thinking that being an adventurer in this city and settling here wouldn't be too bad, Sarfe and his party finally showed up.

Everyone had full bags on their backs and looked better equipped compared to Loren, who had nothing but a small cloth bag.

"Are they your friends?"

The guard's bright and easygoing manner suddenly turned slightly sour.

Loren thought that maybe he had something against adventurers, but quickly dismissed the thought because that meant he wouldn't have been so nice to him.

"Maybe it's because I don't look like an adventurer," thought Loren as he replied, "More like business partners. I'm just joining them for this quest."

"Not trying to sound like a hater but you should leave that party as soon as you can. A guy that invites a bunch of women to his party is never a decent one."

Loren thought maybe he was just jealous, but he wasn't one to point that out.

He let out an awkward laugh and started walking over to Sarfe and the girls, waving at the guard behind him.

"Did you wait long?"

Loren shook his head.

Although they had agreed to meet up in the morning, it wasn't as if they chose a specific time to meet up. He was also able to gain information from the guard while waiting.

No time was wasted, so he didn't think that he needed to complain at all.

"Well we're all here so let's get going. Walking all the way there is going to be a pain

so let's borrow a carriage."

The members of the party agreed with Sarfe, but Loren stopped in his tracks.

Since the village was a 3-day's walk, he thought that they were going to walk there.

However, if they were going to rent a carriage, he was going to have to help pay for it.

After buying rations for the next few days and spending a night at the cheapest inn he could find, he didn't have enough money to rent a carriage.

At this rate he would have to go on foot while everyone else rode the carriage.

As he was debating to either borrow money or run at the same pace as the carriage, he felt some coins slide into his hand.

Surprised, Loren look next to him, a black-haired girl wearing the clothes of a priest was looking up at him, with a finger on her lips.

The others were too busy looking for a carriage and did not notice the actions of Lapis, the priest.

"You're in a tough spot, right?"

Before Loren could say anything, Lapis continued with a smile on her face.

"These are 10 copper coins. It should be enough to take you to the village and back, so please use them."

Loren looked at the coins in his hand, then turned his gaze back to Lapis, giving her a puzzled look. Lapis stuck her tongue out and said to Loren, "I'm lending them to you so please use it."

It was good for Loren that he didn't have to say out loud that he didn't have any money, but lending money was not normal among mercenaries.

Among mercenaries it was unwise to do so because it was a profession where no one knew if he was going to be alive the next day to return the money, which led to many arguments. Loren decided that maybe it was different for adventurers.

“If you owe me one here, you might help me later to return the favor, so it’s sort of an investment as well.”

Loren couldn’t understand lending money for free, but basing an action on calculations and careful thought was something that he did.

He decided to stop giving it much thought and gladly accept her offer. He put the coins in his pocket and slightly bowed his head toward Lapis, expressing his thanks.

Lapis smiled, telling him not to worry about it.



As Lapis walked away from him, he heard the voices of Sarfe and the rest of the party getting close.

“We found a carriage. The ride to the village is going to cost 5 copper coins.”

It was exactly half of what Lapis had lent him.

As Loren reached into his pocket and gave Sarfe the money, he was relieved that he didn't have to make a fool of himself.

“Can't thank you guys enough. Walking just wastes time and stamina.”

The man taking them was a farmer from the village who came to the city to buy supplies.

He came to the town with furs and crops to sell, and bought food and tools and was about to go back. Since he sold most of the things he brought, there was a lot of space left in the carriage. He decided to take the 5 of them to make a bit of extra money.

“You're adventurers that are going to come to the village to exterminate the goblins, right? Then I should take you back to the village as fast I can.”

Loren felt if that was the case, he could have given them a cheaper fee, but since Sarfe and his party was already thanking the man, he held back the urge to try to change the price.

Although using a carriage is faster than walking, horses that pull carriages have more strength than speed, so they are not as fast as war horses.

But it was twice as fast than going on foot, and the farmer said that if they left in the morning, they would spend a night on the road and reach the village around noon the next day.

Staying inside a carriage for a day and a half wasn't an easy thing to do but to Loren, who had similar experiences back when he was a mercenary, it wasn't the worst thing ever.

He thought of striking conversation with Sarfe to try to get some understanding between them, but couldn't find an opening to because of Naron, the thief, and Oxy, the magician.

Lapis was asleep the whole time and the farmer was busy driving the carriage, so in the end Loren put his head between his knees, closed his eyes, and just waited for time to pass.

As the sun was setting and getting close to night time, the carriage stopped.

“Let’s camp here for tonight.”

Travelling the road during the night was usually not an option.

The roads were quite safe because soldiers and adventurers exterminated monsters and thieves (the criminal kind) often, and as long as you stay on the road, you would not run into big problems. But still, there was a chance that you would run into monsters or thieves.

There was higher chance of that kind of accident happening at night, so the only people who would do that are those in a hurry, those who hired strong guards, or fools who do not know of these risks.

The farmer was not any of them, and Loren thought they would be staying in an inn.

If they were not going to stay at an inn, it meant they were going to camp outside. When Loren thought about the situation carefully, he remembered that he didn’t even have enough money to rent a room.

The only money he had were the coins Lapis had lent to him in the morning, and 5 copper coins was barely enough to rent a stable stall, so he wouldn’t have any left to get a ride back to the city.

If that were to happen he would have to borrow more money, so he was kind of relieved they were camping outside.

“Ahhhh, I’m so tired and my butt hurts!”

“Stop complaining. We have to finish setting up camp before it gets dark.”

Naron and Oxy got out of the carriage talking in loud voices, while Sarfe and the farmer watched them with wry smiles on their faces.

They were in the middle of a plain, with no trees or abandoned structures where

monsters or thieves could lurk, but Loren looked around the camp and scowled.

In a situation where they had no idea what could be lurking near them, loud noises would bring attention to them, and with no cover at all, making a fire would mean someone could see them from miles away.

He wished they would move to sunken terrain with more cover, but he had no knowledge of the surrounding terrain and didn't know if there was any place like that nearby.

All he could do was trust Sarfe and the farmer to know more about the surrounding area and do his best to be cautious of any sort of intrusion.

He was already feeling frustrated, but Sarfe's next words gave the killing blow.

"We're gonna have to keep watch tonight."

"You mean... just the two of us?"

Including the farmer, there were six of them. If they took 3 watches in pairs of 2, it would be much easier on everyone. Loren thought that he had a special reasoning for wanting just the 2 of them to keep watch, but Sarfe's reply was surprising... in a completely different way.

"Well, it's tough without any sleep so it's gonna have to be the two of us."

"We're only going to have one person watch at a time?"

To a former mercenary like Loren those words were unbelievable.

Of course, the number of people available was different, so Loren wasn't expecting anything fancy, but in his mercenary group it was normal to act in pairs, whether they were keeping watch or scouting.

The only time they would act solo was when they were alone, or there was an absolute need to split up and act independently.

"You got a problem? The leader is telling you to do it so just shut up and do it!"

He was about to explain to Sarfe the dangers of keeping watch alone, but Naron saw

that he wanted to say something and interrupted him with a loud, rebuking tone.

Oxy didn't say anything, but she must have been thinking the same thing, because she was giving Loren a cold look.

Lapis didn't seem interested at all and looked sleepy even though she slept the whole time on the carriage. She was rubbing her eyes and stifling a yawn. Loren decided that it was no use trying to convince them.

"Alright. You and me. Who's going to take watch first?"

"You can take first watch. I wanna sleep."

He wondered if it was ok for the leader of the party to act like this, but didn't say anything, as it was clear that even if he tried to argue no one was going to be on his side.

"Alright. I'll wake you up halfway during the night."

"Sounds good."

Sarfe waved his hand, signaling that the conversation was over. Loren couldn't help but feel a clear anxiety and let out a deep sigh.

Chapter 4

Recovering from Shock

The premonition that Loren felt earlier soon became a reality.

It wasn't exactly from the watch itself though.

After parking the carriage on the side of the road, tying up the horses, and eating dinner made from provisions, everyone went to their tents to rest except for Loren, who sat next to the fire keeping watch.

After a while, he started hearing voices leaking from one of the tents. He froze and it took him a second to comprehend what he was hearing.

The voices were coming from the tent that Sarfe was supposed to be sleeping in.

Two obscene female voices came out of the tent that was shaking on its own.

Loren wasn't the type of person who enjoyed eavesdropping, but he was easily able to guess what was going on inside that tent.

"C'mon, you're in the middle of a field..."

He didn't have the stomach to go and say something, and all he could do is sit by the fire and tried to let the situation sink in.

At the same time, he realized how awkward it would be to go and ask to change shifts.

He couldn't deny the possibility that they would go on until morning, but another thing on his mind was that there was no water nearby.

No one in their right mind would think about starting something indecent in this sort of place. The thought of them using up their precious water supply to clean up crossed his mind.

It was very likely that inside of Sarfe's tent was going to be smelly and moist.

By morning the smell would mostly be gone, but it was going to remain at the time to change shifts. Loren didn't want to stick his head into that tent.

"Couldn't he have waited for a different time?"

Even worse, he could hear two female voices.

It meant that out of the three of the girls in Sarfe's party, two of them were in that relationship with him.

Although he could make out two voices, he hadn't spent enough time with them to know exactly who they were.

He was sure that the thief girl was one of them, and his drowsiness was kept away by thinking stupid thoughts like who the second girl was.

Loren looked down into the fire, thinking that it wasn't all that bad.

If someone were to ask if he could sleep, he would answer that he probably couldn't.

Back when he was a mercenary, there would always be someone else keeping watch with him.

Right now, there was no one.

Sarfe and the girls didn't count.

He hadn't spent enough time with them, and he was going to leave after finishing their current quest anyway.

His heart was restless at the fact that it was the first time ever that he spent time alone with no friends by his side.

He smiled bitterly as he recalled the night before.

He spent it in a large room of a cheap inn with strangers, but couldn't get any deep, sound sleep. He repeatedly woke up until the sun started to rise.

It led to him to go to the meeting early without being able to get rid of his fatigue.

Loren threw a dry branch in the fire as he thought about his health.

Sleep deprivation and weakening stamina.

Both would eventually slow down his movements and decision making.

It wasn't to a critical point, but it didn't change the fact that Loren's body required rest.

However, he couldn't bring himself to rest.

He had been avoiding the thoughts of what happened to his comrades in the last battle, and a frown appeared on Loren's face as the loneliness of keeping watch alone brought back those memories.

If they were alive, there was a chance to meet them again, but the battle was so gruesome that the possibility was very small.

"Well, I can still hope that someone made it out just like I did..."

"Is there anything wrong?"

Although he uttered those words out loud, he didn't expect anyone to be near to hear them. Surprised, he stood up and reached for his sword.

"I apologize if I startled you, I didn't mean to do that."

The girl in front of him wearing the clothes of a priest, panicking and waving her hands in front of her was Lapis, who should've been sleeping in her tent.

Realizing that it was not an enemy, Loren stopped reaching for his weapon. But he didn't expect one of the party members, who were supposed to be asleep, to speak to him and gave Lapis a quizzical look, wondering why she did.

"Well ummmm... the tent next to me... you know..."

Lapis guessed that Loren was silent because he wanted her to explain why she came out of her tent, and started explaining with an awkward tone.

As soon as Loren heard the first few words, he immediately understood what she was talking about and let down his guard.

In other words, it meant Lapis wasn't taking part of what was happening inside that tent.

Although Sarfe's tent was made with thick cloth that could keep out cold, it wasn't enough to keep noise from seeping out of it.

Had she had slept until morning, she wouldn't have known about this, but to her luck, she woke up in the middle of the night.

Although she was a priest that grew up in a secluded environment, she could easily guess what was going on inside that tent, and falling back to sleep listening to those voices was extremely difficult.

"Um, I can't go back to sleep anymore... and..."

"Yeah, I get what you mean. Unfortunate..."

Loren replied to Lapis with an exhausted tone and in return she gave him an awkward smile, then, for some reason, sat down next to him.

"Is it ok if I stay here with you until I get sleepy again... or... until they settle down?"

As she was already sitting down, Loren just nodded his head, unable to say no.

Since they were in the middle of a field, it wasn't as if there were other places to settle down around them.

It was convenient for him to have someone else with him since it was a way to keep the drowsiness away, and if she were to go someplace else and something happened to her, it would be his responsibility for not keeping a good watch.

"Are they always like that? Being an adventurer isn't the safest thing to do, and I understand that not being sure you're going to survive the next day might take it to that direction, but still..."

"As much as I would like to say they aren't, this happens quite often, actually. Would it be too sarcastic to say that I'm glad that they are healthy?"

Loren wasn't expecting that kind of reply from Lapis.

As a mercenary, Loren never had the chance to have a personal conversation with a priest.

As one who killed and fought battles for a living, a priest who served god was in a completely different world. Loren's image of a priest was an old man with a difficult expression, who you had to pay an enormous amount of money to hire.

The priest girl next to him, who was sighing and spouting vulgar sarcasm, was way different than what Loren expected, and was surprised that priests like her existed.

"Is it too much to ask them to choose the place and time to do those kinds of thing? Well, most gods' teachings say to give birth and multiply, so in that perspective, I guess they aren't doing the wrong thing though."

"Speaking of gods, how much are there? What god are you serving again?"

Digging into personal matters was a hated by mercenaries.

Mercenaries all have a memory or two that they don't want others to know about, which is why Loren was careful not to do so.

But it was still a long way from sunrise, and he got the feeling that Lapis, who seemed to be friendly and talkative, wouldn't mind him asking. Plus, it seemed that Lapis didn't want the conversation to stop either.

"I serve Kuhklu, the god of knowledge. Also, you should count gods by saying 'how many', not 'how much'. I don't mind it, but some priests are picky about it so you should be careful."

"Thanks for the heads up. I've been a mercenary my whole life so I don't know a lot about these kinds of things."

"I forgot about that. Why did you choose to become an adventurer?"

A small frown appeared on Loren's face, but he felt that it would be unfair of him to not answer her question when she had answered his. After a brief silence, Loren finally replied.

"The group I was with doesn't exist anymore."

“Oh... I’m sorry for asking about it.”

“It’s fine. It’s something that happens all the time.”

Although there are quite a few groups that claim they’re invincible, most of them don’t live up to that expectation.

Most mercenary groups have victories and losses, give and receive casualties, and expand or decrease in numbers.

But sometimes an unlucky group would suffer a large casualty that it can’t recover from.

That time it was just that it was Loren’s group that ended up with the short end of the stick.

“I wish I could’ve found a different group to join, but I was pretty much broke arriving in the city, and strength was pretty much the only thing I had to work with to earn money.”

“I see... Loren, was it? You do look pretty strong.”

Lapis’ gaze fell on the great sword next to Loren.

It was an extremely rugged sword that Loren had been using for a very long time.

It didn’t have any sort of decoration or ornament on it and its huge blade was long enough to reach Loren’s chest. The grip was built for holding the sword with two hands and had a cloth wrapped around it, and was very heavy, as its appearance suggested.

It took Loren a few years to be able to wield it to his satisfaction, and with continuous repairing and reforging, he had used it until now.

“Isn’t the blade as thick as my waist?”

Loren wasn’t sure if she was implying that the blade was thick or that her waist was thin, so he raised the sword with his left hand to compare them.

The materials used to make the sword, blade, grip and all, was pure metal.

Lapis' eyes widened, seeing Loren lifting such a heavy object easily with one hand.

"You're able to hold it with one hand... that's incredible."

"It's made to be held with both hands, but I've trained with it enough to be able to use it with either hand."

Loren stood up and thrust the sword into the ground.

"Want to compare?"

"Okay, let's see."

Loren meant it as a joke, but Lapis, who didn't have much else to do, stood up and pressed her back against the blade.

"What do you think? My waist is thinner, right?"

Loren looked at the blade, then at Lapis' waist.

There wasn't any part of her waist that was visible past the blade's width.

It meant that like she said, Lapis' waist was indeed thinner than the blade.

When he turned his gaze slightly lower, he saw that her butt was peeking out of the edge. But he couldn't say that it was fat, because it was natural for girls her age.

"W... What do you think? I... I'm thin, right? Uh, a... am I not?"



Loren's lack of an answer started to cause Lapis to panic.

She must have interpreted Loren's silence as a sign of kindness, and started to feel uneasy.

"Yeah, you're thin. My sword is way thicker."

"Y... yes, of course. There's no way I wouldn't be."

Your butt isn't, though.

Although the thought occurred in his mind, he refrained from saying it out loud. Meanwhile Lapis puffed out her chest and went on with a relieved tone, trying to sound like she wasn't worried at all.

Chapter 5

Recovery to Giving Up

The conversation with Lapis continued until morning.

Although Loren thought of switching watch duty with Sarfe at one point, he despised the idea of putting his head into a tent where business was done. He concluded that it would be better if he just continued watch duty until morning.

The business inside the tent ended quite late into the night, and Loren thought that Lapis would go back to her tent to sleep. He was surprised when she said she would accompany him until morning.

Although Loren wasn't going to complain about having two people keeping watch, he was concerned that the lack of sleep was going to affect Lapis during the day. But after she told him that back in the church there were times where she was not allowed to sleep and that staying up a night was no problem, he gladly accepted her offer.

The two chatted endlessly until morning.

Lapis didn't have much to offer, as she grew up in the church, but she tried her best to keep the conversation going by searching for things to talk about, and Loren appreciated her efforts.

But when the conversation turned to Loren about when he was still a mercenary, there were parts where he was reluctant to talk about.

He wondered why a priest that grew up in a church would want to listen to about his experiences as a mercenary, but he concluded that as a rookie adventurer, she wanted to gain as much knowledge as possible to help herself. As he was trying his best to answer what he could to her questions, morning came.

"Huh? It's morning already. What happened to my turn?"

"Don't worry about it. What's past is past."

Perhaps the sun's rays reached the tent. Sarfe came out and asked Loren in a confused way, but Loren replied, hiding his irritation.

As he saw Naron and Oxy come out in a disordered appearance with no embarrassment at all, a sigh escaped his mouth before any kind of complaint could.

As he watched Sarfe scratching his head with an embarrassed expression, he made a firm decision to leave the party once the job was done and look for a different way to earn money.

“We're leaving as soon as we eat. It's not much longer to the village.”

Loren facepalmed, irritated at the villager who didn't understand why he said that. Sarfe and his party answered in a lighthearted voice, seemingly unaware of the situation. Lapis let out a troubled laugh.

The rest of the trip was a peaceful one, with no encounters with enemies or problems at all.

Apparently, it was true that every now and then soldiers and adventurers cleaned up monsters and thieves near the road.

The village they arrived at was a normal pioneered village.

Protected from outside harm by a simple, but strong fence was a bunch of houses made from logs.

The fields were located outside the fence, but that couldn't be helped.

The village was built to create more farmland, so if they tried to expand the fence every time they made a new field, the task would be endless and would cost them more manpower as well.

It was the minimum amount of defense possible, and couldn't protect the villagers from the dangers from outside.

Living in such as village required understanding that danger was always near, and it was way harder living in it than living inside a city.

Right next to the village was a large forest. Loren looked at it as he got off the carriage,

thinking that it must be the forest where the goblins had appeared. As he started stretching and loosening his body, Sarfe got off the carriage and said, "Alright, let's go."

It was right before noon, so going in the forest wasn't a problem.

But Loren thought that it was normal to first greet the client, the village chief, and go over the details of the job, but when he told that to Sarfe, Naron scowled at him.

"We just have to hunt down the goblins. Why should we go over the details?"

"To ask about the numbers and stuff. And I thought that it was normal to go greet the client..."

"We can just have the guy that took us here to tell the village to tell the chief. How long are you going to make us take on such an easy job?"

Loren believed that no matter how difficult, a job was a job.

That was why Loren thought that they should greet the client, but he let out another sigh knowing that the party wouldn't accept his view.

Even in mercenary groups, the leader greeting the client was common sense, but apparently that didn't apply to the line of workers called adventurers.

"I'll tell the chief, so you guys can go ahead and finish it as soon as possible."

Hearing the villager say that, Naron glared at Loren.

Loren gave up trying to convince them and Naron, seeing that Loren wasn't saying anything, snorted with a proud look on her face. Sarfe put his hand on her head and said to everyone in the party, "Let's go finish this quickly so the village could be safe and sound."

"Yeah. We don't need this sensitive mercenary to get this job done."

"Naron, he's going to be our shield during battle. There's no way we're not taking him."

Loren fingered the grip of his sword, not amused at the fact that they thought of him as a meat shield.

He didn't have any objections being the front line, but there was no way he would feel good about being treated like an object.

"Um... I'll make sure to heal you when you get hurt."

Loren wasn't sure if she was trying to make him feel better, but as soon as she said that, Naron's bad tempered voice rang out.

"Healing him is a waste. Just save it for when Sarfe gets hurt."

"Uh... huh."

Naron's strong words overwhelmed Lapis', but Loren looked toward her and shook his head, telling her not to worry about it.

Now that he thought about it, the only thing he had in his bag were the provisions that he bought. He didn't have enough money to buy other essentials such as medication, and if he were to be gravely injured, he wouldn't be able to do anything about it.

His mood didn't get any better as he decided that when it came to the worst, he would just have to tear his clothes to use as bandages.

Meanwhile, Sarfe and the others said goodbye to the villager and started into the forest.

Loren knew that if he was late they would be mad at him again so he swiftly followed after them, not wanting anything else that would make his mood even worse.

"Okay for now, I'll stay in front and Naron will back me up. Oxy and Lapis stay behind us, and Loren take the rear."

Loren nodded in silence.

It was a solid and reasonable formation, but uninteresting at the same time.

It meant that Sarfe at least knew the basics of moving together as a party.

While keeping watch at the rear, Loren couldn't help but think that because they didn't gather any information on the goblins from the village, it had them wandering around the forest aimlessly, making the search take longer.

It was like trying to fish in a pond not knowing if there were fish in it or not.

In this case, Loren and the party was the bait.

Asking about specific points where fish can be caught meant a high probability of getting a catch, but putting bait on a hook and hurling it in randomly was relying completely on chance, and also very inconsistent.

“Hey look, Sarfe. Raspberries.”

“Raspberries, huh. I haven’t eaten for a while now. Let’s take some with us.”

“Um, everyone? Shouldn’t we focus on finding the goblins first...”

After a while, Loren couldn’t help but want to leave.

Without any information, they indeed had been wandering in the forest, with no hope of completing the quest. On top of that, Sarfe and the two girls showed interest in raspberries, of all things, and proceeded to pick them.

Lapis, as flustered as she was, tried to stop them, but none of them seemed to listen to what she was saying.

At this point Loren didn’t even feel like trying to say anything, and even started faintly hoping that all the noise the three of them made would attract the goblins to their spot.

“Do you think this is fine?”

After a while, Lapis gave up trying to talk to them and asked Loren with a defeated look on her face. But Loren couldn’t find any words to give her an answer.

It would be a big problem if mercenaries were to set aside the quest and start acting of their own accord, but since Loren didn’t know if it was the same for adventurers. He wasn’t sure if he could condemn them about anything, but he was sure that it was useless to even try to talk sense into them.

“They can do what they want to. I don’t even care anymore.”

Loren didn’t even try to hide his rough tone.

“Ah, you gave up, right?”

“Are you saying that you haven’t given up yet?”

“I’m very close to, though.”

Seeing Lapis’ shoulders drop as she replied, Loren felt slightly relieved.

Loren thought that he must be extremely tired to be relieved by something on this level. He wanted to get the job done as soon as possible and head back, but to do that he needed Sarfe and the girls’ help. Even if he were to give up and leave, he didn’t have a way to pay for a ride back to the city or to pay Lapis back.

Loren had no choice but to watch Naron pick raspberries with Sarfe following her here and there, and Oxy look for herbs.

“How are you so calm about this?”

He asked Lapis, who was with him watching the other three, out of boredom. He was slightly surprised when Lapis answered with a glare.

“It doesn’t feel too good being addressed like that.”

Loren instantly understood that she was irritated with how he was calling her. He stopped for a moment and thought about ways to call her without offending her any further.

“Lapis-san?” *

“Just Lapis is fine. Why did you say it like a question?”

“I never had the opportunity to call someone of the opposite gender by her name.”

The only women that Loren had spoken to were servers at the bar.

Gathering food and supplies were usually done by others, so he had never spoken with people from other stores, either.

Since they went from battle to battle, he didn’t get close enough to any of them to call them by their names.

“Well you can call me Loren as well.”

“No, please let me call you Loren-san!” **

Loren frowned, thinking Lapis didn't want to be that friendly. Lapis saw this and became flustered, and tried to explain what she meant.

“It's well, um. It's just that because of how I usually talk, it makes me say names like that. It's not that I don't want to get too familiar with each other, and well...”

“You can call me however you want to.”

Loren felt a slight relief again, seeing Lapis waving her hands and trying her best to explain what she meant. He then looked over to the rest of the party, who paid no attention to him and Lapis at all, and started praying for goblins to attack them.

Chapter 6

Chase after Assault

In a slightly listless atmosphere, Loren's eyes suddenly turned sharp.

Lapis, slightly surprised, watched Loren as he started to reach for the great sword strapped to his back.

"Wait! I just heard something!"

Naron's warning rang out a moment after Loren's sudden action, and everyone tensed up.

Loren scanned the area, concluding that the others noticed the danger too late.

They were within the forest, but he decided that it wasn't a problem because they were in a small clearing, with space to move around and see their surroundings.

As soon as he used his left hand to pull the string strapping the cloth wrapping his sword, it fell off, revealing the blade.

He pulled out the sword in front of him with his right hand and put his left hand on the handle, right above his other hand, and switched his thought process for battle.

Even for mercenaries, who were in battle very often, straining their senses for battle all the time would chip away at their minds.

Loren had seen too many who broke their minds and hearts doing so, thus he made sure to switch back when he wasn't in battle.

He didn't have time to enjoy the energy flowing through his body before he spotted a few shadows moving behind the trees.

The shadows looked small and humanoid.

Based on how deep into the forest they were currently in, and the speed of the moving

shadows, he was sure that they were not children lost in the forest.

“What is it? Monsters?”

Sarfe asked Naron, but his hand wasn't even on the grip of his sword.

Naron, although she pricked up her ears, hadn't even grasped the direction of where the monsters were coming from.

She kept looking around, pricking her ears and squinting, but she hadn't noticed that Loren already found the enemy and was tracking them.

Loren, wondering if this party was going to be okay, was trying to decide if he should point out the enemy's location, but wasn't sure if he should take Naron's job. Before he could decide, the enemy made the first move.

A few arrows flew at them, threading the space between the trees.

They didn't have much speed to them, and some of them flew off into a completely different direction. But still a good amount of them were headed toward where Loren was.

“Ugh!?”

Most of them missed their target and fell around them, but one of them grazed Oxy's shoulder, spraying a bit of blood.

Sarfe and Naron shifted their gazes to Oxy at the sound of her pained voice.

“What are they doing!?”

Loren cursed. The two should know how much of an advantage they could give an enemy if they looked away during battle.

Not even facing the way the attack came from, but instead facing a cry from a comrade, was equivalent to begging the enemy to make the next move.

Loren's eyes turned to the monsters that started to run out from between the trees.

They were green and ugly, with shields made of wooden planks and short, rusty

swords.

Loren swung his sword at the goblins.

The sword and the wooden shield clashed.

Loren's sword didn't cut through it, as his sword wasn't made to cut.

But instead, with its weight and sheer force, it smashed through the shields and crushed the goblin's arm, then ripped its body into two bloody pieces of meat.

Before the pieces could even hit the ground, Loren swung the sword again and hit the second goblin right on the head.

A dull sound erupted, and another goblin lost its life, spraying around things that couldn't be made out if it was bone or flesh.

"Crap! These goblins!"

Sarfe finally realized who the attackers were and pulled out his sword, while Naron pulled out her knife to protect Oxy, who had her hand on her wound.

"Defensive arts!?"

"Don't need them!"

Loren answered Lapis wildly and kept swinging his sword.

The third goblin instantly got crushed between the blade and a tree.

Loren reflected the second wave of arrows with the flat of the blade, then tracked the direction where they were coming from.

He was able to find the goblins with bows, but was irritated at where they were standing.

There were trees blocking the way so it was difficult for him to rush at them, and there wasn't enough space between the trees for him to freely swing his sword.

He wished he had a knife or a shorter sword. He then glanced at the ground and saw

a small sword that belonged to one of the dead goblins. He picked it up and threw it at the archer goblins.

The feeble sword flew across the clearing and hit one of them, but only succeeded in giving a shallow cut.

Loren picked up another one and prepared to throw it but the goblins let out a cry, surprised that

Loren had a way to attack from a distance, and started to run away.

“We’re not letting them get away! Let’s go!”

Watching Sarfe giving out orders, Loren thought

“You didn’t even do anything...”

Naron and Oxy followed his orders but Loren gave his sword a swing, shaking off the blood stained on it, and stopped them.

“I don’t think chasing is a good idea.”

“What do you mean? Our job is the hunt the goblins. We finally found them, so we should chase them and make sure we destroy their nest.”

“Yeah! A lowly mercenary like you shouldn’t butt into the leader’s decision. So just shut up and follow him!”

Loren stopped and didn’t even try to talk back to Naron.

No matter how low intelligence the low rank monster called a goblin had, they weren’t stupid enough to leave their nest completely vulnerable.

Their quest didn’t say that they had to exterminate the nest.

All they needed to do was walk around and hunt down a certain number of goblins and receive their reward, so Loren wanted to avoid danger such as going into the nest, but it seemed that the rest of the party wasn’t going to listen to him.

While he was comforting himself thinking that it wasn’t the first time he was working

under a useless leader, Lapis came up to him and started walking next to him.

“Your friends are way up ahead.”

Loren told Lapis without thinking, revealing his irritation, but Lapis smiled, not affected by it at all.

“Yes, you’re right. But I decided that this is the best place to be.”

He remembered that if he excluded himself, Lapis was the newest member of the party.

“It’s not that I have an ulterior motive or anything. Since priests and magicians usually fight with warriors to protect them, and since Sarfe and Oxy are together, I thought that it would be natural for me to be with you, Loren.”

“Is that how I should take it?”

“Yes, please take it like that.”

Seeing her replying with a smile, Loren didn’t feel like pushing the conversation any further.

There was no point in doing so either because what Lapis said was indeed true, and the only thing he could do is try to guess what she was trying to imply.

“Well, it seems she has a good personality of her own.”

Thought Loren as he accompanied Lapis to where Sarfe was headed.

Tracking the goblins wasn’t difficult.

They weren’t smart enough to cover their tracks, so it was easy for a thief like Naron to track them.

But the tracks were visible even to Loren, so if she couldn’t find them, she probably should become something other than a thief.

In fact, blood spilled from the goblin that Loren had injured gave a such a clear sign, even an amateur could find them.

“Just asking.”

Loren turned to Lapis, who was walking next to him.

As one who had experienced many battles, it was easy for Loren to distance himself from people and talk in a voice where it would only reach the ears of whoever he was talking to.

“How strong are they? Especially our leader’s skill on the sword.”

Judging from Sarfe’s reaction to the goblin attack, he would be labeled as a failure in Loren’s mercenary group. He would either be sent to be retrained or to the very frontlines of battle for no reason.

Loren didn’t want to put someone like him as a leader for sure.

Lapis replied without hesitation.

“Loren, you used to be a mercenary, right? Okay, let’s see... Have you heard rumors of the mercenary called the <<Blade Demon>> ?”

“I’ve heard that name before.”

It was a name that was known among mercenaries.

He was famous not only among mercenaries, but was well known swordsman in general. The <<Blade Demon>> was a legendary mercenary known to bring victory to his allies but death and destruction to his enemies. He was a being that no one wanted to meet in battle, both as an ally or an enemy.

It was because if he was an enemy it would mean death, and if he was an ally there was a risk he would take all the credit.

Mercenaries got more offers the more they took part in battle. The existence called the <<Blade Demon>> was distanced from others for that reason.

Although there were mercenaries with titles here and there, the was considered the one of the strongest. It was believed among mercenaries that the only ones who could stand up to him was the <<Swords of Flame>> , who used both sword and magic, or another swordsman called the <<Slaying Wind>>.

“Don’t tell me that he’s as strong as him?”

“Even if ten million Sarfe’s got together, they wouldn’t be able to beat him.”

It was a confusing way to compare, but Loren understood that she meant Sarfe wasn’t strong at all.

No matter how strong the <<Blade Demon>> is, he would run out of steam going against ten million enemies. But if that many number of people couldn’t beat him, it meant that Sarfe was very weak.

“You guys must be insane, trusting your lives to that kind of guy.”

“Loren, we’re in the same shoes right now, you know?”

“Oh yeah, you’re right. I have no money. I can’t say that you’re insane.”

If Loren didn’t have the problem of being broke, he probably wouldn’t have chosen to become an adventurer.

“Being broke sucks. It’s like I don’t have a say in the decisions I make.”

“Well, how should I put it. My condolences?”

Loren wondered why she said it like a question, then suddenly stopped in his tracks.

Lapis stumbled, not expecting Loren to stop walking. She then saw Sarfe with his hand up as if he was signaling them to stop.

“Look, a cave. That must be their nest.”

Sarfe must have meant to talk softly, but Loren facepalmed at how loud his voice still was.

“The trail of blood goes into it, and Naron is sure of it as well.”

“Are we going in? I’d rather not.”

The cave was barely wide enough to fit two people side by side, and there wasn’t enough space for Loren to pull out his weapon and fight.

But Naron appeared from a nearby brush and started to make fun of him for saying so.

“Then just go back. But you’re not getting any of the rewards.”

“They’re just goblins, so we should be fine. If you’re worried about weapons, try this.”

Sarfe then handed him a small sword that belonged to one of the goblins he had slain.

“I brought this because I thought maybe we could find a use for it.”

“Well, you’re not completely thoughtless.”

Thought Loren. He was actually a bit impressed at Sarfe, but not at the sword. It was made poorly and it was so blunt it couldn’t even cut anything.

But it was better than nothing, so Loren strapped his great sword onto his back and took the sword.

“Oxy, use a spell to give us some light and Naron, watch our surroundings. Looks like there’s no problems. Let’s go.”

Loren sighed again, wondering how many times he had sighed already and didn’t even want to count, at the fact that they didn’t even have a torch or lantern with them.

Of course, Loren didn’t have them either, but that was only because he didn’t have the money to purchase them.

“They don’t have anyone keeping watch or hiding, and no traps either.”

“Okay, let’s go. There might be villagers in there. We should hurry and save them.”

Oxy raised the staff she was holding.

“Behold, light. <<Lighting>>.”

A magic light appeared at the tip of the staff.

Loren didn’t understand why they would use the spell already when they didn’t even step into the cave yet, but had completely given up on them a while ago so he didn’t

even try to point it out.

“Let’s go.”

As soon as Oxy gave a nod, Sarfe started walking toward the entrance of the cave, with no way of knowing everything going on in Loren’s mind.

Chapter 7

Pursuit to Engage

It was most likely a trap.

That was the thought that kept going through his head.

Although goblins had low intelligence, it was hard to believe they were stupid enough to not post anyone to keep watch at the entrance.

Even mindless beasts, if they lived in packs, would make sure that some of them were guarding the entrance to their nests.

But there were no signs of any goblins keeping watch.

“Lucky that there isn’t anyone on watch. They must have been so scared they forgot to.”

Loren started shutting out Sarfe.

If he didn’t, he knew his mind wouldn’t last until the quest was over.

But still, their conversation managed to reach his ears as static.

“The trail of blood is still here so they must have gone this way.”

“In the end they’re just goblins. They were so hurt they didn’t even think about setting watch.”

“What’s your take on this Loren?”

Lapis asked Loren and looked up at him, quite interested in Loren’s opinion. He was about to keep silent but then reconsidered, thinking that maybe talking to her will keep his mind off Sarfe and the others.

“It’s a trap for sure. No guards mean they’re ready to ambush us.”

“Goblins have that kind of knowledge?”

“Not sure. I don’t know much about goblins. But I do know that even monkeys set up watches. I don’t think goblins would do less than monkeys.”

“The difference in intelligence between goblins and monkeys. That’s kind of interesting.”

Lapis put her hand on her chin started speculating with a serious look on her face. Loren looked at her and felt a different kind of disbelief than with Sarfe and the others.

Since she was a follower of the god of knowledge, Loren thought that her way of thinking couldn’t be helped, but still, there was a time and place for that, and right now was definitely not the time and place.

“Are you saying that you think goblins are more intelligent than monkeys?”

“Well, of course they are.”

Although he thought of it as a problem, he diligently answered her because it helped keep his mind off his problems.

“Of course, huh. I don’t think so. Monkeys live in societies, they use tools, and they learn. How different can they be from humans?”

Loren couldn’t find anything to say and continued to chase after Sarfe and the others.

He didn’t have a logical answer like she had just now.

He thought that goblins were smarter than monkeys because he felt that they were. He had no clear evidence.

But if he said that out loud, it would sound like he was saying that there isn’t much of a difference between humans, monkeys, and goblins.

“I guess it just means we shouldn’t underestimate them?”

Not being able to come up with a good argument, he concluded that Lapis may be right, and muttered under his breath.

Lapis heard him and nodded, looking straight at his face.

Meanwhile, Sarfe and the others were pulling further and further ahead.

Since the only source of light was Oxy's magic, Loren made sure not to lose sight of them.

He couldn't help but worry that they were being too careless going this fast.

Loren was about to make a point when Sarfe suddenly stopped.

The path was slightly curved, and Loren couldn't see what the three in front were seeing.

As Loren started to suspect that something happened, Sarfe spoke up.

"There's a chamber up ahead, and there's light pouring out of it."

If that were true, it meant whatever is inside there could see Oxy's light as well, and there was no point in stopping here. However, Loren decided not to interrupt Sarfe.

"An ambush?"

"Kind of sucks that they have bows."

Naron and Oxy started a carefree conversation.

Sarfe, who finally made up his mind, faced them and told them his decision.

"I'll charge in first and block the arrows. You guys follow me up."

"You've got guts to run face first into an ambush with arrows ready for you."

Thought Loren, looking at Sarfe with pure amazement.

Even though the enemy were goblins, Loren thought that running into archers in this narrow cave with no space to dodge the arrows was suicide.

"Do you need the magic <<Protection>> ?"

Sarfe nodded when Oxy asked him, and she closed her eyes and proceeded to cast the spell.

Loren found nothing to say, seeing that she was using one of her three spell usages on such a thoughtless charge. He felt Lapis tug at his sleeve.

“You seem dissatisfied.”

Not wanting to show his true thoughts, he averted his eyes and answered her, who asked him in a teasing manner.

“Hmm, not sure.”

“If you were in charge, how would you handle this situation?”

Loren wasn't sure why she wanted to know, but answered her, thinking of it as a change of pace.

“I'd pile raw wood in front of the cave and set in on fire.”

Loren believed that it was the simplest yet most certain mean of attacking enemies within a sealed space such as a cave.

He wasn't sure how large the cave system was, but the smoke and heat would eventually fill up inside. After that, most creatures inside would be dead soon enough.

“We'd need oil for that.”

It's not easy to burn raw wood.

To do what Loren was thinking of, they would either need lots of oil or dry wood.

“I don't have a flint or any oil so I would give up and leave.”

Loren answered Lapis, realizing how sad it was to not have any money to buy supplies.

“I see.”

Lapis looked convinced and didn't say anything more. Instead, Sarfe called him.

“I’m going to have you come with me.”

“Do I not get any protective spells?”

“You have a big sword, so just use that as a shield.”

Oxy said loudly with a frown on her face and Naron nodded her head, agreeing with what she said.

“Sorry, but we can’t spare another spell for defense. Instead I’ll make sure to cover you.”

“Alright then. Unfortunate for me, though.”

What Loren had in his hand right now was the small sword one of the goblins used.

Trying to deflect arrows with it was going to be very unreliable, and using his great sword as a shield would hinder his movements because of its massive size and weight.

The thought that this wasn’t the first time a helpless leader had given bad orders gave him a little bit of comfort. Loren gripped the sword tightly, and Sarfe took it that he was ready and shouted.

“Alright, let’s go!”

Loren followed him, not amused by the fact that the enemy must have heard him from a mile away.

It was pretty much telling the goblins that they were going towards them. Soon enough, arrows started raining down on them.

Sarfe, who was in front, tried to parry them but failed.

But the protection magic reduced the speed of the arrows, and none of them were able to pierce

Sarfe’s leather armor and dropped onto the floor.

Loren was quite impressed by the magic and how useful it was while striking down an arrow that got past Sarfe.

“Damn, this is so dull.”

The sword broke the arrow rather than cut through it, and the pieces dropped on the ground.

He didn't have time to be complaining about the sharpness and was about to jump into the clearing where the goblins were waiting.

Loren suddenly stopped in his tracks, while Sarfe suddenly fell down and rolled right into the awaiting goblins.

“Sarfe!”

Naron, who was right behind Sarfe, rushed into the area followed by Oxy and Lapis.

“Hey, wait!”

As the three of them rushed past him, he was barely able to get a hold of Lapis' collar and stopped her.

Lapis let out a slight moan, but seeing Oxy sprawl onto the ground as well, she realized why Loren stopped her.



“A trap!?”

“There’s a smart one in there somewhere!”

There was a small dent in the floor that could barely fit a foot, well camouflaged in the rough ground.

It was a simple trap, done by digging a small hole in the ground, but unfortunately Sarfe and Oxy didn’t notice it and got caught on it.

“Sarfe! Get up!”

There was no way the goblins would ignore such a defenseless opponent.

Another barrage of arrows rained down.

Although Naron deflected some of them, the rest got through and lodged into Sarfe’s right shoulder and left thigh, as well as in Naron’s right flank.

“Damn it! How dare you!”

Oxy cursed and got ready to use a spell. Loren ignored her and scanned his eyes through the goblin ranks.

Around ten archers.

Many with small swords and clubs.

In the deepest part he saw one that was a whole size larger, holding a staff made from animal bones, and wearing a golden necklace with a strange light emitting from it.

“Is that the head?”

Based on the way it was dressed and its size, Loren guessed that it was.

Still held by her collar, Lapis muttered

“Is that... a goblin mage?”

“A high rank monster. This is bad.”

For goblins that had a high reproduction rate and expanded quickly, it was possible for a special one to be born.

Or it could've been born as a regular goblin, but through experience, change into something different.

Those individuals were called high rank monsters and were known to be a few times more dangerous than normal goblins. Packs led by the high rank often became more dangerous as well.

Goblin mages were rare even among the high ranks, as it meant that a goblin somehow gained magical knowledge, making it one of the most dangerous among them.

Going against them without any preparation meant only disasters were waiting.

Loren decided that they should retreat, but Sarfe and Naron, who were closest to the goblins, were under attack by arrows, and Oxy was already chanting a spell.

“Damn it...”

Although he knew that giving a warning and helping the others was what he should do, he concluded that it was impossible to save all of them. He looked back at the path that they came from, but what he saw left him speechless.

“We got flanked!?”

He thought that it was a straight path to this area, but maybe because of the dim light or maybe because Loren didn't pay close enough attention, the path they came from was filled with goblins with a few larger ones behind it, all of them rushing towards the area where Loren and the others were in.

Chapter 8

Collapsing to Running Away

“Guess I’m not getting out of this easily!”

There was nowhere to run, being pincerred in by the two groups.

As Loren decided that the only way out was to cut through them, he heard Oxy finish chanting her spell.

“Scatter the sands, bring upon slumber! <<Sleep>>”

Based on Oxy’s movements and line of sight, Loren saw that she was using on the goblins in front and was irritated at her decision.

He knew that she was trying to help Sarfe and Naron, but if they were to successfully retreat, it was better to use it on the goblins behind them.

But Oxy was too focused on them and didn’t seem like she noticed the goblins behind them.

Loren changed his mind and thought that they still had a chance if they could at least get through the goblins in front, and waited for Oxy’s spell to take effect. But he narrowed his eyes, seeing a strange light coming from the goblin mage’s necklace.

At the same time for an unknown reason, Lapis, who Loren was still holding her by the collar, became limp.

As her knees buckled, Loren immediately let go of her and before her knees could hit the floor, he managed to catch her and lend her his shoulder.

“Hey! What’s wrong?”

“This is...”

He didn’t have time to check what was wrong with Lapis, who looked dumbfounded,

because he heard Oxy's panicked voice.

"What? How!?"

Loren soon found out why.

Although the spell had been used, there was no sign of any of the goblins going to sleep. The goblins then rushed at Sarfe and Naron at once.

"You bastards! Get away from me!"

"S... stop! Let go of me!"

There was no way Sarfe could get up and fight with an injured shoulder and leg.

Naron, who injured her flank, was unable to go against them either and they pushed her to the ground.

"Hey! Get away from her!"

The goblins showed no mercy, bringing their weapons down on Sarfe.

As dull swords chipped away at his flesh and the clubs struck bone after bone, Sarfe screamed in pain.

Naron shrieked as the goblins started to rip her clothes off.

Oxy became pale at the sight and before she could do anything, the goblins tackled her from behind and covered her, not even letting her scream.

Loren knew that he couldn't save them.

He then started to take steps forward.

For a second, the thought of leaving Lapis here crossed his mind.

Lapis couldn't move her limbs, much less grab onto Loren's shoulder, and was getting carried by Loren. To him, she was dead weight.

If he left her, he would be able to move around quicker and the goblins would be

focused on new prey, letting him run away with little to no problems.

The only problem was dealing with the guilt later, but considering the pros, he thought it wasn't a bad choice.

Lapis looked up at Loren, who was still trying to decide, and gave out a small sigh.

"It can't be helped, just leave me."

It was a completely different tone than until now.

Loren was more surprised that she told him to leave her here than the change in the way she talked.

"I'm in the way, correct? They won't kill a woman that easily, but they will kill you for sure. Don't mind me and just go."

He sensed a feeling of defeat in her voice.

But what struck his heart was that she was saying all this just for him.

So what Loren did was silently grip the sword in his left hand tighter and put Lapis under his right arm.

"Hey?"

"Shut up, you might bite your tongue."

After getting a better grip on her, he gritted his teeth and took a step forward, then suddenly started dashing toward the exit.

All the screaming from behind him and weird moaning sounds coming from Lapis didn't reach his ears anymore.

He swung his left arm in a wide arc right at the base of a goblin's neck.

The goblin's body tore into two pieces and Loren kicked them away, then bashed the forehead of another goblin who jumped at him.

The blade lodged into its head and broke off.

Loren, as soon as he felt it break, hurled the rest of the sword at another goblin, then picked up a club and continued to speed up.

He rushed past Sarfe, who was getting hacked to pieces in a pool of blood, and Naron, who was stripped naked and held down on the ground, and went straight toward the archers.

A few arrows were fired at close range.

No matter how bad they were at using bows, Loren was close enough that it was almost impossible to miss.

But to the goblins' surprise, not even one of them managed to hit Loren, and before they could even act confused, they got a knee to the face and flew away.

Right before the arrows were launched, Loren immediately jumped to the side and as soon as the arrows flew past, he jumped and kicked off the wall, propelling himself towards the goblins and landed the attack.

He didn't even bother looking at his work as continued running, at a speed that seemed impossible to reach while holding a person.

He dashed toward the goblin mage, who was standing behind more archers.

But the goblin mage wasn't ready to back down without a fight.

It started muttering something and raised a finger and pointed it at Loren. A ball of fire appeared at the tip and started moving in Loren's direction.

It was the beginner level magic spell , and it flew at him faster than the arrows.

Loren couldn't dodge in time and it struck him on the left shoulder.



Loren grimaced at the impact and the pain of fire burning his flesh, but it wasn't enough to slow him at all.

The goblin mage, shocked that the spell didn't stop Loren, was readying another spell.

"Too slow!"

Of course, Loren wasn't about to give it time to use another spell.

Cutting off the pain in his left arm from his consciousness, he rammed into the goblin mage.

He took a wide swing at it and the hit immediately crushed its head open.

At the same time, he threw away the now broken club, and before the goblin mage could fall onto the ground, reached out and snatched the necklace that emitted the strange light when Oxy used her spell.

"I wish you would just leave that."

Lapis muttered in a small voice, looking at the necklace with the corner of her eye, but Loren ignored her and jumped into the tunnel in front of them.

It was the other way they came from, but they didn't have a choice.

There was a chance that the tunnel led to a smaller space, but there were side tunnels and Loren prayed that they could use them to dodge the goblins and escape.

"How are you running so well without any light?"

Lapis asked him, sounding impressed.

Her tone was a lot more relaxed, but lacked the politeness that Lapis' usual way of talking had and Loren wondered if she was putting on airs until now, but he didn't answer her and continued to run.

"Don't tell me you can see in the dark?"

"Shut up, you're loud. I can't focus."

There was no way Loren could see where he was going in the dark tunnel.

But back when he was a mercenary, he learned how to figure out his surroundings by using the reflections of sounds that he made.

It was a technique mostly used during times where they couldn't use a light, such as during an ambush, and although it helped, it wasn't the most accurate. If he lost focus there was a chance of tripping over uneven ground or crashing into a wall, so he didn't have any time to spare talking to Lapis.

"Getting carried around like a sack gets pretty boring."

"I don't have time for that. It's a matter of life and death so please be quiet."

"That's true, but how about this."

As soon as Lapis said that a soft white light shined, illuminating their surroundings.

Loren squinted and realized that the light was coming from his chest and guessed that Lapis had something to do with it. He slowed down slightly and looked down at the girl.

"Can you see now? I won't ask you to carry me like a princess, but can you at least carry me on your back?"

Lapis asked him with her limbs still dangling.

He could've ignored her, but he felt an eerie tone from her voice and gently let her down from under her arm and proceeded to put her on his back.

"Ah, that's better. Now that that's out of the way, Loren, thank you for saving me back there."

As soon as she got on his back, she started talking politely again.

Loren wondered what the change in her way of talking meant as he continued deeper into the tunnel, now illuminated by the light.

"But why did you decide to save me? You left everyone else to die back there."

Loren didn't flinch at the fact that she said he left Sarfe and the rest to die.

He knew that she was simply just asking him what she was thinking, so he answered her in a daunting manner.

"I just felt like it. You were lucky. I still owe you money. Just choose one. I'm sure one of them is the answer."

「でも、どうして助けてもらえたのでしょうか？
他の皆さんは見捨てられましたのに？」

ロンは面倒くさそうに答えを返す。
「俺の気まぐれ。お前の運が良かった。
銅貨を借りたままだったから。
好きな理由を選べよ。きっとどれかが正解だ」

“Is it okay if I take it that Loren is a kind person?”

“If that were true I wouldn’t have left the others.”

He told Lapis with a wry smile and a teasing tone, but she didn’t seem to be offended at all and quietly leaned onto his back.

“But you still saved me so I’ll think of it as that.”

“Think of it as you want to then.”

It didn’t matter to Loren about how Lapis thought about him.

When Loren told her to do as she liked, she told him she would with a smile on her face.

Chapter 9

Escape to Confession

“Oh yeah, about what happened earlier.”

Loren was jogging through the tunnel with Lapis on his back.

The sword pressed onto Lapis’ body must have been uncomfortable, as she squirmed around on Loren’s back. But she still couldn’t move her limbs to help herself.

“Earlier?”

She neared her face toward Loren’s shoulder.

Naturally their bodies got closer, but the only thing Loren felt on his back was his sword that was lodged between the two of them.

“The way you talk changed. Is that how you talk naturally?”

Lapis stopped squirming.

Loren got the feeling that she didn’t want to talk about it, but he continued on, deciding that it was better to know as much as he could about her, especially because he was going to be with her for a while.

“Your body as well. Is there a reason why it stopped moving?”

“Do I... do you have to know why?”

After hearing Lapis’ reluctant voice, obvious that it was something she didn’t want to talk about, Loren started to have second thoughts about digging deeper into this matter.

It wasn’t information that he needed, but there was always a chance that information that may not be needed contained something important. Judging from the situation that they were in, he wanted every piece of detail he could find.

But at the same time, he didn't want to push too hard and ruin his relationship with Lapis either.

Since Sarfe and the others were gone, the only ally he had left right now was Lapis.

"I won't force you to, but it would be easier to think around it if you told me."

He made it so that Lapis would make the decision.

He decided to tell her what was on his mind, then see how she would react.

"Well, let's see... since you already saw everything, I guess I can tell you."

After taking a moment to collect her thoughts, she whispered into his ear.

While thinking that a woman whispering into his ear was something that ran down his spine, he focused on Lapis' voice, not slowing down and continuing to scan his surroundings.

"Loren, how much do you know about demon kind (demon kin?)." *

Loren almost stopped in his tracks at Lapis' question, but remembered that they weren't in a situation to be stopping.

He slowed down to a jog while trying to recall what he knew about demon kind.

They generally didn't have much interactions with humans.

In this world, there exists races other than humans such as demi-humans and beast kin who lived in their own societies along with humans.

Demon kind was one of them but didn't have a good reputation among the other races.

They had little to no interaction with humans, much less other races, and were generally thought of as the name of the race suggested.

But in fact, there were only a handful that lived up to that reputation and it wasn't that they were impossible to interact with.

Although they had higher physical abilities and higher affinity to magic, they weren't

interested in other races, and their tendency to use anything however they could to benefit them was the root of their bad reputation.

But people like that existed among humans as well and it all depended on the personality of the individual, so the mercenary that told him all of this warned Loren not to think 'just because they're demon kind'.

Most of them didn't believe in gods either, which made many churches dislike them as well.

They looked almost the same as humans except for the color of their eyes, which were a deep purple color.

Beings called demon lords popped up every now and then and brought fear upon the world, but they were just rulers of demon kind and rarely tried to control monsters and take over the world.

Loren told Lapis all he could recall about demon kind.

After he was done, Lapis nodded and said

"I'm one of the demon kind."

"You're kidding, right?"

Based off Loren's knowledge, demon kind didn't believe in gods.

Gods didn't share their powers with those who weren't believers, and if Lapis was indeed demon kind as she said, it would contradict the fact that she was a priest.

Because Lapis was on his back, he saw her face more clearly and saw that her eyes were pitch black just like her hair.

Her physical characteristics were different to those of the demon kind as well.

"We definitely don't believe in the supreme god or the earth goddess and such, but the knowledge god has similar tastes as we do so..." **

Although gods oversaw different things, ideals such as love and peace were a part of their teachings.

But Lapis told Loren that the teachings of the knowledge god didn't include any of them, and that the only thing taught was to gain knowledge, then search for further knowledge.

This teaching wasn't well known by demon kind, but there was a small number of followers among them.

"Since the Knowledge god considers magic a form of knowledge, priests of the Knowledge god can use magic as well as divine arts. However, the priests of other gods cannot use magic, only the divine arts their god bestows them." ***

This is why Loren was surprised when Lapis conjured light using a magic spell.

Priests usually only used the divine arts of their god, and Loren never heard of a priest who used magic on top of that.

"Does that mean a human priest of the Knowledge god can use magic too?"

If this was true, it meant that priests of the Knowledge god could fill two roles at the same time, and would be high in demand from both adventurers as well as mercenaries.

Even if it were to be expensive, having one person fill the roles of two was too good of a deal.

"There may be some that can, but no one should be as good as I am. I'm demon kind. It's only natural for me to have higher specs."

Lapis sounded slightly proud of herself.

Loren thought that she wasn't wrong.

He had no idea how much strength Lapis possessed, but if she had enough to cover one person's worth for both magic and divine arts at the same time, it wasn't something not to be proud of.

"So, why is a demon kind like you an adventurer? Don't you guys usually stay inside the mountain range in the middle of the continent?"

The reason why demon kind didn't interact much with other races.

Although their bad reputation and their personalities played a big part, the biggest reason was where they lived.

They were surrounded by a high stone mountain range in the center of the continent, and it was physically very difficult for people to go in, much less go out.

There were many theories about why they lived in such a place, and Loren didn't know too much about it, but the most known one was that they retreated into the mountains because of persecution against them.

“Actually, we come outside quite often.”

Now Loren was certain that demon kind were way different than what he knew about.

“We just don't get caught. We look similar to humans, so if we are careful we look just like humans who are a bit more distinguished.”

“Is that so,” Loren thought.

Loren believed that individuals that have over a certain amount of skill, whether that be swordsmanship or magic, had an aura coming from them that told others what that individual was capable of.

Although sometimes inaccurate, it would still give an idea of what that individual was.

If the demon kind was as powerful as he had heard, he thought it would be hard not to notice them among humans.

Lapis managed to sense Loren's confusion and continued to explain.

“People that have strength or skills that are obvious to the eye either don't come to human lands, or they come out with restrictions.”

“Restrictions?”

“Yes, and that explains my situation as well.”

She raised her right hand, which was around Loren's neck, slightly.

Her movement was sluggish, and it seemed like she couldn't move how she wanted to.

“This is artificial.”

“What?”

“Currently all four of my limbs as well as my eyes are artificial ones with some magical tampering on it. I can only move them by using my mana, and it uses quite a bit as well.”

Loren then looked closely at Lapis’ right hand, and even though Lapis had explained just now, he couldn’t tell the difference between that and a real hand just by looking at it.

“Did you notice that Oxy’s magic didn’t work earlier?”

Loren had noticed that.

The spell she had used against the goblins had no effect, and that was one of the reasons that the party collapsed.

“That was probably because the goblin mage activated something that had the effect <>. It’s not a spell that goblins could use, so I’m guessing that it had some sort of magic item.”

Lapis explained that the spell <> diffused mana using mana itself, making it impossible to use any kind of magic within an area. It took a lot of mana and control to use, which made it very unlikely that the goblin used it.

“It’s not something the mana capacity of a goblin can handle, so it probably used a storage-type magic item to use it.”

“You mean this?”

Loren then showed her the necklace that he ripped from the goblin mage’s neck.

Lapis looked at the golden necklace for a while and eventually nodded.

“This is probably it. But what I find troubling is how a goblin got a hold of a magic item like this, with a spell that even humans have trouble using.”

When Loren took the necklace earlier, Lapis told him that she preferred that he leave

that.

It was most likely because she realized that it was the reason she couldn't move her limbs.

However, Loren judged that it wasn't a spell that activated continuously, as Lapis was able to move her limbs little by little.

Lapis said that it was a storage-type, so Loren guessed that as time passed, mana would be stored into the necklace, so he decided to keep it in his pocket.

"My eyes managed to keep functioning, though."

"I see. What about the way you talk?"

"That's... it's not that that way of talking is more natural. The way I'm talking right now is natural as well. Actually, the way I talk right now is the natural me."

Lapis talked as if she were trying to make excuses.

"It's not like that's natural for demon kind either. Well... how should I put it... It's like I switch consciousness during battle."

"Hmm?"

"Since my arms and legs stopped working because of <> and it became a dangerous situation, my consciousness naturally switched, and I started talking like that."

Her explanation made sense to Loren.

Loren himself changed his consciousness in and out of battle.

He believed that the result of it going too far and changing the way a person talked or changing personality wasn't that weird of an explanation as well.

"I see. I got you."

"I told you to leave me because at the time I believed that it was the most optimal decision. Thank you, Loren, for ignoring me and carrying me all the way here."

Loren couldn't see Lapis' face directly because she was on his back, so when he looked over his shoulder, his eyes met hers, and judging from her serious face, he knew that she meant that from the bottom of her heart.

“Although demon kind like me have quite the bad reputation, we aren't ones to forget a debt.”

“Ah, okay. You can repay me however you want to. But that's only if we're able to get out of this cave.”

Loren was jogging the whole time, but the tunnel continued into the distance.

Although they passed crossroads and caverns, it felt as if the end of the tunnel would never come, and Loren replied to Lapis bluntly, trying to hide his embarrassment.

Chapter 10

A Different Destination

“Still, don’t you think there’s something abnormal about this cave?”

After staying silent on Loren’s back for a while, Lapis suddenly spoke up.

Loren, who was running with the help of the magic light Lapis had conjured, looked at her with a face asking her what she was trying to say, while trying not to get his feet caught in holes in the ground.

“Loren, you’ve been running for quite a distance since we were attacked by goblins, but we haven’t reached the end of the tunnel yet.”

That was something Loren agreed with.

Even though he had someone on his back, he had run nonstop for a long time, and covered a long distance as well.

But the tunnel continued, not even changing shape.

They passed a few chambers filled with items that the goblins gathered, but they passed the last one a while ago, and the tunnel they were in just kept going.

“I thought these goblins lived in a natural cave, but this is too unnatural. It’s definitely strange.”

“I agree. Who knows how long this is going to continue.”

After reaching the end, Loren planned on going back and searching the side tunnels, but it didn’t seem like the tunnel was going to end anytime soon.

If it were a natural cave, the tunnel would’ve gotten a lot narrower, but it continued on without changing size.

Although the floor and walls looked natural, Loren started doubting it and began to

think that the cave was artificial.

“You want to head back?”

Loren started to get a sense of urgency going deeper and deeper down into the cave, but even if they were to head back, it meant going back to the place where they separated from Sarfe and the others.

He didn't want to think about what was going on in there, but what he was certain that the goblins were concentrated there.

There was no way they could sneak past them, and it would mean that Loren would have to get through a horde of goblins with Lapis on his back.

“I hope there is an exit on the other side.”

“If there was, it would mean that Loren has tremendous luck.”

Loren had trouble deciding whether luck was on his side or not.

He was lucky that he managed to survive through all the battles in his mercenary days, without any lasting injuries.

But the group that he was a part of being destroyed was very unlucky for him, so he couldn't decide.

“In any case, don't expect much of it.”

“Mine isn't that good either.”

For some reason Lapis joined in, and Loren turned to her with a puzzled look.

“Well, my parents took my arms and legs as well as my eyes when I came out of my country so.”

“Ah... that's unfortunate.”

Loren was surprised that she had parents, but when he thought about it, it made sense. Of course, demon kind had parents. There was no way they grew from trees or anything like that.

But he had to agree that her own parents taking her limbs and eyes away was very unlucky, and started to think which of them had the worse luck.

“I became an adventurer, but my party were those kinds of people.”

“Okay, I got it. Looks like you’re way more unfortunate than I am.”

“They had a few screws loose when it came to thinking and paying attention, so it was easy for me to hide my identity, though.”

“Stop. You don’t have to say it.”

Under the onslaught that Lapis brought, Loren had no choice but to admit that she was unluckier than he was.

He thought that saying things like this without hesitation was why demon kind continued to have a bad reputation.

“On top of that, my parents hid my limbs and eyes somewhere in human territory. I can’t go home until I find them, as well as gain experience in the human world.”

“I’m not trying to compete.”

“But even if I find them, how would I put them back onto my body?”

“Go back home and ask your parents.”

Loren couldn’t understand what happened between her and her parents that it ended up with getting her limbs and eyes taken away and hidden.

He also couldn’t understand how she could describe it as just ‘unfortunate’.

“Um, Loren?”

While he was immersed in such thoughts, Lapis, the subject of those thoughts, brought Loren back to reality.

Loren was wary that maybe she had something even worse up her sleeve, but when he looked at her, he saw that she was pointing in front of him and faced the direction she was pointing.

After all this time with the tunnel continuing forever, Lapis saw some sort of light ahead of them.

“It’s not a dead end, is it?”

“If it was there wouldn’t be light shining.”

“But a light at the end? Does that mean there are more goblins there?”

“I can’t say for sure. I don’t sense any, though.”

Loren wasn’t sure how much he could depend on demon kind’s senses.

But they were known for their high strengths and capabilities, and Loren decided that their senses would be pretty accurate. He slowed down from a jog to taking light footsteps, taking care not to make any noise.

“Get rid of the light.”

Loren could see a bit, thanks to the light coming from the direction he was walking toward, and asked Lapis to extinguish the light she conjured using magic.

As soon as Loren asked, Lapis extinguished the light. It became dark again, but they could see their surroundings vaguely thanks to the light pouring in.

“You can’t stand on your own yet?”

“I’m sorry, I’m such a nuisance.”

“Don’t worry about it.”

Lapis seemed embarrassed that she couldn’t move yet, but Loren had asked her without expecting much, so he wasn’t disappointed at all.

“I’m going to apologize ahead of time. I might have to shake you off if it’s an emergency.”

“It’s fine. I’m in the way when you reach for your weapon.”

In the narrow tunnel, Loren couldn’t use his weapon to its full potential.

But he didn't have anything else to fight with, so he had no choice but to use his great sword in an emergency, and that would mean he had no choice but to shake Lapis off his back to draw it.

To Lapis, who couldn't move any of her limbs, it would hurt quite a bit, so Loren decided to apologize to her now because he could see the possibility of it happening.

"It would be nice if I didn't have to draw it, though."

Loren continued to walk slowly toward the light shining through the cave.

Although it took a while, they managed to reach the light pouring out with no problems.

It was a dead end, but there was a crack in the wall, barely large enough to fit a child, and the light was pouring out from it.

After examining it for a while, Loren found out that it wasn't connected to the outside and that it wasn't large enough for him or Lapis to pass through.

"I could probably pass through if I crawled, but I can't move my arms and legs well yet, and we don't know what's at the other end, so I don't really want to go alone..."

Although Loren had useless thoughts, such as maybe her butt will get caught, but he agreed with many things she said, and decided against sending her ahead alone.

"I guess we'll have to break the wall and widen the crack."

Since there was no other way they could pass through, it was the only option they had.

Loren didn't have any sort of tool with him to widen the crack, but he did have a great sword on his back.

He hoped that, since the crack was large, the wall around it would be somewhat weak and easily crumble. He set Lapis down against a wall in a sitting position and drew his great sword.

"It's going to be a bit loud. Keep watch for anything that notices us."

"You can count on me."

After seeing Lapis nod, he held his sword upside down and struck the wall around the crack with the tip.

Since his sword didn't have a proper blade, it was like striking the wall with a slab of metal, and slowly but surely the wall started to crumble.

Even the sturdiest weapon, if not used the way it was meant to be used, would be greatly damaged.

Loren decided that if he managed to get out of alive, he would have to take his sword to a smith or buy a new one. While he was working, he heard Lapis' voice.

"It seems like it'll take a while."

Great swords weren't meant to be used to dig holes.

And even though the wall was somewhat brittle, it was still completely made of rock, and it didn't look like he was making much progress.

Lapis' outlook was correct, and Loren kept on striking his sword on the wall, not wanting to waste any time replying.

To their luck, no monsters were attracted to them by all the noise he was making.

If some monster noticed them, Loren would have to fight it protecting Lapis at the same time, who couldn't move well, so he wouldn't be able to fight properly.

"I guess we're lucky the wall isn't that hard."

The crack itself was fragile from the wind eroding it for many years, so Loren was able to make the crack bigger and bigger with the tip of his sword.

He continued for a while, thinking how easy it would be if he could swing the entire sword at the wall.

Eventually the crack became large enough for Loren to crawl through.

Loren hit the blade a few times to get the rubble off of it and strapped it onto his back.

"Now we can somehow get through."

“Good work. Sorry to trouble you again, but it would help a lot if you could pull me across the wall.”

Although quite a long time had passed, Lapis’ limbs remained unmoving.

The crack wasn’t large enough to fit Loren with Lapis on his back, so the only way was to do as Lapis just said, for Loren to go in first and pull Lapis through.

“It’s going to take some work.”

“I apologize.”

“It’s fine. It’s too late to back out, anyway.”

Loren told Lapis, who was apologetic, not to worry about it, and got down on his knees in front of the crack, and proceeded to crawl out of the tunnel.

Chapter 11

Infiltrating to Encountering

It wasn't hard for Loren to crawl through the crack.

It wasn't that high, so he had to crawl flat on the ground and the great sword on his back was slightly in the way, but those weren't big problems to him.

Getting Lapis, who still couldn't move much, was the tricky part.

In a situation where the goblins might catch up to them if they took too much time, Loren was wondering what he should do. The next thing he knew, he saw Lapis start inching toward the crack, bending and wriggling her body like a worm.

As soon as she got close enough, Loren reached out, grabbed her body, and pulled her the rest of the way.

"Well, we're on the lucky side."

They were able to make it to the other side without any of their pursuers catching up, so that's how Loren evaluated the situation.

He was also relieved that the place they ended up in wasn't within the goblin's nest.

And although they crawled on the floor to get through the crack, the only thing covering their clothes was dust and rubble.

Lapis' clothes seemed to have it worse because of the color, but if this was still within the goblin's nest, her clothes would have been covered with stains and smells from things much worse than dirt.

"Thank you, Loren. You helped me so much."

"Don't worry about it. More importantly, what do you make of this place? I want your opinion."

Staying in a sitting position on the ground, Lapis looked at the scene in front of her.

It wasn't blinding, but there was enough light that they could make out their surroundings clearly, unlike inside the tunnel.

A large space with a high ceiling.

They could see everything because the walls and floor were emitting light, and it definitely did not look like the inside of a cave at all.

Lapis, who still couldn't walk, pulled herself across the floor to a wall and put her face up so close that she almost touched the wall. After observing it for a moment, she pulled away and said in an impressed voice.

"I'm surprised. This is mana material."

"What's that?"

"It's a building material seen in places such as ruins of the ancient kingdom. The technique is unknown, but it's quite exceptional, because it takes mana from the atmosphere and converts it into light."

The Ancient Kingdom was something even Loren knew about.

It referred to a kingdom that thrived in the distant past.

It was an outstanding magic civilization and it was said that they had half of the world under their rule. Their citizens included humans, demi-humans, beast kin, as well as demon kind.

Since magic was so intertwined into their culture, there was no doubt that it was magicians that held great power and high status.

It meant that most of the ruins excavated in the present once belonged to magicians, and it was said that during the kingdom's peak of development, cities floated in the sky.

However, although it was said to have been very technologically advanced, it suddenly disappeared and scattered all the different races, eventually forming the lands that existed today.

“Speaking of ruins of the Ancient Kingdom... wouldn’t finding one be worth a fortune?”

Loren knew that it wasn’t something that you can find every day.

Some relics that were excavated were worth way more than Loren could ever imagine.

“I think the best you can do is try not to get completely ravaged by the adventurer’s guild and robbers.”

“That’s... quite the dream right there.”

“Rather than that, Loren, can you scrape off a part of this wall? It’s not that strong, but it’s a reliable source of light, and it’s also valuable research material.”

Loren had already broken part of the wall of the cave of the goblins’ nest, so it wasn’t difficult for him to break another one. He nodded at the crack they came through and said to Lapis, who was looking at him with eyes sparkling with expectation.

“There’s a lot of them over there.”

“Oh, that’s true.”

Loren picked up Lapis, who was trying to drag herself regardless of her clothes getting dirty, like how a cat would pick up her kit, and carried her to the crack in the wall.

Lapis thanked him for the act, as it kept her clothes from getting dirtier, and started to choose parts of the building material and stuffing them in her pockets.

“You can keep doing what you’re doing. But if this is ruins of the Ancient Kingdom, aren’t we in a pretty bad situation?”

Traps and guardians, as well as countless other methods of chasing away intruders, were part of the ruins most of the time.

It was more dangerous for the important ruins, and if what Loren had heard about them were true, they were in an unimaginable amount of danger.

“Maybe. Maybe not.”

Lapis seemed to have finished stuffing her pockets and continued.

“Although you say ruins of the Ancient Kingdom, it goes from the best to the worst.”

“What do you mean?”

Loren asked Lapis as he reached under her arms and helped her onto her feet.

She managed to stand up, but as soon as Loren relaxed his arms, she started staggering and almost fell. Loren sighed as he saw that her limbs still remained unmoving.

“The dangerous ruins that Loren is thinking about do have its dangers, but there are also ruins that no one really cares about.”

Loren, thinking it was dangerous to stay in one place too long, put Lapis on his back again.

Lapis, who quietly let Loren do his thing, continued while clinging onto his back.

“Out of all the ruins that have been found, the dumbest one that I know of is an ancient restroom.”

“Huh...?”

“Perfect air conditioning and lighting system with private stalls. Complete with a sewer system and great ventilation. Of course, there are no traps or guardians. It would be weird if they did.”

Loren thought that only someone who was crazy would place traps or guardians in a restroom.

He also thought that there wouldn't even be much to protect, but a thought that crossed his mind unknowingly made it to his lips.

“Well, there could be at least one to protect whoever's using it.”

“That's an idea that I've never thought of before...”

“Men are most distracted when they are using the toilet or sleeping with women you know?”

“That's quite a mercenary's way of thinking, but I don't think that the magicians of the

Ancient Kingdom lived so close to danger.”

The two scenarios that Loren presented usually resulted in getting stabbed in the back or getting sniped by arrows or magic, and was taught among mercenaries that those were the most dangerous times, but it seemed that Lapis didn’t really understand.

“That is why not all ruins are dangerous. In fact, there are less dangerous ones than there are safer ones.”

Now that he thought about it, the ruins that they were in were buildings used by civilians, so it did make sense that there wouldn’t be any traps or guardians.

If they were research facilities or held treasures, it would be a whole different story, but it also made sense that compared to the whole kingdom, there would only be a handful of them.

“Then first we have to find out what kind of ruin this is.”

“Yes, exactly.”

“I hope it’s not a dangerous one.”

After checking if Lapis was firmly settled on his back, Loren started walking slowly.

It wasn’t like he had any place in mind.

Although the area they came out to was large and had a high ceiling, Loren thought they were in some kind of room, but after observing his surroundings, he found out that they were in a middle of some sort of corridor.

He thought that if he followed it, they would be bound to end up somewhere.

It meant walking around carelessly in a ruin with possible dangers, but Loren thought it would be better than going back into a cave full of goblins.

“I’ll put my guard up. Can I count on you to keep watch as well?”

“I’ll try my best to detect traps or anything with magic, so I’ll be counting on you if enemies pop up.”

She gave the grasp of the great sword on Loren's back a light tap.

In the hands of Loren, it was a weapon of great force because of its ridiculous weight, but at the same time it was a sword made of ordinary iron.

It was effective for cutting and smashing things, but was useless against spiritual or magical things.

It was more than enough in battle, but in a ruin of the Ancient Kingdom, it seemed quite lackluster.

"If it comes down to the worst, we may have to think about going through the goblins' nest."

"That's something I'd like to avoid."

Although Loren had slain the goblin mage, there was no way to know if that was the only one.

Plus, Lapis had seen a few goblins with larger bodies among the ones that flanked them.

She guessed that they were hobgoblins, another type of high ranked goblin. If one asked her if Loren could fight through them on his own, Lapis would have to tilt her head.

Also with herself not being able to move at all, she understood that she was completely dead weight to Loren.

"The best thing would be getting out of here without running into anything."

"Based on my daily deeds, I don't think things will go too smooth for me."

"Same here. I don't really believe in gods, so it wouldn't be right to pray to one either."

Loren let out a troubled laugh as he thought that it was probably way worse for him than Lapis when it came to daily deeds.

He suddenly stopped and reached over his right shoulder to his great sword.

It was a movement that signaled he was about to draw his weapon, so Lapis tensed, bracing for when Loren would shake her off.

Loren didn't go as far to draw his sword yet, and instead lowered his waist, readying himself to be able to move anytime.

"Loren?"

"Quiet. Something's coming."

The corridor in front of them turned into a corner.

Although Lapis was clueless about it, Loren sensed something coming towards them and stopped.

If it were a street corner in a city it wouldn't be dangerous at all, but in an ancient ruin there was very low chance of it not being dangerous.

"Shouldn't we run...?"

"We'll be lucky if it lets us."

There was the choice of running back the way they came immediately.

But Loren wanted to gather as much information as he could about the ruins.

If he could see what was coming, he was bound to get some sort of information, so he decided he would choose to stay or run after he saw what was coming.

Lapis, who was on his back, understood what he was trying to do.

"I can still use enough magic to keep it busy for a bit. Just tell me when."

As Lapis whispered into Loren's ear and he nodded back to her, whatever that was coming towards them was right around the corner.

What came around the corner saw Loren, who had tensed his legs and was ready to make a move, and spoke up.

"There's a scary looking brother here with a sister on his back." *

“What!? Why the heck is something like that in these ruins? Is it an illusion or something?”

“It’s not my fault they’re there! If it was an illusion wouldn’t it be showing us something better?”

“They’re humans, I think. They have heat, at least.”

“Kinds of a harsh place to be lost in.”

What came from across the corner was a group of armed individuals, most likely a group of adventurers.

On their chests were silver identification tags.

Chapter 12

Encounter to Assessing Current Situation

“So, you guys were running from goblins and managed to find your way in here? Unfortunate for you, big guy.”

The man dressed like a thief laughed out loud as Loren finished explaining what happened to them, with Lapis still on his back.

He looked older than Loren and had a stubble beard. He combed his fingers through his short, brown, unkempt hair and continued to laugh loudly.

“Their party got wiped out but they survived, you know? I would say that that’s the thing farthest from being unlucky.”

The man who scolded the thief was a warrior as well as the leader of the party, and he introduced himself as Ritz.

His equipment was orthodox for a warrior, with leather armor reinforced with iron plates as well as a buckler and a long sword. All of them seemed old, but they were well kept and he had the air of a veteran around him.

The thief that Ritz scolded snorted and looked away, but the woman, dressed like a hunter with a bow in hand, pulled on his ear and swung his head back.

“Jack, bad attitude.”

“Ow, that hurts Nim! Stop pulling! What’re you going to do if it comes off!?”

“You don’t need ears if you’re not going to listen.”

The female hunter glared at the thief named Jack.

The woman, her blue eyes now half open, had stunning blonde hair and from between her hair were her ears, long and pointed like the blades of short daggers.

Although Loren had heard of them before, it was the first time meeting one in person, so his eyes automatically focused on her ears.

“Is this the first time you’ve seen an elf?”

The old man dressed like a magician noticed him staring, and asked him.

He had his white hair pulled back and knotted, and carried a straight black staff in hand, wore a gray robe, and introduced himself as Quartz.

All four of them were silver rank adventurers.



Compared to Loren, who just became a copper rank adventurer, they were two ranks above him, with the iron rank separating them.

It wouldn't be wrong if he called them veterans.

"Ah, sorry about that. It's the first time I've met one in person. That was impolite of me."

Loren didn't mean to stare, but the others might've found his gaze uncomfortable, so he started to apologize, but Quartz waved it off.

"I don't blame you. She's quite the beauty, after all."

"Quartz, if you want to keep your eyes, shut up."

The elf named Nim warned Quartz coldly, who was still laughing.

Loren thought she was joking, but when she used her free hand to pull out a dagger from her belt, he took a step back, with a frightened expression.

"I'm not going to be here much longer, but I don't want to lose my eyes."

"It's okay, I'll forgive you with one of them."

"Hey, stop messing around in front of them. You're making them feel awkward."

Ritz silenced Quartz, who was acting scared, and Nim, who looked quite serious, and turned to Loren.

"I'd take you guys to the entrance if I could, but we're in the middle of a quest here. We don't have the time. We're competing with another party right now."

"Expedition of the ruins near the Village of Ain. Heard of it?"

Hearing Nim's flat toned voice, Loren recalled a conversation he had with Sarfe and the others.

He remembered that Naron had talked about taking a better quest near Ain, and guessed that they were in the newly discovered ruins.

“We don’t know how dangerous these ruins are, but unexplored ruins usually make good money so we accepted the quest, but we got some competition.”

Jack spat, annoyed.

Quartz continued where he left off.

“We’re currently competing with the other party. The rewards of the quest will differ based on what kind of information we bring back, so we’re in a hurry.”

What they were trying to say was, they couldn’t help.

But Loren understood and agreed to what they said.

Within mercenaries, people with a credible endeavor, who helped others for free, didn’t exist.

Loren thought that it would be the same for adventurers.

If they were going to pay a price, depending on how tall the stack of coins would get, they might help, but Loren didn’t have that sort of money.

“I know. I have no intention of getting in the way. If you can just point towards the exit, we’ll take it from there.”

Since he had Lapis on his back, it wouldn’t hurt to have them lead him to the exit.

But he couldn’t ask them to help no matter what because they had their own job to complete.

It wasn’t like he didn’t have a chance at getting out.

If Ritz could tell him the direction of the exit, he would have a general idea of where to head towards, and if he followed the paths that Ritz and his party came through, it would be quite safe because they would have had to cleared out traps and monsters on the way here.

“About that...”

Ritz responded hesitantly to Loren’s words.

Loren thought gloomily that maybe he was trying to make them pay for the information, but remembered that not many things were free in this world. If it came to that, he was ready to ask Lapis for some money.

However, Ritz's words were something beyond what Loren expected to hear.

"Actually, we don't know either."

"Unfortunate."

Loren unconsciously responded in that manner.

In his mind, he was unsure of how Ritz and his party came all the way here, but didn't know the way back.

If they were copper rank, he could guess that they didn't map the ruins as they came or just completely forgot, but they were silver rank adventurers.

Even Loren, who still wasn't too familiar with adventurers, was confused how they came to explore new ruins but don't know the way out.

"No, it's not what you think. It's not like we didn't map as we came or just forgot."

What Loren was thinking must have been written on his gaze. Ritz nervously started to explain.

Loren was uncomfortable at the fact that he looked at Ritz with such eyes, but it turns out that Ritz wasn't facing him directly, but more towards his shoulder.

"Lapis?"

"Sorry. It must have been in my eyes."

"I don't know if you can't move because you're scared, but that definitely wasn't the kind of gaze from a person being carried by someone else."

Lapis sensed the irony in his words, and retreated on Loren's back.

Wondering what would happen if they knew what Lapis really was, Loren questioned Ritz.

“So what’s the reason why you guys don’t know the way back?”

“We fell down. It was a pitfall. Jack here failed to uncover a trap.”

Ritz glared at Jack, who was trying to hide behind Quartz, but Nim kicked him down.

Loren felt sorry for Jack, as Nim started stomping him, but asked Ritz to continue.

“We were lucky there wasn’t poison or spikes at the bottom, but we fell down a whole floor. It was too high to climb back up so we were looking for a way out...”

Loren looked up at the ceiling.

It was high enough for him to swing his great sword around with no problem. It was definitely too high for any of them to reach.

“If someone was still up there, we could’ve pulled each other out, but all of us fell down together.”

“Jack, I won’t forget you landed on top of me.”

“It’s not much different than falling on the floor, anyway.”

At Jack’s words, Nim realized that everyone’s gazes were focused on a certain part of her body, and readied her bow with a fearsome glare.

“If you have any last words, I’ll listen.”

Looking at that part, Loren could see what Jack was trying to say, but he forced himself with all his might not to show it on his face, because he didn’t want to die yet.

Lapis didn’t seem to be able to do the same, as he felt her silently press her face onto his back.

She must have not been able to keep in her laughter, as Loren felt her shake slightly on his back.

Lapis’ on the other hand, were large enough to be self-assertive, and even if he compared them modestly, Nim didn’t stand a chance.

“In any case, Jack dies.”

“I haven’t said anything wrong!”

“Well, there you have it.”

Ritz turned to Loren, trying to face away from Nim, who started chasing Jack with her bow ready to fire, and said with an exhausted voice.

“As much as I would like to tell you, you wouldn’t be able to get to the exit even if I did.”

“Well, it can’t be helped.”

Even silver adventurers were prone to get caught on traps sometimes.

Rather than that, Loren was more surprised that none of them, even Nim, who Jack fell on top of, didn’t seem have any injuries after such a fall.

“Some of us were hurt pretty badly, you know? But we made do with the potions that we brought. And that’s where I’d like to talk to you guys about something.”

“If you mean divine arts, I can use <<Heal>> one more time.”

Before Ritz could even start explaining the details, Lapis raised her head from Loren’s back and cut into the conversation.

Loren didn’t know what she was talking about and Ritz was surprised that Lapis saw right through him, but quickly calmed down.

“Once, huh...”

“I can guarantee that it works better than potions. If you can give me some time, I’ll probably be able to use it once more.”

Loren glanced at Lapis, confused. Lapis realized what he was trying to say and whispered into his ear.

“They want me to go with them to make up for their lack of potions, probably.”

The potions that adventurers carried around healed injuries when used, but they

weren't that effective and the effects were not instant, either.

Compared to that, <<Heal>> had instant effects and had higher healing capabilities than potions.

"Doesn't that mean they'll just get rid of me and then take you?"

"I can't move, so they'll probably need someone to carry me, right?"

If they were going to use Lapis as a medicine box, they didn't need Loren.

Although Loren started to feel danger, Lapis had thought this through already.

"If they use a person from their party to carry me, it would decrease their numbers in a fight. If Loren were to carry me and also protect himself to some extent, they would all be able to fight. Even if they were to leave us behind, it wouldn't leave as bad of an aftertaste, either."

"Do I look that inhuman to you guys?"

Though Loren and Lapis had tried their best to keep their voices down, their whole conversation was heard by Ritz, who asked them with a disappointed face.

Loren and Lapis looked at each other and replied at the same time.

"Quite a bit?"

"Can't deny that I look pretty rough, but still..."

"Don't worry. If anyone says take the girl and kill the guy, we kill him on the spot."

The rest of the party let out a nervous laugh as Nim continued to say dangerous things.

It seemed that this was the usual for this party, and Ritz gave Loren, who was laughing nervously, his suggestion.

"Sorry, but our conditions are having the young lady use her divine arts on our orders. If you can accept this, I'll let you guys stick with us until we find a way out of these ruins. How does it sound?"

“We accept. Please take good care of us.”

Before Loren could say anything, Lapis accepted Ritz’s suggestion.

Ritz looked at Loren, asking if he was okay with her decision. But Loren thought that it was fair for Lapis to choose, as she was the subject of the conditions, and wasn’t going to say otherwise.

“Well then, negotiations are complete. Guess we’ll be taking care of each other until we get out.”

Ritz then held out his left hand.

Loren glanced at Ritz’s hand and with a smile on his face, trying to look likable, grabbed it with his left hand and shook.

Chapter 13

Accompanying to Exploring

Now their total number was six.

If they counted people who could walk on their feet, it would be five, but in any case, the group started moving, led by Ritz and Jack.

Quartz the magician was in the middle, and Nim the hunter, as well as Loren, still carrying Lapis, was in the back. But since Loren had his hands full, he was worried that the back line was weak.

“It’s okay, trust me.”

Nim, who was walking beside Loren, patted Loren’s shoulder to help him relax.

The shoulder she lightly touched was covered with medicine and wrapped in bandages.

Loren had left his shoulder, burnt from the goblin mage’s magic, unattended because he was too focused on getting away from the goblins.

Ritz saw the injury, and although they didn’t have any potions, they helped disinfect the wound, put burn medicine, and wrap bandages around his shoulder.

Although it was much better now, it still stung when touched.

While he steeled his face, trying not to let the pain show, Lapis, who was on Loren’s back, whispered into his ear.

“If it becomes unbearable, please tell me.”

Lapis was supposed to be able to use divine arts two times a day.

But she told Ritz she had one use left.

Mana used to cast magic and the power to use divine arts were totally different, so

divine arts had nothing to do with Lapis trying to regain control of her limbs.

She didn't tell Ritz about the extra use and decided to save it.

Loren guessed it meant that she wanted to use the last one for his injuries because he had taken her with him.

"I'm fine. They treated it, anyways."

To be honest, Loren wasn't comfortable with lying when making deals with others.

Although it depended on the opponent, Loren believed that when it came to making deals, both sides should be honest and straightforward with each other.

But Loren decided that Lapis' choice wasn't the worst either, because he wasn't sure if he could trust Ritz and his party completely.

"But still, this is one weird ruin."

Jack, who was walking up front, muttered while looking around their surroundings.

Loren, who wanted more information, wasn't about to miss a thought from a veteran adventurer, so he pricked his ears to what Jack was saying.

"Since they said it was unexplored, you would expect enemies to be things that aren't living, like golems or undead, right?"

Jack turned around slightly and glanced at Loren.

Loren had a vague feeling that Jack wanted him to respond, but he didn't have much experience to give Jack his opinion.

His very first quest was exterminating goblins, and he'd never stepped foot inside a ruin before, either.

Loren was wondering how he should respond, but Jack, who apparently wasn't expecting an answer, continued.

"But nothing of the sort is coming out in these ruins."

“Are you saying that there’s no enemies? Isn’t that a good thing?”

Loren wasn’t sure how long these ruins had remained undiscovered, but if it was from the time of the Ancient Kingdom, it would be a few hundred years for sure.

It wasn’t an amount of time a person could survive, and without any contact from outside, as Jack had just said, it would make sense that only golems or undead could exist here.

Since those weren’t coming out, Loren thought that there might not be any enemies, but apparently reality differed, as Jack showed a frown as he turned his head back ahead of them.

“About that. I’m not sure why, but the only enemies we encountered so far are goblins.”

“Goblins in Ancient Kingdom ruins? Did they get in from outside?”

Goblins were tough creatures.

They would crawl into anywhere if it meant getting out of wind and rain, and would start reproducing there, and before long, would increase in numbers rapidly. They could live almost anywhere, and in worst cases, they would even live in sewer systems under large cities.

Of course, even if it was Ancient Kingdom ruins, it wouldn’t be surprising if they started multiplying in it, and Loren thought maybe that was the case, but Jack shook his head, still facing ahead.

“Well. Apparently, the entrance to these ruins were sealed when it was found. It means that no one could’ve come in from the entrance. The guy that found it hired a few magicians and unsealed the entrance.”

“But there’s still a chance there might be more cracks like the one we came through...”

“That’s right. Since we bumped into you guys, the chance that there are holes all over these ruins and the goblins came from those holes.”

“But there’s still things that can’t be explained just by that.”

Quartz, who was listening to Jack and Loren’s conversation, joined in.

“If the goblins came from outside and multiplied in here, it would mean there are no guardians in these ruins at all.”

“Maybe they died over the long period of time?”

“Then there would be some sort of remains of them. If they were all ghosts or undead, it would be a different story, but that itself would make these ruins quite the particular one.”

Undead monsters don't make good guardians in general.

Quartz explained that because undead were originally human, it was difficult to give them orders. What was usually done was either have a large number of them that could only follow simple orders, or the master of the ruins itself was an undead and had its own army.

Quartz thought that it was hard to believe that they would disappear without a trace, and it would be weird that they didn't find any sort of trace of them if they did exist at one point.

“Personally, I'd prefer the theory of the goblins coming in from outside.”

Ritz spoke up.

He had a reason for hoping the goblins came from outside.

The goblins Ritz and the others had encountered were before they fell into the pit, which meant they were above the floor that they were in right now.

If the crack Loren had come through was where the goblins came from as well, it meant that they found a way to climb up to the upper levels, and if they could climb up, they would also find a way out of there.

“Of course, it's possible that there are cracks everywhere and goblins came through all of them.”

“That's something I don't want to think about.”

If that were true, it meant that there would be packs of goblins all over the place.

To silver ranks like Ritz, it may not seem like much, but to Loren, who just witnessed a whole party getting destroyed by them, it wasn't something he would like to encounter again.

"Oh, more goblins from the front."

In a straight corridor with nothing between them and the goblins, Ritz let out a warning.

As soon as Loren heard him, he tried to let Lapis down but Nim stopped him.

"It's nothing. Loren just watch behind us."

"Alright."

He could check if there were any enemies coming from behind without using his arms.

While Loren looked back to see if there were enemies, Nim quickly notched an arrow on her bow and without taking time to aim, she fired the arrow with ease.

The arrow flew over the heads of their front line, and lodged in the eye of the goblin in front, instantly killing it.

"There's not many. Seven of them."

"You shouldn't need back up with magic, right?"

"Nah. It'll be over in a flash."

After nodding at Quartz, Ritz readied his sword and shield and rushed into the goblins.

He bashed one with his shield, and with a swing of his sword, the head of another spun in the air.

Ritz then quickly went to the goblin he had knocked down and cut its head off.

Meanwhile another arrow from Nim struck another goblin, and before the goblins could even react, all seven of them were dead.

"That was pretty clean."

“It’s nothing to be proud of. We’re silver rank, remember?”

Loren, slightly impressed at the quick fight, called out to Ritz, but Ritz responded flatly.

While Loren thought that watching how Sarfe did things made him see simple battles way better than they actually were, Ritz continued.

“If four silver ranks had trouble with seven goblins, we wouldn’t be able to go on for long.”

Now that he mentioned it, Ritz and the others were indeed high ranked adventurers.

Loren apologized honestly, thinking that he may have offended them.

“Sorry about that.”

“It’s all good. Should be a good learning opportunity for copper ranks like you.”

At the same time, Ritz was going around the goblins corpses, which were decapitated or had arrows sticking out of them, and started cutting off an ear from each of them.

While Loren was watching him, wondering what he was doing, Ritz finished cutting off seven ears and put them in a small sack, and then handed it to Loren.

For a second Loren thought it was trash, but he decided that it meant something, and looked at Ritz, who averted his eyes and talked quickly.

“Your quest was exterminating goblins, right? You may have failed to get rid of the nest, but you’ll still get rewarded for killing some. To us, it’ll only be a bunch of change, but you guys need the money, right?”

Loren made sure to take note that the ear was the proof of hunting for goblins. *

“You sure?”

Loren didn’t know how much a goblin was worth, but giving them the proof of hunting meant the same thing as giving them money.

“If you don’t want it just toss it wherever. A goblin is only worth five copper coins, so there’s no need for us to take it either.”

“You should take it.”

Nim added.

“Unusual for Ritz to let go of money. We can tell other adventurers about this.”

“Hey, I’m just trying to look out for my juniors.” **

“I’m surprised. It’s going to rain spears tomorrow.”

Nim, who had kept a straight face until now, looked very surprised, and Ritz, who apparently did something that was very unlike him, tossed the sack at Loren and started to argue with Nim.

“Let’s keep it. They’re giving it to us, anyway.”

Lapis recommended Loren, as he caught the sack without thinking and hung it from his waist.

Chapter 14

Discovery During the Search

They didn't run into any problems while exploring.

As Ritz said earlier, the only monsters they encountered were goblins, and they were quickly taken care of by him and his party.

The goblins' corpses were lying strewn along the ground, with one ear missing.

Loren was worried that they would become undead, but there was no way for them to bury them inside the ruins, and if they were to burn them, the smoke would fill up the corridor.

They had no choice but to leave them as is.

"Even if they do become undead, they're only goblins so it shouldn't be that big of a deal."

Although Ritz answered Loren's worries, Loren did not want to meet ghosts or undead goblins.

Putting that aside, thanks to all the goblins that showed up, the sack on Loren's waist was now full.

It wasn't much at first, but as the number of ears increased, the goblins' blood started seeping into the sack, and started giving off an awful stench.

As much as Loren wanted to throw it away, he couldn't, because it was given to him by Ritz and his party.

He couldn't handle it roughly either, because it could be traded in for money.

Loren wondered if no one else was bothered by the smell, so he looked around, but no one seemed bothered by it except for Lapis.

She was grimacing, and because she was trying not to breathe through her nose, Loren could hear her heavy breathing.

“It’s not like I’m getting aroused or anything.”

“I know. You don’t have to tell me.”

Even if she didn’t say it, there was no way Lapis could be in the mood, anyway.

Nim, who was watching the two of them with a smile, suddenly became serious and let out a warning so everyone could hear.

“Wait. Something’s wrong.”

Ritz and his party responded instantly.

Ritz, the warrior, raised his shield, and Jack, the thief, scanned their surroundings.

Quartz, the magician, raised his staff and looked around.

“Nim, what is it?”

“The smell of the air changed. I smell blood other than goblin’s blood in the air.”

At Nim’s words, Loren sniffed but the only thing he could smell was the goblin’s blood coming from the sack, and couldn’t smell what Nim was talking about.

Loren was surprised that Nim was able to detect a different smell, despite being right next to him with goblin stench covering up all the other smells in the area.

“Blood smells like iron, but is there really a difference between the smell of human blood and goblin blood?”

Lapis asked Loren with an unamused voice, but there was no way that Loren knew the answer to that.

“I won’t tell you guys to stop talking, but from here on out we should be careful. When it comes to sight and hearing, Nim’s is the sharpest.”

“Her figure is sharp too... Oww!?”

Jack, who said one thing too many, received a kick on the back from Nim.

Although Jack had the larger body and looked stronger than Nim, she must have put in quite a bit of strength into that kick, as Jack fell face first onto the ground.

“Stop messing around... I just said we need to be careful.”

“Come on, it’s getting too serious here. If we don’t relax it’s not good for our mentalities.”

Jack laughed and rubbed his back as he stood up, looking around the area, while Ritz just looked at him, exasperated.

“From what I can see, there’s nothing like what Nim said around here. Which means it’s a bit ahead from here.”

“Whatever. Let’s go.”

Ritz, who decided that it was a waste of time trying to deal with Jack, gave the order, frustrated that he wasn’t apologetic at all, Although they would slow down, everyone agreed that it was better than becoming like what Nim sensed, or fighting with whatever caused it without preparation.

“The young lady can’t move yet?”

While moving slowly through the corridor, Ritz asked Loren.

Loren looked behind at Lapis, who tried raising her arms up and down, and shook her head.

“I’m sorry, it’s going to take a bit more time.”

“I thought you weren’t able to stand? Your arms should be fine.”

“I know this is embarrassing, but my whole body seems to have frozen from all the fear and tension...”

Ritz let out a bored expression at Lapis’ excuses, but then said to Loren.

“I don’t know where you found her, but wouldn’t it be better for both of you if you took

her back to her church?”

“That’s something for her to decide. I can’t really say anything about it.”

Loren thought that they weren’t close enough for him to say anything about what she should do, but didn’t feel like explaining that to Ritz.

He knew that he didn’t have a way with words, and there was a chance that he would say something that he didn’t need to.

Loren didn’t have any thoughts about Lapis’ true colors, but most people didn’t think the same way he did, and he wasn’t sure how Ritz and the others would react if they found out.

So Loren decided that there was a need for them to keep it a secret, and if he was going to do that, he shouldn’t talk much.

“Hey, look at that.”

While Loren was thinking such thoughts, Jack, who was looking around, raised his voice.

Loren stopped thinking and looked toward the direction Jack was pointing, and what caught his eyes was something on the ground a distance ahead of them.

Loren wasn’t sure what it was at first.

It was a distance where he could just make out that there was something on the ground, but maybe because her job was a hunter, or maybe because it was because she was an elf, Nim was able to make out what it was, and muttered under her breath, trying to keep something in.

“Armor... Bloody.”

Even after finding out what it was, Ritz and the party didn’t cease to be cautious.

As much as they wanted to rush in and examine it, they were careful to look for traps or whatever left the bloody armor on the ground, and after taking a good amount of time to make sure there were no dangers, they walked closer to the thing lying on the ground.

“It’s armor all right. Leather armor. But this doesn’t tell us anything.”

Ritz went close and leaned over to look at it more closely, but soon gave up trying to gain any sort of information.

As Nime said, it was leather armor covered in blood, but it in such a shape that they could barely recognize that it used to be armor, and there was nothing that let them know who’s it was.

“One thing’s for certain. The wearer is definitely dead.”

Even Loren could tell that the amount of blood was from a fatal wound, and there was blood all over the floor as well.

If all that blood was from one person, there was no way he would be alive.

“The only people who came other than us was the party we’re competing against, but maybe they fell down here too?”

“Was there anyone who was wearing leather armor in their party?”

At Quartz’s words, Ritz and Jack both crossed their arms and started thinking deeply.

Nim, who was standing next to Loren, who thought that they must have forgot who was in the other party, spoke up with a cold glare at the men, who still couldn’t remember.

“Ritz and Jack are too careless. Quartz is going senile.”

“I’m not senile!”

“Then hurry up and remember. Who had leather armor in the other party?”

“Ugh”

Quartz let out a small groan, but it wasn’t easy trying to recall something he had already forgotten.

“Just give up and accept the fact you’re going senile.”

“I’m not senile, I’m not. I’ll remember soon enough.”

Quartz started gritting his teeth and tried to remember as hard as he could.

Around him, Ritz and Jack were growling, not able to remember at all either. Nim ignored all of them and told Loren.

“What do you think?”

“Me? Not your party?”

“We should let them think for a bit. They might remember eventually.”

Nim, who completely cut off the other three, gave the information to Loren, who was thinking if it was okay for her to do that to her party.

“If the armor was from someone in the competing party, the person wearing it was a thief.”

“Looks like it.”

“That’s not the problem. I want your opinion on the next thing.”

Magicians usually didn’t wear armor, but instead wore robes made of cloth, and priests wore equipment made of cloth as well, and sometimes wore chain mail under it.

When it came to defense as well as being able to move quickly, it was usually equipment for thieves or warriors, but the leather armor didn’t have any reinforcements to make it sturdier and was quite light.

Based on this, Loren could tell that it belonged to a thief even without having seen the other party.

But that wasn’t what Nim was worried about.

“If we’re to continue with the theory that it’s one of the members from the other party. Their thief was a woman.”

“Huh?”

Loren wasn't sure what that signified, but Lapis, who was listening on his back, seemed to find something wrong.

"From what I saw, the only monsters that came out in these ruins are goblins."

"What about that?"

"Goblins don't usually kill women. It's because they can use them for other things. But if the wearer of this armor was a woman, it means she was killed. That's what's strange."

Loren looked again at the remains of the armor on the ground.

In its current state, it was hard to tell if it was armor made for a woman.

But if it was like Nim said and the wearer was a woman, it was weird that she was killed on the spot, as Lapis just said.

"It's not like something hit her and killed her?"

"It's not impossible. But there's too much blood."

Loren agreed with Nim.

Even if something like an arrow had killed her, it was hard to think that goblins' weapons could make a wound that caused so much bleeding.

"There's too much blood. It's likely that she was taken apart on the spot."

"That would be unusual for goblins. If their prey was alive, they would prioritize their entertainment and take it to their nest."

"Then I guess there might be something other than goblins here."

"That's what it comes down to."

After being silent for a moment to collect her thoughts, Nim asked Loren.

"The crack where we met you two. Do you remember the way back?"

“Yeah. It was mostly a straight tunnel, anyway.”

“Okay. Ritz.”

Ritz stopped thinking and turned toward Nim.

After waiting for him to completely turn his attention to them, Nim suggested to Ritz.

“Something’s weird. We should go out and restart.”

“Wait a second. I feel that something’s wrong as well, but we don’t know for sure if these remains are from the other party. We need a clear reason to retreat.”

“It won’t look well if we say we came back because we found bloody armor. It’s a different story if we found their identification tags, though.”

Nim scanned the area with her eyes, but there was nothing of the sort laying on the ground.

“We can be extra cautious, but retreating is out of the question. It’ll affect our jobs in the future.”

“It’s okay if that’s what Ritz decides, but...”

“I know. We’ll head back if we find things like tags.”

“Then it’s fine.”

Nim stopped being persistent as Ritz presented the conditions for retreat.

Loren, who had no choice but to follow Ritz regardless of whether he agreed with his decision, stayed silent and nodded.

Chapter 15

Speculation to Return

There is a saying that misfortunes never come singly, but that didn't seem to happen to Loren this time.

After a while passed since Loren and the others had found the remains of the armor, Lapis tapped Loren on his shoulder.

Of course, she tapped the shoulder that wasn't injured, and Loren realized that she was able to move her limbs again.

"You alright now?"

"Yes. Sorry about all the trouble."

Loren made sure to check with her before he softly let Lapis down from his back.

Lapis stomped her feet a few times and stretched out her arms over her head, then nodded.

"Did you unfreeze, young lady?"

Ritz said to Lapis with a smile, without any sort of sarcasm in his voice, and Lapis didn't detect any either.

"Yes. Riding on Loren's back was so comfortable, so I wanted to stay a bit longer, but I would be in the way, so."

"Are you guys in that sort of relationship, by any chance?"

Loren was immediately about to say no, but Lapis covered his mouth with her left hand.

Loren was surprised at her actions, but was even more surprised at what came out of Lapis' mouth.

“Yes, we are.”

“Well that’s something that can’t be overlooked. You managed to catch quite the jewel there, brother.”

Jack sounded very happy for some reason.

As Jack was about to cheer them on, Nim calmly landed a kick from behind.

“If you want to draw attention, do it alone.”

“I feel like I’m going to get killed by you before monsters ever get the chance to...”

“I think so too.”

Quartz agreed with Jack, who was lying face first on the ground, groaning.

Although it looked like Nim didn’t go easy on him, it seemed like it didn’t do much damage, as Jack quickly got up and stroked his back.

“This means that you can fight now, right?”

Loren nodded at Ritz.

It wasn’t that he couldn’t participate in fights until now, but it was awkward to do so, because he would have had to let down Lapis first.

If it were an emergency, Loren was going to drop her, but he did feel some guilt to dropping a girl from his back.

“Then I count on you to keep watch behind us. Young lady, you can support him.”

“You can count on us.”

Now that they were a six-man party, Ritz and Jack were in the front line, and Nim and Quartz were in the middle.

Now with Loren and Lapis in the back line, they continued on their way down the corridor.

“Loren, this is quite the rare experience we’re having right now. We’re helping investigate Ancient Kingdom ruins, and even better yet, it’s an unexplored one. It’s a job that copper ranks never get to do.”

Just when he thought Lapis was finally able to walk by herself, she kept talking to him with a small voice, sounding very excited.

The party that was competing with Ritz’s party.

In a situation where a silver rank party may have suffered extreme losses and where there shouldn’t be anything to be optimistic about, her happy expression and excited atmosphere didn’t match.

Loren thought that maybe this was one of the personalities of demon kind that other species hated, and nudged Lapis, who was looking around here and there next to him, with his elbow.

“You do realize the situation we’re in, right?”

Loren asked Lapis in the softest voice he could. Lapis looked back at him, puzzled for a second, then after a moment, suddenly clung onto Loren’s left arm and said with a quiver in her voice.

“Loren, I’m scared.”

“That’s way too forced.”



To Loren's luck, Ritz and the others, who had completely left the back to the two of them, didn't notice them talking quietly. Loren wondered what to do with Lapis' excitement, but he couldn't think of a way to act in the situation they were currently in.

It was a bother if she did a poor job of acting frightened, but her current state of looking excited and interested with no trace of being scared didn't seem right either.

"I got that you're intrigued and all, but keep it down a bit. Alright?"

"It can't be helped, I guess."

Lapis looked like she wasn't convinced, but she let go of Loren's arm and nodded.

"By the way, what is the goal we are trying to accomplish?"

"Investigating the ruins is the main objective, but we're also investigating what happened to the other party. Not sure what we should prioritize."

Lapis nodded at Nim's upright response, then continued.

"If that's the case, I recommend that we return to the pit fall where everyone fell down."

"Let's hear why, young lady."

Ritz asked Lapis, who suddenly suggested, for an explanation.

Lapis started to explain her suggestion to everyone like it was nothing.

"The pit fall that everyone fell through was most likely a trap for intruders."

"Of course, it was."

Jack wondered why she was pointing out the obvious, but Lapis just continued.

"Since the trap wasn't set up to kill, it's likely that this whole floor was made for intruders who fell into the trap."

"So, you're saying that they kept monsters loose in here and let them deal with the

intruders. But why would they go through all the trouble?"

"I don't know for sure, but in any period and country, it didn't really matter how they treated intruders, so."

Everyone made an unpleasant face at her words.

She was implying that they were making use of intruders that couldn't move anymore or killed by monsters for something else.

They didn't know what exactly, but everyone guessed that it was something unpleasant.

"Putting all sentimental thoughts aside, there is no way there's anything important on this level. So if our objective is to investigate the ruins, staying here would be meaningless."

"What's your reasoning for going back to the pit fall?"

"I think there is a maintenance hatch near it. Or some path to collect the people who fell here. Whatever it may be, it would lead back to the upper levels."

Ritz stopped and thought about Lapis' suggestion.

"It's worth a shot. Even more since we don't have any other thoughts."

Nim easily agreed with Lapis, but Jack seemed against it.

"Wait a second. There was nothing like that where we fell down."

"Since the trap doesn't kill instantly, I believe that the pathway to the upper level is hidden somewhere."

"I didn't detect anything like that."

"Well, it's you we're talking about, so..."

Nim and Quartz both nodded at Ritz's words.

Lapis seemed to understand that she shouldn't agree with them and let out a troubled

laugh, while Loren, who didn't want unnecessary trouble, kept a straight face and looked away from Jack.

"Damn it, I can't argue with that."

"It's settled then. Let's go back and search the place where we fell."

Since the leader made the decision, everyone in the party reacted quickly.

Although they were just going back the way they came, they were able to reach it without any problems thanks to Quartz, who had made sure to map the paths they took.

"Is there really a way to go back up?"

The place was right in the middle of the corridor, and other than it stretching in front and behind them, there was no sign of a hidden passageway Lapis had talked about.

They could see the hatch of the pit fall on the ceiling, but it was already closed and the ceiling was too high for any of them to reach.

"As much as I would like to say to shut up and search, I really don't see anything like it."

"I mean, we're silver adventurers. If there was a hidden passageway we would've found it already..."

The sound of something heavy and hard moving sounded as Jack was talking.

Everyone braced for whatever was coming next.

Loren looked up and saw the hatch open with a pole coming down from it.

Everyone, confused at what was happening, stared at Lapis, who had her hand on the wall.

"What did you do?"

No one said anything, so Loren asked Lapis, who was standing next to the wall, on the behalf of everyone else.

“It’s hard to see because of the mana material, but there is a control panel here.”

Loren looked closely at the part of the wall Lapis was pointing at.

He couldn’t believe that there was such a thing on the dimly glowing wall, but after staring at the wall for a while, he could make out pale lines etched onto it.

Loren, who wasn’t a magician, wasn’t sure what kind of device it was, but apparently, those who were knowledgeable about these things realized that it was indeed what Lapis said it was.

“Isn’t this something you should’ve noticed old man?”

“Idiot. A thief like you should be able to notice those sorts of mechanisms.”

Jack and Quartz immediately started blaming each other.

Meanwhile, the pole continued to descend, and when it hit the floor, handles extended from either side of it.

“Man, it feels like we’ve been walking around for nothing.”

“Lucky for Loren and I though. If you had returned to the upper floor, we wouldn’t have run into you.”

“I guess you guys were lucky. But still, can we even climb this?”

The ladder wasn’t thick, and it wasn’t wide either.

It seemed sturdy enough for the girls to climb, but looked like it would break if a warrior with full armor like Ritz tried to climb it.

“It’s from the Ancient Kingdom. I doubt that climbing it would break it.”

Although that’s what Lapis said, she wasn’t that confident in her words.

The ruins were quite old.

No matter how technologically advanced the Ancient Kingdom was, there was no way it could stand against time, and it wouldn’t be strange if it got weaker over time.

“I’ll go first.”

Jack was the first one to volunteer.

“When it comes down to weight, Nim could go first as well, but I’m the only one who could jump back down if there are monsters up there.”

“Good decision. Hurry up and go.” *

“You’re saying that with a different nuance, aren’t you?”

Jack made a pathetic face for a moment at Nim’s words, which sounded like she wanted him to take responsibility for not being able to find the ladder. But he grabbed onto the ladder and started climbing up with light, swift movements, as expected of a thief.

Jack reached the top in no time, grabbed the edges of the hole, and pulled himself up.

“It’s alright. Coast is clear. The ladder’s sturdy, too. Come up one at a time.”

They could see Jack leaning over the hole, telling them to come up.

The remaining members looked around at each other, trying to decide who should go next.

Chapter 16

Climb to Escape

“Hey Lapis. Sorry to interrupt your good mood.”

As he watched Ritz clumsily climb up the ladder, he called Lapis, who was standing next to him with a big smile on her face, as calmly as he could.

Lapis, who was in a good mood being able to explore Ancient Kingdom ruins, turned her smiling face toward Loren.

“Once we climb up there, wouldn’t they tell us to go home?”

Unlike Lapis, who was too excited at the rare opportunity, Loren was calm the whole time.

Lapis froze at Loren’s words.

“Ritz and the others know the way back because they fell down to this floor, right? If we go up, it means they know the way back from there.”

All they had to do now was see if taking them further so they could use Lapis’ divine arts once, was worth it.

If Loren was in their shoes, it would be easier if he told them that they were lucky to get out and to go home, even it meant not being able to use divine arts.

Loren thought that veteran adventurers would come to a similar conclusion, but apparently Lapis hadn’t thought that far ahead, as was still frozen on the spot.

“What should I do. This is unexpected.”

“I guess you have your moments as well.”

“I was too excited by the fact that I could explore the ruins... But we really must go to the upper floor. There’s really nothing down here.”

Loren turned his gaze from Lapis, who looked troubled, to Ritz, who was still climbing the ladder.

To Loren, having Ritz tell him the way back and getting out of there wasn't a problem.

To adventurers like Ritz and his party or to someone who acted out of intellectual curiosity like Lapis, the ruins might be a fun place to be, but to Loren it was just a dangerous place that he could care less about.

But seeing Lapis this dispirited, he felt like he wanted to grant her wish despite the dangers he might have to face.

"Is there like, anything we have to offer?"

"Other than divine arts? That's a difficult question. If I told them I could use magic as well, I would look too suspicious."

"Anything like knowledge or skills?"

"If I can find out what kind of ruin this is, I'll have a pretty good idea of what these ruins look like."

The information that Lapis just said was very useful, even to someone like Loren who didn't know anything about exploring ruins.

He thought that it was more efficient if they had a basic idea of what the insides looked like than to walk around with no idea.

"That's impressive, but how would you know?"

As Ritz barely managed to climb to the top, Quartz started to climb up, but because of his robe and his old age, he was even slower than Ritz.

As Loren asked Lapis, he saw Nim's face become frustrated at how slow the two before her were, and at how long they were making her wait.

"Loren, do you know what the adventurer guild looks like inside?"

"I'm not too sure, but there's the floor with the front desk and a place where you can eat, right? There's also the archives and the guild master's room... Something like

that?”

Loren, who hadn't been an adventurer for long, didn't know too well about the building so he told her what he saw and heard about, and Lapis nodded.

“The details don't matter, but buildings like the adventurer's guild look like each other no matter where it is located. Apparently, it's so that employees could adapt faster whenever they move around to different locations, but the same thing can be said for ruins as well.”

Loren saw Quartz, who was halfway up, miss a rung and fall back down.

Since it was quite a long fall, Loren was worried that he may have hurt himself, but he immediately stood back up, rubbing his butt. But he let out a groan as Nim, who was even more frustrated now, kicked him down.

Although Loren knew she wasn't being serious, and Quartz knew that as well, he couldn't help but see it as abuse, so he averted his eyes.

“People in the Ancient Kingdom built things functionally and efficiently, so most of the time buildings are built similarly.”

“Any exceptions?”

“There always exceptions. Apparently, that stayed the same from ancient times, and there are weirdly built ruins every now and then.”

Lapis crossed her arms, annoyed.

Although slightly unreliable, Loren thought that the fact that Lapis was a priest of the Knowledge god who used divine arts as well as being quite knowledgeable about ruins was good enough of a reason for Ritz to tell them they could stay.

Loren concluded that if he told Ritz what Lapis just told him before Ritz tells them to go home, there was a high possibility that they could stay. As he decided that he would make the effort for Lapis, who still looked frustrated, Quartz gripped the edge of the hole and froze.

“This is bad!”

As soon as he yelled, Jack jumped over Quartz and back down the hole.

Ritz followed right after him, and shouted as he descended.

“Goblins!”

As soon as Nim heard him, she readied her bow. At the same time Jack landed on the ground without a sound, and Ritz landed as well with a dull sound.

“Quartz, jump down!”

Quartz was almost at the top, and it was twice as high than when he fell earlier.

Jack and Ritz could jump down thanks to their agility and sturdiness, but Quartz saw how high up he was and hesitated.

Then came the problem, the horde of goblins.

The goblins’ daggers and clubs scraped his head and shoulders, and he lost his grip on the edge and started falling headfirst toward the ground.

Lapis feared that he might fall on a poor place and be badly injured, but by then Loren, who had been right beside her, was already on the move.

Loren started climbing up the ladder at an incredible speed for someone who had a large great sword on his back, and as soon as he caught Quartz, jumped down with no problem at all.

“S-sorry.”

“Don’t have time for that right now! Run!”

Quartz started to thank Loren as he gently put him down, but at Ritz’s voice, Loren looked up to see what the problem was. As soon as he saw the goblins start dropping down the hole, he started to run.

“What is that!?”

“How am I supposed to know! All I know is that there’s a lot of them!”

Nim and Lapis quickly understood the situation they were in and had already started.

Ritz was running in front of everyone, but Loren decided that from a party's perspective, it was natural for the leader to be in front and choose where to go, and it wasn't that Ritz was quick to run away.

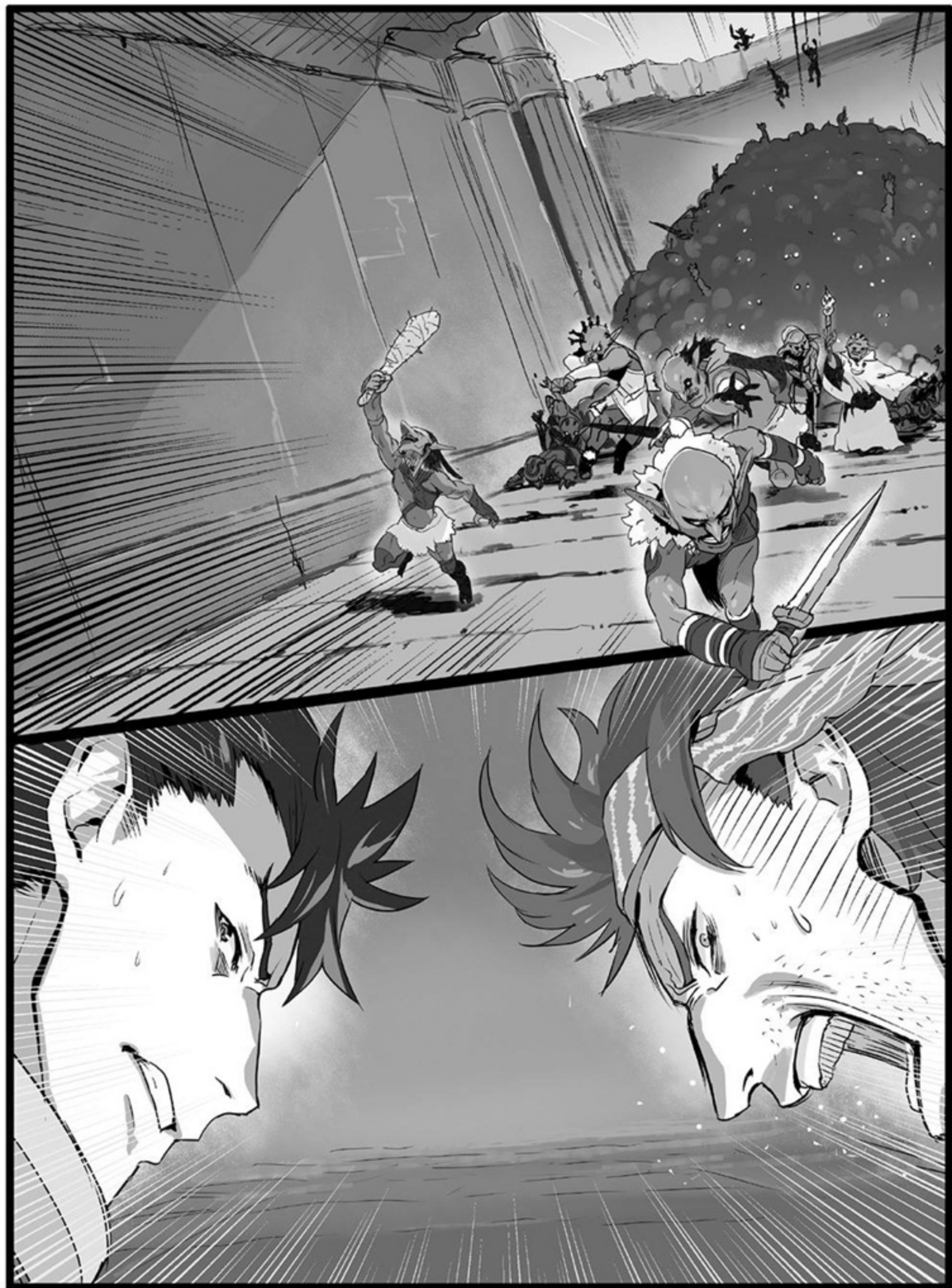
Loren slowed down slightly to let Nim, Lapis, and Quartz ahead of him and got the rear. Loren asked Jack, who was running beside him, what had happened upstairs, but the only thing he got from Jack was a panicked shout.

Loren looked back, wondering what had made a silver adventurer like Jack make such a sound, and a small moan escaped his lips when he saw what made Jack scream.

What he saw was an avalanche of goblins.

He saw goblin after goblin drop down. Those who landed on the floor were crushed by the ones who came after, some of them broke their bones, and they acted as cushions for the goblins that came later. It was a sight that would make anyone want to scream.

Loren couldn't see an end to it, so he discarded the thought of fighting them and focused on running.



“What is this!? What the hell is this!?”

“This is a ruin right!? Why are there so many goblins... where the hell were they hiding, anyway!?”

“I really don’t want to die trampled by goblins.”

“Shut up and run. That’s the only thing we can do right now.”

All of them kept running, complaining and rushing each other the whole time, but they had no idea where to run, and just continued to run blindly through the corridors.

If they took one unlucky turn and ran into a dead end, the only end that awaited them was death from a horde of goblins. Every single one of them tried to think of a way out, but none of them could think of something that could stop a horde of goblins, and could do nothing but pray they don’t run into a dead end.

“T-this is...”

“This, isn’t looking too well.”

The first ones to start running out of stamina was Quartz, who was way older than everyone else, and Lapis, for reasons that only Loren could guess.

Lapis was slowing down because her prosthetic feet had run out of mana due to all the sudden harsh movements.

As the two slowed down and were about to be passed by Loren, he wrapped his arms around each of their waists, hoisted them up, and started running with both under each arm.

“H-hey. Are you okay?”

“I’m used to it.”

Running while carrying disabled comrades was something mercenaries did all the time, and Loren had done this many times before.

Compared to sturdy mercenaries wearing full armor, an old man wearing a robe and a girl wearing priests’ clothing was way less of a burden.

Loren not slowing down even with the weight of his armor added to that, his strength and stamina was at a level where even Jack and Ritz were surprised by them.

“Sorry young one... I’ll make sure to thank you later...”

“I’m sorry for the trouble again, Loren.”

“I’m fine. Don’t worry about me and try to use your brains. We’re going to get caught eventually.”

Loren wasn’t sure who had more stamina, humans or goblins, but compared to them, who all had armor and equipment, the goblins, who had weapons but were lighter in general, seemed to have the upper hand.

Although they couldn’t lose the goblins and the goblins couldn’t catch up to them either, it was only a matter of time before they would be unable to move anymore.

If the goblins caught them at that moment, their sheer numbers would crush all of them.

Loren continued to run behind Ritz and the others, praying that the two he was carrying would think of a solution.

Chapter 17

Recursion to Interception

“Blast them in an area with Fire Ball.”

“Against that many? Same thing as pouring water on a hot stone. Don’t recommend it.”

“Block them using Earth Wall.”

“Make a wall large enough to block this entire corridor? I can do it but... against that many it’ll only give us a moment to pull ahead.”

After Loren told them to use their heads, Quartz and Lapis, under Loren’s arms, were discussing ways to try to deal with the goblin horde.

Although it seemed like a discussion, all they were doing was Lapis giving suggestions and Quartz saying it won’t work, and to Loren it didn’t look like they were getting anywhere.

“How about Fire Storm?”

“I can use it, but twice is my limit. Do you think that would do anything?”

“Most likely not.”

Lapis glanced behind her and replied weakly.

There were so many goblins that Loren didn’t even want to try and count them, and even he, who wasn’t an expert in magic, could see that there were too many to get rid of using a spell once or twice.

“Mister Quartz, you must be quite the magician, being able to use Fire Storm.”

“I’m impressed at your deep knowledge in magic as well, Miss Lapis”

Loren, irritated that the two started complementing each other and laughing, looked

up at the ceiling.

“I don’t mind you guys being friendly and all. But if we don’t think of something quick, we’re all going to be goblin food.”

“No, I believe Nim and I would become seed beds.”

Although Lapis gave an unexpected return to Loren’s slight joke, Quartz returned an objection to it.

“I wouldn’t be so sure about that. A woman from the other party most likely was killed and eaten.”

“I don’t like the thought of being the mother of goblins, but being food for them sounds quite annoying as well.”

Loren was slightly confused at her words, which lacked a sense of danger.

It wasn’t like she didn’t care at all for the party, so Loren thought maybe there was a good reason for her not to feel any danger. He was about to interrogate her about it, but Nim’s desperate voice caught his attention.

“This isn’t good. I’m almost...”

Out of the people running on their own legs, Nim, who most likely had the least amount of stamina, started to slow down.

Despite Loren’s stamina and strength, there was no way he could carry another person along with the two under his arms already.

Even though his back was open, anyone could see that if he carried Nim on his back it would just make him tire faster.

“If I carry you on my back, it’ll be less of a problem.”

Unexpectedly, the one who said that was Jack.

Loren was surprised that it wasn’t Ritz, who was stronger than Jack, who said it but instead it was Jack that did. Nim’s reaction to it surprised him even more.

“Sorry... I might have to count on you.”

“Whoa, this is really bad!”

Jack must have sensed something from Nim’s modest response and panicked, but it didn’t help the situation at all.

“It’s not much of a solution, but I do have an idea.”

Loren decided that if no one gave an idea, even a slightly unreasonable one, they would be wiped out soon enough, so he ran up next to Ritz.

Ritz turned his head towards Loren.

“Hey, do you remember the way back?”

“Not me... but Jack should remember.”

Loren turned to Jack for confirmation, and saw Jack nod.

“Then can we go back to the hatch where the goblins came down from?”

“Can’t use the route we came, but we’ve been going through the same corridors for a while now, so it’s possible.”

Loren felt gloomy at the fact that they’ve been going in circles a few times.

It meant that they wasted time and stamina, but he knew it couldn’t be helped because in their current situation, there wasn’t time for them to make calm decisions or track where they were going.

“Then take us back to the hatch.”

“What are you going to do there?”

To Ritz and Jack, that hatch which rained down a lot of goblins was something they wanted to avoid, and couldn’t see at all what Loren was trying to suggest.

“There’s that many goblins that rained down from the upper floor. I’m sure there aren’t any more of them coming down right now.”

“Why does that matter...”

“They were able to come down at once, but they won’t be able to do that climbing up, right?”

Goblins couldn’t fly.

That was something anyone knew, but since they couldn’t, they would have to use the ladder to get back to the upper floor.

When they came down, they could ignore their casualties and come down many at a time, but if they were to climb the ladder that Lapis had put down, only one or two of them could climb it at once.

“This way we wouldn’t get crushed by their numbers.”

“B-but think about it. They aren’t that dumb. They’re not going to wait for us to climb the ladder, right? If they reach us before we’re all out that’s the end.”

Ritz pointed out an obvious problem with the plan.

Loren knew that based on how Ritz wasn’t that good at climbing ladders, they would be swarmed by the goblins before he even had a chance to climb.

“We can buy time with magic. Use Fire Storm to burn the front and Earth Wall to block the ones in the back.”

If they tried to block all of them with a wall, it would break instantly from the goblins’ momentum.

So, Loren thought that they could burn the front and kill their momentum, then stop them with the wall.

He didn’t think that would be enough to stop them, but it would be enough to buy them some time.

“I see. You can count on me to do that.”

After hearing Loren’s plan, Quartz bumped his fist on his chest, telling him that he could do it.

But that wasn't enough to take Ritz's anxiousness from his face.

"But that's not a number that you could just stop at once."

"We just have to climb up before the wall breaks. Even if we don't make it in time, it's my plan. I'll take the rear."

"You serious? You know that that's not a number one person can handle, right?"

"I just have to deal with the ones that get past the fire and the wall. I don't think I'd have to face too many at once. Just try to climb as fast as you can so that doesn't happen."

Loren gave Ritz a smile, and after thinking for a moment at his words, Ritz gave the order to Jack.

"Jack, take us back to the hatch."

"Got it."

"Quartz, get ready to use the magic Loren talked about."

"Got it."

"When we get there, Jack, you go up first. Then help the others up. I'm the leader of this party, I got the rear."

Ritz, reluctant about Loren taking the rear, announced that he would be the last one up, but Loren denied it with a shake of his head.

"With how slow you climb the goblins are going to be all over you. There's no way we can let you take the rear."

"But still..."

"With a bit of backup, I can scale the ladder easily. I'm the most suited for the job. Don't worry."

While Ritz had been clumsy and slow when he climbed the ladder earlier, Loren had dashed up the ladder like it was nothing and caught Quartz.

Ritz couldn't say anything more, because it was obvious with a glance who had the better chance of surviving.

"I may be new to the whole adventurer business, but I was a mercenary before this. I've covered my comrades' asses so much that I'm bored of it. Leave it to me."

"Sorry... I'm counting on you."

Ritz bowed his head slightly, and Loren nodded, telling him not to worry about it. Then Jack let out a nervous shout.

"We're about to reach the hatch! You'd better pray that it ran out of goblins to pour down!"

If there were still goblins coming down from the hatch, they would be pincered in by them and the ones chasing them and there would be no chance of survival.

But Loren thought that it wouldn't be realistic because it would mean that the ruins contained an unimaginable number of goblins in it.

That thought led Loren to think that this was the best chance they had to get out, and Jack saw the hole in the ceiling and shouted.

"They're not dropping down anymore!"

"Nice! Looks like luck hasn't left us yet! Start climbing!"

Jack, who was in front, jumped onto the ladder and started climbing without even breaking momentum.

Ritz, who reached it a moment later, readied his sword and shield and Nim ducked past him and followed Jack up the ladder.

"Old man, the spells!"

"Swirl before my eyes, o scarlet flames, rage before me. << Fire Storm >>"

At Loren's signal, Quartz started chanting his spell.

A swirling pillar of flame erupted from the ground and reached all the way up to the

ceiling, burning all the goblins in the front.

The flames covered up the whole corridor and killed quite a bit of goblins in its wake, and screams and shrieks erupted from the goblin ranks.

“Stand fast, wall of dirt. << Earth Wall >>”

The heat coming from the flames and the shrieks and burning smell coming from the goblins.

The wall burst up and completely separated them from it.

“Now’s our chance! Climb!”

Lapis, who Loren freed from under his arm, ran to the ladder and started climbing at a speed which matched Jack and Nim.

Meanwhile Quartz, who had used two spells in a row, looked dizzy and was climbing at a slower pace than he had before.

“Come on, climb a bit faster will you...”

“Don’t rush him. We don’t want him to fall.”

Loren stopped Ritz, who impatiently tried to rush Quartz.

If he slipped and fell again, he would have to catch him again, and in case he couldn’t, Quartz might receive injuries that could immobilize him.

Putting that into consideration, it was easier if they made sure every one of them reached the top safely, even if it took some time.

“But the wall isn’t going to last much longer.”

They succeeded in killing the goblins’ momentum with the fire and the wall, but they were already onto breaking the wall that Quartz had set up.

“What’s going on? I know the magic only lasted for a bit, but with the amount of flames, it should be burning hot in there.”

In Loren's calculations, the fire would make the walls and the floor burning hot, making it difficult for the goblins to approach the wall.

Since the goblins were barefooted, their feet would burn if they approached the burnt floor.

But the goblins had already rushed up to the wall and started banging on it.

"There's definitely something wrong with them. Goblins shouldn't have the pride or guts to be so persistent in chasing their prey."

Ritz had his sword and shield raised, but he looked pale.

The fact that these goblins were like nothing he had faced before made even a silver adventurer like him anxious.

"Think about that later. Right now, just think about escaping. Here, your turn to climb."

Quartz, who was climbing for his life, just got pulled up by Nim and Jack.

When Ritz saw that, he hesitated for a second, but immediately sheathed his sword and started climbing the ladder.

But his climbing speed was far from being fast.

Loren hoped that he would reach the top before the wall crumbled, but fate seemed to sneer at his wish, as a large crack appeared in the wall while Ritz hadn't even made it to the middle.

"Looks like I'm going to have to fight one."

Luckily, the corridor was large enough for him to use his great sword with no problem at all.

Watching the crack widen and listening to the pounding behind it, Loren reached behind him with his right hand. He grabbed the handle of his sword, removed the cloth wrapped around it, and pulled it out.

He gripped the sword with both hands, his left hand above his right, and prepared himself.

The wall crumbled, as it were waiting for that stance, and as soon as the burnt up goblins saw him, they roared and rushed toward Loren.

Chapter 18

Interception to Interception

Although the goblins broke through the wall, it wasn't like the whole thing broke down.

Only a portion of it broke where the goblins were coming out of, so the wall was still quite functional.

Loren decided that it was still possible to buy some time. He stirred himself up and took a swift step forward and swept his great sword sideways, cutting two of the goblins in half.

As he caught another one with a back swing, he realized something; the floor was too clean.

After all the goblins that rained down from the hatch and got crushed earlier, there should have been quite a bit of goblin corpses around it.

However, though there were bloodstains on the floor, he couldn't find any of the corpses.

Loren, although not too familiar with monsters, had heard about goblins' eating habits.

He knew that they would eat anything that they could find, but wondered if it was so bad that they would go as far as to eating the corpses of their own.

But still, it was weird that there was no trace of anything left.

Loren, thinking about how many weird things he has encountered this time around, continued to swing his sword with ease.

The goblins' shields and weapons were meaningless against the weight and the force of the great sword it was being swung with.

While crushing shields, snapping daggers, and rendering the defenseless goblins into hunks of meat, Loren, without even turning around, called up to Ritz.

“Are you up yet!?”

“S-sorry!”

Loren glanced up at Ritz’s anxious voice and saw that he just above the half way point.

He decided it was going to take a while, and with a feeling close to giving up, he kicked a goblin that tried to slide under him and stabbed it.

“Can’t you guys pull him up!?”

Ritz was still far from the top, but Loren asked without thinking.

Meanwhile more of the wall crumbled before him, allowing more goblins to flood through.

Loren knew he could still fend them off, so he calmly looked at the number of goblins and the speed which the wall was being broken, and resumed swinging his sword.

He could feel the sensation of cutting flesh and crushing bones in his arms.

Taking a step back so he wouldn’t trip on the dead goblins, he heard the bad news from Lapis.

“Loren! More goblins have appeared up here as well! Jack and Nim are fighting them, but they’re slowly increasing in number!”

“Goblins again!? Why do these ruins like goblins so much!?”

Irritated, Loren took another swing, and another corpse rolled at his feet, staining the floor with its blood.

“Ritz! Are you there yet!”

“Wait just a bit more!”

“I’m fine but the guys up there aren’t! If we take too long, we’re going to be pincer

from both sides!”

“I know! Damn it! I’m so clumsy!”

Loren focused on his own opponents, thinking Ritz and the others had to manage it themselves somehow.

The number of goblins coming past the wall continued to increase, and Loren immediately realized that soon enough, even he wouldn’t be able to deal with them all.

He was keeping them away from the ladder, but he started feeling impatient as the goblins started to surround him.

Even in such a situation, a calm part of Loren’s head caught strange movements from the goblins surrounding him.

Although the goblins came toward him bloodthirsty, as soon as they saw their allies’ dead bodies, they dropped their weapons and started gathering the corpses, ignoring Loren completely.

Loren had no idea what caused them to do that, but thanks to this weird behavior, he faced less goblins than he had first expected.

None of the information in his head explained their weird behavior, but he wasn’t about to ask them about it.

Even though he didn’t know the reason, it was an opportunity.

Not thinking about the logic behind it, if he killed a good number of goblins and spread the corpses around him, the goblins would retrieve them and leave, thinning their numbers.

There was no way that he was not going to take advantage of that.

The goblins that surrounded him were the ones that didn’t pick up the corpses, so if he focused on those, the goblins coming after would have to retrieve their corpses, and the number of goblins that Loren would have to face would not increase by much.

Loren couldn’t tell the difference between the two types of goblins, but he tried to

choose to kill the ones that didn't retrieve the corpses.

Above him, Ritz finally made it to the top and Quartz and Lapis pulled him up.

"You need to hurry Ritz. Jack and Nim can't handle all of them."

"Hurry up Mister Ritz. The goblins aren't our only foes."

"Huh? You mean something other than goblins finally appeared?"

"Well... Something that looks like a goblin."

"What are you talking... Jack! Damn it! Jack!"

Ritz suddenly shouted and tried to rush up the last few rungs, but misplaced his foot, and

Quartz and Lapis barely caught him from falling.

Loren was irritated at Ritz's clumsiness, but judging from their conversation, something had happened to Jack, and guessed that he needed to get up there as fast as he could.

"Man, why does so much shit... Keep coming at me!"

Loren, for the first time, changed the way he swung his great sword.

Up till now, he had only used his arms, but this time he twisted his body while he swung his sword, using the strength in his whole body.

He was already able to crush many goblins with a single swing, but this strike was sharper and faster than ever.

The goblins that took the strike not only got cut into two pieces, but became nothing but a rain of blood and pieces of flesh, and those flew back and rained into the goblins out of the sword's reach.

Loren, who massacred the large number of goblins around him, used that opening to jump onto the ladder and climb up.

He then swung his sword at the ladder beneath him, making sure that the goblins couldn't chase him up, and finished climbing up the ladder, setting foot on the upper floor with no help needed.

He immediately readied his great sword and looked around at the situation, and saw Jack lying down with his back against the wall, blood dripping from his head.

Ritz was using his sword and shield to protect Jack, while Nim was struggling against something that pushed her down onto the ground.

"What the hell is that?"

No matter how Loren saw it, the things that were causing this situation were goblins.

At least, they looked like goblins.

Goblins were usually green and small like a child, but these were closer to black and were larger than Ritz, who was quite large himself.

"Loren, Nim is in trouble!"

"Hey old man, what about your magic!"

"I'm completely out! I can't even use elementary level spells for a while!"

Quartz pointed to one of the goblin like monsters lying on the ground, smoke emitting from its body.

Quartz was able to kill it with a spell, but now he was out of spells to use.

"Loren, you have to help Nim!"

At Lapis' words, Loren remembered he had things to take care of before assessing the situation. He ran up to the mock-goblin, with an arm that had a knife lodged into, it that was reaching for Nim's clothes.

Before it could react, Loren kicked it square in the face.

If it were a normal goblin, the kick would've broke its neck and sent it flying, but the

mock-goblin snapped its head right back and threatened him with a low growl.

Loren ignored it and swung his great sword at the base of its neck.

“You’ve got to be kidding me!?”

The sword that easily cut through numerous goblins got stopped by the mock-goblin’s hard skin and muscle, not even reaching its bones.

Blood dripped from the cut onto Nim, but the mock-goblin showed no signs of caring about the injury, raising its body to reach for Loren.

Loren pushed down with his great sword to keep it from standing up.

Nim, who was pushed down, managed to pull the knife out of the mock-goblin’s arm, and while it was distracted by Loren, she stabbed it in the eye.

The eye wasn’t hard like its skin, and the knife sunk deep into it. The mock-goblin roared and snapped its head back, covering its injured eye with both hands.

Nim used the opportunity to slip out from under it, while Loren pulled out his great sword, and with a fissured yell, swung it at its neck with all his might.

Although the blade got stopped by the skin and muscle earlier, Loren knew what to expect this time.

The blade ripped through its skin and muscle, reaching the bone and crushing it.

Added with the cut he made before, the mock-goblin’s head flew off, blood erupting from its neck.

“You okay Nim!?”

“I’m fine. But Jack and Ritz aren’t.”

Loren turned to Ritz at her words.

He saw Ritz dodge the mock-goblin’s grab, step close into it, and plunge his sword into its flank.

Loren thought that it was over, but with a swift movement that seemed to disregard the blade lodged in it, reached out and grabbed Ritz's head.

"You bastard! Let go!"

Even regular goblins had quite a bit of strength, but if it was larger than Ritz, Loren had no idea how strong it would be.

He could imagine what would happen if something with so much strength grabbed his head.

Ritz knew it as well, and he twisted his sword to try and get out of its grasp, but the mock-goblin's grip didn't waver, and Ritz's body started creaking as it slowly started to put pressure into its hands.

"D-damn it! My bones!"

Ritz would've been crushed by the mock-goblin, but Loren intervened before that could happen.

While it was busy with Ritz, Loren charged at it from behind, and with his momentum and centrifugal force added to the strike, he knocked its head right off its shoulders.

A moment after the head flew off and blood spewed from its neck, it dropped down onto its knees, dropped down, and fell straight into the wall.

"You okay?"

"You saved me. I was about to become a rag doll."

"Don't mention it. How's Jack?"

"I'm alive..."

Although he was still bleeding from his head, he was alive.

When Loren asked what had happened, they gave their explanation.

At first, there were regular goblins, but two of the mock-goblins appeared.

They were able to kill one with Quartz's magic, but Nim's arrows had no effect on the second one, and she was pushed down onto the ground. Jack had tried to save her, but another one showed up and smacked him into the wall, and that's when Ritz entered the fray.

"Sorry Jack. It's my fault."

"Hey, stop it, you're being disgusting. Modesty isn't your thing, so just tend to my wounds already."

Jack pointed at his head and Nim, who kept apologizing in a sad manner, with her ears drooping forward.

Nim nodded and started to treat Jack's injury.

Loren decided to leave them at that, and walked over to Lapis, who was squatted down, next to the two mock-goblins.

"Did you find something?"

"I can guess, but if my speculations are right, it means we've wandered into quite an unpleasant kind of ruin."

"Unpleasant ruin?"

Loren couldn't believe such words from Lapis, who was happy that she was able to explore these ruins earlier, and raised a quizzical voice, but Lapis didn't answer him.

Instead, she walked up to Ritz and cleared her throat.

"Mister Ritz, I'd like to make sure of something."

"Do we have to come with you?"

"No, but it should be in line with exploring the ruins. But above all else, if we don't hurry and shut down these ruins, it's going to cause lots of trouble."

Lapis tilted her head slightly to the side, waiting for an answer. Ritz looked at Loren, asking for his opinion, but Loren shrugged, telling him not to ask him.

Chapter 19

Withdrawal to Explanation

“In any case, let’s move from this place. If we stay, the next wave will come.”

At Lapis’ suggestion, Ritz looked at Jack’s condition.

Jack had suffered a blow to the head from the mock-goblin, and though Nim had treated it, he wasn’t in a good condition. He shook his head to clear his mind, but it seemed ineffective.

“Should I use Divine Arts?”

Lapis asked Jack, whose head was bandaged up and was chugging a potion, but he shook his head.

“Don’t need it. The potion is working. My head is still a bit dizzy though.”

“A blow to the head is quite dangerous, so I recommend seeing a doctor when we get back to the city.”

“Thanks for the warning. If we’re able to get back safely, I’ll do as you say.”

“Can you move?”

Jack bit at Ritz, who seemed worried about him.

“Don’t be stupid. If you want me to move just give the order.”

“It’s not good to push yourself.”

When Nim, still looking discouraged, said that to Jack, who was trying to put up a bold front, he patted her on the shoulder, trying to reassure her.

“I just took a good one and went unconscious. Don’t worry about it. I can move properly.”

“I’m the one with the bigger problem. I’m out of magic spells. I can’t fight anymore.”

Quartz spoke up apologetically, but no one blamed him for it.

If Quartz hadn’t used his magic to kill one of the mock-goblins, the situation would’ve been way worse, and everyone thanked him for that, much less think of him as a burden.

“It couldn’t be helped. In any case, let’s hurry and move from here. More goblins might come, and if those black ones come again, I don’t think we could handle them.”

As soon as Ritz spoke up, Nim lent Jack her shoulder and helped him up. Then the group started to walk away from that place.

Loren, who had instantly slain the two mock-goblins that even silver adventurers had a hard time dealing with, and Lapis, who announced that she found out something about the ruins, led the group.

“What were they? Their skin and flesh were hard, but their bones were even harder. Were those a kind of high rank goblin?”

Loren looked at his great sword’s blade as he asked Lapis.

The blade was able to cut down the two mock-goblins, but Loren found some large nicks in the blade.

It wasn’t as sharp as most swords and was used more like a blunt weapon, but the edges were close to crumbling.

“They were similar to hobgoblins, but I’m sure that those were probably goblins that got larger.”

Lapis was walking forward with no hesitation at all.

It was as if she knew where she was going, and although cautious, she was leading the group confidently.

“If that was a hobgoblin, there was no way they would’ve survived such a blow from Loren and not die. That probably could’ve made an ogre’s head fly off, couldn’t it?”

“Never fought one before, so I have no idea. What were those black goblins?”

“Loren, have you noticed anything else?”

Since Lapis asked him a question instead of answering his question, Loren decided to tell her about what he noticed while he was fighting.

“The goblins were retrieving other goblins’ corpses. I don’t think they were going to preserve them as food. The goblins here are definitely strange.”

Lapis wasn’t walking that quickly.

They had no choice because of Jack and Quartz, but Loren was becoming slightly paranoid about more goblins appearing out of nowhere. He realized that he was thinking about goblins again, and tilted his head.

It was true that from the cave all the way to the ruins, the only monsters he had seen were goblins, but that didn’t mean that the next thing that came out would be goblins as well.

As Loren warned himself that biased thoughts will cloud his judgment and affect his reaction when the next problem occurred, Lapis seemed to have read his mind and told him.

“The only monsters in these ruins are goblins. Probably.”

“What?”

Loren was confused that the monsters that appear in an Ancient Kingdom ruin would be limited to goblins.

It wasn’t that he wanted there to be a guardian of sorts like he had heard from stories, but the probability of it happening being completely zero wasn’t too satisfying, either.

“Loren, have you heard of pharmaceuticals and alchemy?”

The question seemed unrelated to what they were talking about until now.

But if it was from Lapis, who was demon kind, Loren decided that she must have a reason for it and answered her question.

“I’ve heard of it. But I don’t know anyone who practices them.”

“Knowing about it is enough. Then do you know about the test subjects people who practice them use?”

For a second Loren was at a loss for words as he couldn’t understand what Lapis was talking about, but immediately realized what kind of answer Lapis was looking for.

“You mean mice? The ones they use to test new medicine and stuff”

“That’s correct. Then do you know why they use mice?”

Loren didn’t know the answer to this one.

He didn’t know anything about this kind of topic at all.

“Do you think a mercenary would know something like that?”

“It’s a useless piece of information, anyway. They use mice as test subjects because they have short sexual cycles, grow quickly, and produce many offspring at once. Do you know anything else that fits this description?”

“Yeah, I’ve got a clue.”

A creature that could mate with anything, grow up in no time, and increase in numbers rapidly.

Loren said the name of the creatures that he had encountered enough for a lifetime during this quest with disbelief.

“Goblins?”

“That’s exactly right. They’re easy to breed, economically stable, won’t hurt one’s conscience, and humanoid. Are there any other creatures that are more fit to use as test subjects? I don’t think so.”

Lapis explained with quite a bit of emphasis, but Loren wasn’t sure what she was trying to emphasize, and just asked her about a word that caught his ears.

“Economically sound?”

“They’ll eat anything they’re given. Whether it be leftovers or corpses. Records from the Ancient Kingdom says that when they gave them trash from the city, the amount of trash decreased by 80%.”

“Well, I guess that’s pretty economically sound?”

“Plus, no matter how many goblins gathered together, they were nothing but dust to the Ancient Kingdom. It seems that while they were increasing their numbers, they selectively bred them at the same time, and made all sorts of different kinds of goblins.”

When Lapis said different kind of goblins, Loren thought of the black mock-goblin that he had faced earlier.

If that wasn’t a hobgoblin or any sort of high rank goblin, the kind of goblin that Lapis talked about seemed to be what the mock-goblin was.

“This is why there are quite a number of goblin farms inside Ancient Kingdom ruins, but this is something more terrible than that.”

Judging by the conversation, Loren guessed that they were in a farm that people in the Ancient Kingdom used for breeding test subjects, but before he could mention anything, Lapis denied his speculation.

Wondering what was terrible about this place, Loren waited for Lapis to continue.

“This isn’t an ordinary farm.”

As she said that, Lapis was about to reach the corner of the path.

From the shadow of the corner, two goblins suddenly jumped out.

Loren was about to raise his great sword, but Lapis grabbed their heads like she was picking flowers on the side of the road.

Though it looked like she didn’t put any strength in her arms, the goblins’ heads turned 180 degrees with their bodies still facing forward.



At the same time as Loren heard bones being broken, Lapis reached into her pocket, pulled out a handkerchief and a bottle filled with perfume, and sprayed the contents of the bottle onto the handkerchief.

She wiped her hands, which touched the goblins' heads, and casually kicked in front of her two times.

Lapis then walked past the dead goblin corpses, which flew back a few meters, not even bothering to take notice of them.

Her movements seemed way too natural, and since it occurred past the corner, Loren, who was walking next to her, was the only one who saw it.

“You... You're pretty strong, aren't you?”

If she could pull something like that off, Loren wished she could've done it earlier.

But if the others saw that Lapis, who didn't look like she was trained at all being skilled in close quarter combat, there was the danger of her losing their trust and losing her credibility.

Usually, priests couldn't snap a goblin's neck with their bare hands.

“Well, it's me we're talking about, so. Back to the subject. This isn't an ordinary farm. It's definitely a farm, but it seems that they were conducting experiments of physical modification and improvement, and evolution at the same time.”

“What's that supposed to mean?”

“To put it simply, they were enhancing the strength of goblins as regular goblins. The goblins that chased us. Don't you think it's strange that there were no high rank individuals in that horde?”

High ranked monsters were indeed rare, but it wouldn't have been strange if there were at least one or two of them within that many number of goblins.

Lapis was saying that it was strange that they didn't see any sort of high rank goblin at all.

“It's probably because the goblins produced here are adjusted so they won't evolve

into high rank individuals. They were trying to improve only goblins, so it wouldn't have any meaning if they became hobgoblins or goblin mages."

In experiments, the same species of the test subject are always used.

That must have been why the researchers of the Ancient Kingdom adjusted the goblins, but Loren frowned at their bad tastes.

Loren guessed that one part of the adjustments that they made was making the goblins chase intruders until they caught up.

Then the goblins themselves would chase intruders away, so there was no need to put a separate protection system.

"They're okay with them growing bigger, though?"

The mock-goblin that he had faced earlier was way larger than an ordinary goblin.

Loren still found it hard to convince himself that the mock-goblin was an ordinary goblin.

"Even though they're big, they're still goblins."

"Do you think the goblins in here found the crack and entered the cave? Also, wasn't there was a goblin mage over there?"

"The adjustments are probably limited to inside the ruins. It must have evolved because it ran outside of it."

Lapis said it like he should've found that out easily, but to Loren, there was no way he could know, nor did he want to.

"Anyways, this is that kind of facility. I believe that it was dormant, but I'm not sure what restarted it. It could've been someone who did it manually, or whoever unsealed the ruins itself was the key that did it."

"What about them not using women as seed beds or collecting corpses?"

"There's no need for seed beds. There's probably equipment that breeds them, and baby goblins should be produced there. The corpses are probably being reused to

make new ones. This is quite an eco-friendly facility, reusing their trash.”

“If we leave it like this, wouldn’t it become a big problem?”

This is what Lapis had said earlier.

Loren tried to confirm, but her reply made him think maybe Lapis herself didn’t seem to think it was that big of a problem.

“That big black goblin is an improved goblin. It was made in this facility, but the problem lies within its actions.”

“Problem? What in the world would that be...”

“The goblins from this facility don’t need seed beds. But the goblin that attacked Nim tried to rip off her clothes.”

For a second Loren wasn’t sure what Lapis was trying to say, but immediately guessed what Lapis meant and his face became slightly pale.

“Have you realized? There’s no need to, but it assaults women. It means that it knows about assaulting women for reasons other than mating.”

Animals generally mate in order to reproduce.

This was the same for monsters, and although goblins quenched their sadism by assaulting women, the goal itself is to reproduce.

There was only one existence that Loren knew of that did it for enjoyment.

“In conclusion, there were traces of human inside those goblins. Probably the people from the party that was competing with Mister Ritz’s party.”

“Are you sure you can call that a goblin?”

“It definitely is a goblin. You don’t call a goblin born from a human mother a half goblin, right? Even if there are traces of human in it, a goblin is a goblin.”

Loren stopped trying to understand what she was talking about.

It was because he decided that knowing that these ruins were built to produce goblins was currently up and running, and that some of them had the intelligence of a human, was enough, and everything else was unnecessary information.

“The reason I said that it was going to be a big problem, is because this facility physically enhances and improves goblins, and the fact that the goblins produced in this facility are obtaining human intelligence and learning abilities.”

“That’s...”

“It’ll produce an even stronger goblin from the experiences of the mock-goblins. After repeating that many times over... What do you think would happen if goblins became tougher than dragons, accumulated knowledge and experience, and gained abilities according to its strength? That’s why I said we need to make these ruins dormant again.”

Lapis spoke of a future that Loren didn’t want to think of, but she said it in such a relaxed manner, it seemed like she thought it was someone else’s problem.

Chapter 20

From Searching Houses to Determining Actions

“You said return it to its dormant state, but how?”

“I haven’t really thought that far ahead. It’s not like I know everything. There’s many things that I don’t know about.”

To Loren, nothing rang a bell when it came to shutting down the ruins.

He asked Lapis, but apparently there were things that even she didn’t know about.

Loren thought that it would be so much easier if Lapis, who seemed to know a lot about ruins, knew how to shut it down, but Lapis added with a huffy look.

“Every ruin is different, so there isn’t a definite way to do it. It’s not like I haven’t done enough research.”

“Uh, okay?”

“It’s written all over your face Loren. That’s not a good thing.”

“Then where are we headed right now?”

Luckily for Loren, Ritz caught up to them and changed the subject.

When Loren gave her a questioning look, Lapis looked slightly dissatisfied, but sighed and answered.

“I was thinking of searching the rooms of the Ancient Kingdom’s citizens. I’m sure there was a person in charge of this place, and the manual for these ruins are most likely there as well.”

“There were people living here?”

There was no detailed record of where the capital of the Ancient Kingdom was.

Some said that it was at the bottom of the ocean, and others said it was flying up in the clouds, and the records of how it perished were nonexistent as well.

If the records did exist, adventurers would swarm it, looking for lost knowledge and technology, but nothing of the sort had been found yet.

Even if someone managed to find it, it wouldn't be in a place that was close to any city or village.

Loren had traveled here from the village of Ain for the quest, so he knew how far the goblin nest was from there.

Loren was surprised that people actually used to live in this remote place, but Lapis seemed to have an idea and started talking about it.

"They did have the magic <<Teleport>>, but paying the high mana cost of using such a spell just for transportation between the city and the facility isn't ideal."

"Well, I wouldn't know."

"It would be better to make living quarters inside the facility and make sure people can live comfortably there."

"Is that the way it is?"

"That's exactly how it is. There should be houses for the researchers and related people in here. We should go and search their homes for a way to shut down the ruins. Also while we're at it, if we find anything of value, we take them for ourselves."

"Don't proudly announce that you're going to steal stuff."

Ritz, who was walking behind him, said to Lapis with a tone of exasperation, but Lapis didn't seem to care. She tightened her fist and firmly declared.

"The owners have died hundreds of years ago. It's not stealing if they're dead."

"But still. If these ruins were put on pause, wouldn't it mean the people in the Ancient Kingdom, did it? Then wouldn't they have already taken everything valuable?"

Loren thought that if he were the one in charge, that's what he would've done. Lapis

suddenly looked disappointed and drooped her shoulders.

“Yes, that’s probably true. And in that case, it’s also possible that they took the manual for the ruins and it doesn’t exist here.”

“If that’s true, what are we going to do?”

“What should we do?”

Loren looked behind him with a troubled face, as Lapis returned his question with the same question.

He saw Ritz and the others, but they were in no shape for another battle.

Ritz and Nim were still able to fight, but Jack’s injury prevented him from being able to fight freely, and Quartz was out of spells.

Loren himself wasn’t in his best condition either.

“Man, my sword...”

Along with the crumbling blade from the fight with the mock-goblin, it seemed that there was damage done to the blade itself as well, so his sword was slightly tilted.

The goblin was indeed quite tough, but it was also because Loren hadn’t repaired it well from the last battle he fought as a mercenary, and even though he regretted not taking it to get repaired, his regret didn’t do anything for him now.

“I think it’ll break after another two or three of those mock-goblins.”

“That’s a problem. But... procuring another weapon isn’t going to be easy.”

“If it breaks, I’ll think of something then. Right now, we need information.”

“That’s exactly what we need. Time to raid!”

After firmly raising her voice, she opened the door in front of them.

Jack made a shocked face as Lapis suddenly opened the door without even checking for traps, but Lapis walked in with no worries at all.

Loren guessed that they reached the living quarters, and Lapis' actions were based on the calculation that no one would put a trap on their own door, but he still thought that she was acting overly confident. When he walked in after Lapis, he saw her already searching for things.

“Is she okay?”

Ritz, who came in a moment later, asked Loren, but all he could manage to do was shrug.

It was indeed a question that Loren didn't know the answer to, but he didn't want to tell that to Ritz and make him uncomfortable.

“I'm actually quite familiar with these kinds of ruins. Rest assured and leave everything to me.”

The room looked like a private room, with a bed and bookshelf, but both had rotted over the long period of time.

Lapis started flipping them over with no reserve at all, and though her actions looked like she was familiar with the place, it also looked as if she was flipping over random things, so it was hard to tell if she actually knew what she was doing.

“She knows more than us for sure, so we should let her do her thing.”

That was all Loren managed to tell Ritz as Lapis started to look more like a robber than a priest, pulling out shelves and flipping the bookshelf.

“There's nothing useful at all.”

Lapis' raid moved from room to room.

She didn't find much of anything valuable, but still managed to find a few books and accessories, as well as some coins.

The books were written in the Ancient Kingdom language so Loren had no idea what they were about, but Lapis told him that they were all about the ruins, so if Ritz and his party took them back, it would end their expedition in a success.

“Can't we just take these and go back home?”

Ritz's objective was to gather information on the ruins, not reverting it to the state it was in before.

If they were done with their job, heading back and letting the country or guild handle this situation was indeed an option.

Loren knew that if he was in their shoes, he would have asked the same thing.

Even more so if the people in his party were injured and half of them unable to fight.

"I don't mind, but... I hope you can get back safely."

Although Lapis replied in a light tone, the words were from a person who knew exactly the current state of Ritz's party.

It would be fine if they were lucky enough to reach the exit without running into anything, but chances of that was slim, and if they ran into a large number of goblins or mock-goblins, there was no way there were going to survive.

Ritz had to choose whether to take that risk, or even if it meant facing further dangers, stick with Loren, who could fight the mock-goblins head on, and Lapis, who could use Divine Arts.

Both had their pros and cons. Loren knew that it was completely up to Ritz, and decided not to say anything.

"Wouldn't it be better if you guys came with us? It's not like these ruins are going to go out of control in the span of a few days. Wouldn't it be better if we report this and let the higher ranks take care of this...?"

"When you say higher ranks, do you mean gold ranks and mystic* ranks? I wonder how long it's going to take for word to reach them?"

Lapis was talking about adventurers who were a rank or two higher than Ritz and his party.

The rank system started at copper, iron, silver, and above those were gold and mystic ranks. Adventurers who were above gold were said to have exceeded the limits of humans, and their strength was incomparable to the ranks below. There weren't that many, and the number of gold ranks were in the hundreds, while the number of

mystic* ranks were in the tens.

The highest existing rank was the crimson** rank, but less than ten of them existed.

Lapis was implying that there was no way to know how much time and money it would cost to ask those people to take on this quest.

“I won’t stop you if you decide to go back. I pray that you can get out safely.”

Ritz was at a loss for words, looking quite discouraged.

“You’re pretty ruthless.”

Loren whispered to Lapis, and Lapis replied, also in a whisper.

“There wouldn’t be anything beneficial for both groups if we force them to stay.”

“So it’s already decided that I’m going with you.”

“That’s-...”

Lapis, who was flipping through yet another book, suddenly went silent. She slowly stopped flipping through the book and looked up at Loren.

“You’re not, going to come?”

Lapis suddenly asked him, looking like a puppy about to be thrown away. Loren, wondering how serious she was being right now, answered without a pause.

“Too late for me to turn back now. I won’t leave you on your own.”

“I’m relieved. This is a bit too much for me to handle alone. Thank you.”

Loren rubbed his nose and looked away from Lapis, who was smiling at him.

He didn’t have any experience of anyone thanking him back when he was a mercenary, and although Lapis’ straightforward gratitude and happy expression didn’t feel bad, it did make him feel a bit of embarrassment.

“I have some good news for you, Loren.”

“What’s that?”

Although she said it was good news, Loren couldn’t really take it seriously at this point.

Without showing it on his face, he lamented that ever since he accepted Sarfe’s invitation, nothing good has happened to him.

Not noticing Loren’s frustration at all, Lapis took out a book from the shelf and waved it proudly in front of Loren’s eyes.

It was definitely old, but somehow preserved very well, and although the color was faded from it and the corners were crumbling, he could make out the words on it.

“Even if you put that in my face, I have no idea what it says.”

“This is the manual we’ve been looking for. It has the instructions for shutting down the ruins as well.”

“You’re able to read that, huh. Impressive.”

“I’m a priest of the Knowledge god, after all.”

Loren, thinking that other priests of the Knowledge god probably wouldn’t know how to read the language, stared at the book held up in front of him.

Lapis opened up the black leather cover and pointed at a part of a page to tell Loren where the instructions were, but of course he couldn’t understand a word that was written on there.

“Are all priests of the Knowledge god this extensively knowledgeable?”

“There are some. Like me.”

Loren didn’t miss Lapis’ gaze slightly turning away from him.

He guessed that saying that priests of the Knowledge god knew many things was just an excuse, and all the things she knew were things the demon kind knew about.

“So, what do we need to do?”

“There’s a control room somewhere. We need to use the control panel to get it to shut down. Let’s head over there immediately... Have you made up your mind, Mister Ritz?”

Ritz looked back at his party, then back at Lapis, and finally made up his mind.

“We’ll go with you guys. I feel like we’ll have a higher chance of surviving if we do.”

“I see. Then let’s hurry to the control room. Once we get there, the job should be as good as done.”

Lapis closed the manual and tucked it under her arm.

As Ritz made his decision, the only thing left to do was act.

For Loren, whose thoughts became completely pessimistic at this point, couldn’t help but think that there was no way they would get to the control room without trouble, and tightened his face.

Chapter 21

Moving to Defending

“The person who oversaw this place must have been a nice person. There aren’t any weird riddles that we need to solve or keys we need to find.”

Lapis, while jogging toward what it seemed to be the control room, was evaluating the person who oversaw the facility.

“Mean people would make up riddles that would make you want to rip your heart out trying to figure out.”

“You serious?”

Loren didn’t really get it, but he wondered what kind of ruins Lapis had explored before this one.

He wanted to ask her, but had a feeling that she would start talking about something unspeakably terrifying, so he was scared to ask.

“I’ve read it in a book.”

“I’m sure you did.”

Lapis somehow guessed what Loren was thinking, and gave a reply, but to Loren, it sounded like nothing but an excuse.

He would believe her even if she said that she explored tens and twenties of ruins already. That is what his image of Lapis was at this point.

“I really did read it in a book, you know!?”

“Okay, let’s say that that’s true, so hurry up and lead us to the control room!”

Surprisingly, it wasn’t Loren that rushed Lapis, but it was Ritz, who was running right behind them.

Although he chose to follow Loren and Lapis, it didn't change the fact that half his party couldn't fight and they didn't know when more goblins would appear.

Loren thought that if it were just goblins, Ritz could handle them on his own, but the fight with the mock-goblin seemed to make him want to avoid goblins at all costs.

"Man, this quests sucks."

"Can't say that I don't understand that feeling."

Loren understood why Ritz couldn't help but curse.

He didn't know much about exploring ancient ruins, but he didn't believe that there would be many of quests that would take them to ruins such as the one they were in right now.

He thought that Ritz and his party were very unfortunate to have chosen this quest, but Lapis softly whispered to him.

"We've wandered into these ruins, you know? We're way unluckier than they are."

"Can you read minds or something?"

"Loren, you keep writing your thoughts all over your face. You should really be careful, okay?"

At Lapis' words, Loren reached up and rubbed his face.

When he was a mercenary, he had never looked straight at a person's face to try and guess what that person was thinking.

No one had said that to Loren until Lapis had just now.

But since Lapis had accurately guessed what he was thinking many times already, he decided that his emotions and thoughts must really be easily readable by looking at his expression.

"In comparison, I would say that the party that was competing against Ritz's would be the unluckiest."

“Yeah, well... I guess that’s true.”

“Well, enough chatting for now. We’ve arrived.”

Lapis stopped in front of a pair of large doors.

It didn’t have keyholes or handles on it, so Loren wondered how Lapis was going to open them.

Lapis walked up to them with the manual in hand, and with her other hand, swiftly traced a part of the doors.

The parts where Lapis traced started glowing, and the doors opened forward without a sound.

“That’s impressive.”

“It’s too early for compliments.”

The room they walked into was quite large.

Lined up across the wall from the entrance, a large number of boxes were stacked together, with words in the Ancient Kingdom language etched onto them.

It was a dreary room with nothing else inside it, but Loren looked at the walls on either side and saw another pair of large doors.

“This is the control panel. This can control the whole facility.”

Lapis walked up to one of the boxes and touched the surface, then started hitting it.

As soon as she started doing that, the words on the boxes started to change.

But all Loren could tell was that they were changing, and had no idea how they were changing.

“You sure you can do this?”

“Of course. You can count on me. This is a piece of...”

Lapis stopped talking.

Loren looked at what Lapis was staring at and saw red words on the surface of the box.

“Uh, what?”

“What’s wrong?”

“This is weird. It keeps kicking me out when I try to operate it. I was able to turn on the control panel and all I need to do is send the shutdown signal...”

Lapis, looking unsatisfied at the result, tried again to gain control, but the red words popped up again.

Loren didn’t know what they meant, but he did know that Lapis failed to gain access yet again.

While Ritz and the others looked on with anxious looks, Lapis knitted her brow and read through the manual again and tilted her head.

“This is strange. I didn’t mess up operating it.”

“If that isn’t the problem, do you have any idea what might be?”

“If there *was* anything, I would’ve fixed it already... I wonder what’s wrong? Maybe the control panel itself became weird after all the time that passed? If that’s the problem, there’s no way to fix it.”

As she said that, Lapis traced her fingers on the box once again.

This time the whole surface flashed red and black words started flowing across the surface.

The sudden change made Ritz and the others back off, and Loren, who was surprised as well, continued to watch over Lapis.

Lapis put her hand on her chin and started thinking, and after a moment, clapped her hands together.

“That’s right. This is a laboratory.”

“What about it? Anyways, what’s with the red box and the words on them?”

“There are always researchers inside laboratories.”

“That’s... I guess there is.”

“Researchers are usually registered into the laboratory’s system.”

“So, what? What are you trying to say here?”

Loren couldn’t understand what Lapis was talking about and began to get irritated, but she took no notice of it and traced her finger on the box’s surface once again.

Meanwhile, the words that were flowing across the surface of the box sped up, and the light that was being emitted from the walls became a eerie shade of red as well.

Then the three doors on each wall fully opened.

“H-hey. What’s going on?”

Ritz asked Lapis nervously, but she replied without even looking up, with her hands still moving furiously.

“I’ve failed the biometric authentication.”

“Biometric... What?”

“This control panel is only supposed to be operated by researchers registered into the system. Since someone that isn’t registered, in this case that would be me, tried to operate it, it kicked me out.”

“What?”

Ritz and the others started panicking as they finally understood what was happening, but Lapis paid no attention to them and kept working.

“Since I failed to send the shutdown command three times, it locked me out. I can’t operate it.”

“Is that what the red and black words are talking about?”

Although Loren asked Lapis, a part of him knew that he was wrong.

He felt himself becoming more pessimistic by the second, but after all the bad things that he had experienced so far, he started to think it might be okay to have pessimistic thoughts.

“That’s incorrect. The red words in the beginning were warnings, but these black words aren’t.”

“Then what does it say?”

“To put it simply, the system recognized us as intruders.”

Although Lapis said it like it was nothing, the reality that they were facing wasn’t something that should’ve been said so lightly. At Lapis’ words, Loren smiled weakly, and the rest of them turned pale.

However, during all that, Lapis continued to work.

“What are you doing!?! This is really bad!”

Ritz tried to grab Lapis, but Nim and Jack, who managed to stay calm, held him back.

They did so, because they knew lashing out at Lapis wouldn’t do anything, but their worry and anxiousness could also be seen on their faces.

“The facility’s defense mechanism just activated.”

“Can you be more specific?”

It may have been obvious for some people, but Loren had no idea what was going to happen.

After Loren had asked for an explanation, Lapis put her thoughts together and explained their current situation.

“The ruins have recognized us as foreign existences, and will eliminate us using goblins.”

“What are we going to do?”

“I believe that all the goblins that are already produced will all rush towards this room, so for the time being, please keep them away.”

Ritz and his party’s faces were filled with despair.

Loren grabbed the handle of his great sword and prepared for battle.

If the mock-goblins came, it would be quite a hard fight, but there was a chance that they wouldn’t show up.

There were three entrances, but he didn’t think that many of them would swarm in at once. As Loren thought that they would still have chance if only a few came at a time, he heard Lapis’ voice.

“I’ll try to fool the system. Once I get in, it won’t matter how many goblins are here.”

“I just have to buy you some time, right?”

“I’m sorry. I’ll be defenseless while operating this, so.”

“How do you even know how to do that anyway?”

Although he felt hopeless, Ritz must have realized that fighting was the only choice they had right now. Ritz asked Lapis as he readied his sword and shield.

“I’m a priest of the Knowledge god, after all!”

“You can’t say that every time, you know that?”

Loren snapped at her convenient excuse.

A part of him was trying to warn Lapis that it won’t work for everything, but the other part was trying to save the reputations of other priests of the Knowledge god that were out there.

He also didn’t want Ritz and the others to get a false image of them, either.

“I haven’t said anything that isn’t true you know?”

“I guess you haven’t, but... Never mind, just keep doing what you’re doing.”

As much as Loren wanted to defend the priests’ reputations, he reminded Lapis that there were other things they had to do right now. Lapis nodded and went back to focusing on the control panel.

Chapter 22

From Defending to Changing for the Worse

“They’re here!”

Ritz’s voice rang out throughout the room.

The monsters that burst through the doors were regular goblins.

Although there weren’t as many as earlier, when they were being chased down the corridors, there were still quite many them.

Plus, the ruins had recognized Loren and the others as intruders, so there was no way to know how many more goblins were on the way.

“Damn it, fighting is the only chance we’ve got! Quartz, move closer to the young lady! Nim, stay near them and support us with your arrows! Jack, can you move!?”

“Yeah, I got this, god damn it!”

Although he was injured, Jack’s voice rang out loud and strong.

Loren decided that he was fine and started swinging his great sword.

The room was large enough for him to swing it about with no problem.

The problem was that it wouldn’t stay intact for much longer, but Loren decided not to think about it and jumped into the midst of the goblins, bashing the blade against them.

The great sword, which was more of a blunt weapon than a sharp blade, caught a few goblins that jumped towards him, and while some of them split into two pieces and spraying blood everywhere, others got their bones crushed and fell limp onto the ground.

Loren made sure to crush them with his foot, as they weren’t completely dead yet, and

looked for his next prey. He then saw a black mock-goblin enter the room from one of the other doorways.

“Crap! It’s here!”

“Leave that one to me.”

The mock-goblin didn’t have a weapon in its hands, and reached for Loren with its bare hands.

Loren raised his great sword high over his head and charged towards it.

He let out a yell and brought the sword down on the mock-goblin, which raised its left arm to try to block the strike. He cut right through its arm and the sword sunk deeply into its shoulder, all the way to its collarbone.

As blackened blood spewed out from the cut, Loren put his foot on the screaming mock-goblin and pulled his sword out. He used that momentum to raise it above his head again and swung it straight down onto its flank.

Luckily, he didn’t hit any bones, and with the force behind the strike, cut the mock-goblin’s stomach open. As soon as the great sword passed through, its intestines started dropping out onto the floor.

But the mock-goblin paid no attention to its injury and went straight for Loren, who had just finished the swing.

Loren was surprised at its toughness, but as he returned a backswing, it caught the mock-goblin right on the neck, and it sank to the ground gurgling blood.

“That’s incredible... No matter how many times I see it.”

“If you’ve got time to talk, use it to kill more goblins.”

Warning Ritz, who was staring at him blankly, Loren looked down at the blade of his great sword.

The great sword, which was completely doused in the dark blood of the goblins, looked like it didn’t take much damage, but to Loren, who was holding the blade aloft, knew that it wouldn’t last much longer.

“This isn’t good.”

He murmured to himself, as he swept his great sword across some goblins that neared him.

If it were just the regular goblins, he could use the great sword for a bit longer with no problem, but the large mock-goblins, whom were way tougher, drained the blade’s durability much quicker.

“Lapis! How much longer is it going to take?”

Loren had no idea what Lapis was doing, but she had said that once she did it, the goblins wouldn’t be a problem anymore.

The only thing he could do was pray that she would finish what she was doing, before his sword broke.

“I’m trying my best, you know?”

Quartz was standing near Lapis, and Nim was near him, planting arrow after arrow into the goblins.

Every time she released an arrow, a goblin fell, but they kept on coming, wave after wave through the doorways.

“My opponent is a system of the Ancient Kingdom ruins. There’s no way it’s going to fall that easily.”

“I don’t need that kind of talk! I want to know how much longer it’s going to take!”

“It’ll take more than a few minutes, but it won’t take an hour.”

Loren was irritated at her ambiguous reply.

There was no way for him to tell time inside that room.

In cities, there was usually a magic item inside a clock tower that told the time, but once you left the city, there was no way to check time.

He knew there was no point in blaming Lapis, but he couldn’t do anything about the

irritation that was building up.

“If only I had a magic spell left...”

“That can’t be helped. It can’t be helped, but I’m also about to run out of arrows.”

Nim tried to comfort Quartz, who was regretting not being able to do anything, but her face became grim as she saw her supply of arrow slowly deplete.

If she could retrieve some of the arrows from the goblin corpses it would be a bit better, but fights were happening all around her, so she couldn’t find an opening to do so.

“There’s no end to them! The bodies just keep piling up!”

Silver adventurers like Jack and Ritz had no problem dealing with normal goblins, but the mock-goblins were a bit of a different story.

Goblin corpses were strewn all over the floor, and they soon started seeing goblins collecting the corpses.

“They’re not forgetting to retrieve the corpses, huh.”

“Yes, they’re valuable materials and sources of information after all.”

As Loren was taking care not to slip on the blood across the floor, he heard Lapis say something he couldn’t ignore.

He swept his great sword and cut through a group of goblins, then turned his head toward Lapis.

“What did you say just now?”

“Materials and source of information?”

“I understand material, but why source of information?”

“They should be using them as sources of information for enhancing goblins. The best way to get battle information and experience is through physical experience, after all.”

Loren gulped and looked down at a goblin's corpse lying on the ground.

Apparently, the ruins were collecting corpses like these, and using the experience from its brain to create new goblins.

As Loren found out that killing the goblins meant that they were helping the ruins enhance the goblins, he planted his palm on his forehead.

"Then that means, the more we fight them..."

"The goblins get tougher and tougher. According to the manual, it takes a while for the ruins to make the physical bodies, but installing the experience only takes a few seconds."

"So, what you're saying is..."

Right when Loren was getting a bad feeling, a new wave of goblins rushed into the room.

Ritz and Jack both looked tired, but immediately moved to fight them off.

They soon realized that these goblins were slightly different than the ones from before.

The goblins until now had swung their weapons aimlessly and couldn't properly use their shields, and weren't that hard to deal with.

But the new goblins knew how to use their weapons as well as their shields, and were harder to fight.

"What's happening? They got smarter!?"

"You good for nothing goblins!"

Although they knew how to use their weapons, their fighting style wasn't that different from the ones before, and they still weren't a match for Ritz and Jack.

But their large numbers were still a threat, as both started being covered in small cuts and bruises.

One of Nim's arrows was used to kill a goblin, but they soon started blocking her arrows with their shields and weapons.

"The chances of us surviving is going down as time carries on!"

"After they gather enough information from normal goblins, they start inputting them into the enhanced goblins."

Lapis was flipping through the manual with her right hand, while her left hand was still working on the control panel.

If what the manual said was true, it meant that the experiences from the goblins they were fighting now were going to be used on the mock-goblins.

They were a threat already, and Loren didn't want to think about how strong they would get once they learned how to fight.

"They aren't even at full power right now. If they start equipping themselves with weapons we're actually done for."

Before, the goblins didn't stand a chance against Loren's great sword, but the newer ones started to clash their weapons and shields against it.

Of course, that meant there was more pressure put on the blade, even though he wasn't facing the mock-goblins. There was already a very thin, but visible crack beginning to form on the blade.

Loren was worried at how much longer the great sword would last, as he kept feeling an unpleasant sensation while swinging it around.

But the goblins didn't care about Loren's worries at all and kept charging at him. Slowly, Loren started getting small cuts here and there as well.

"The big one's here!"

The bad news reached Loren's ears.

He looked to the doorway that Ritz was pointing at and saw the mock-goblin, but this one was carrying a giant wooden club in its right fist.

As soon as he saw that it was armed, he kicked off the floor and charged towards it.

He acted immediately because he knew that Ritz and Jack couldn't handle this one, but the mock-goblin didn't even act surprised, and raised its club against Loren's great sword.

After a loud clang erupted from the clash of iron against wood, Loren's strike was stopped.

Not only that, Loren seemed to have lost in terms of strength and force, and he got pushed back a few steps, almost falling over.

It immediately ran towards him, not missing a chance to retaliate, and brought down its club onto Loren.

Loren brought his great sword up and barely caught the strike, using all his strength to stop it.

"You..."

He poured even more strength into his arms, trying to push it away, but its enhanced arms didn't move so easily. In the antagonized situation, the mock-goblin looked at Loren and seemed to laugh at him.

"You... You smiled just now, didn't you?"

Loren didn't know if it understood what he was saying.

But as soon as he muttered those words, the mock-goblins smile seemed to widen.

It was most likely a ridiculing smile.

As soon as Loren had that thought, he felt something snap in the deepest corner of his mind.

Chapter 23

Retaliation to Recalling

“Don’t you dare look down on me!”

If he was losing in terms of strength, there was no need to rely on his arms.

Conjuring as much strength as he could, he planted a kick into the mock-goblin’s stomach. He was feeling a burning sensation in his mind, like someone had shot a burning steel rod into his head.

The kick withered the mock-goblin, pushing it off of Loren.

But the smile didn’t disappear from its face.

It believed that the human that lost to it in terms of strength was putting up a useless struggle, and that it would eventually beat him.

But Loren’s next move made its smile stiffen.

Loren immediately rushed at the goblin with more force and speed than before, completely giving up on defense. Although it was stopped by the mock-goblin’s club yet again, it widened its eyes at the impact that came through it.

As the mock-goblin took a step back, Loren took another step forward and attacked it.

The blow that Loren delivered, which was even faster than the one before, was again, stopped by the mock-goblin’s club. But the club, which had blocked all three of Loren’s attacks, couldn’t take the sheer power of the last blow and snapped in half.

The mock-goblin panicked and pushed goblins away from itself, as it tried to gain distance from Loren, but Loren continued to increase his speed.

Loren didn’t let the mock-goblin get out of his range, and the fourth strike that he released crushed all the goblins in his path, directly hitting the mock-goblin’s arm.

The sword cut right through the skin, flesh, and bones, splattering blackened blood everywhere.

The mock-goblin let out a roar from the pain, but immediately got flung backwards again by a tackle from Loren.

It couldn't regain its balance, and all it could do was look at Loren's great sword flash from right to left.

The next blow struck its right forearm, going straight across its body and out the other side.

It had so much force behind it, that the mock-goblin's arm was still spinning in the air when the body crumbled onto the ground, blood spurting from the cut.

But Loren's charge didn't stop there.

Loren's arms continued to accelerate every step he took, and his great sword was being swung so fast that a rumbling could be heard from the air around him.

He didn't care if he was using the blade or where he was aiming at. As he swung his great sword around him at an unbelievable speed, his attacks became a single whirlwind.

Anything that the winds touched were cut down, gouged, and crushed into mere pieces and blown away.

Ritz and Jack saw the fierceness of the attack and nervously decided to stop fighting, and took a step back to where Nim and Quartz were.

They didn't want to risk getting caught in windstorm that was raging on.



“What in the world is that...”

Jack muttered with a dumbfounded look on his face.

That was how fierce and one-sided Loren’s attacks, which looked like a storm, were.

The goblins who tried to approach him were immediately reduced to black and red pieces and blown across the room.

Some of them tried to run away, but they were pushed back by the goblins who came in from behind them, all of them falling prey to the raging wind.

A few mock-goblins came as well, but even they were only able to take one or two blows from Loren before they ended up like the other goblins.

“Isn’t this just like the rumors? His body is as the wind, and after the wind passes through, nothing is left standing in its wake...”

“You talking about the mercenary << Slaying Wind >>? There’s no way, right? Why would a title-bearing mercenary become a copper rank adventurer?”

“Come on! Do you think that there can be two or three different people that can pull this off!?”

No one could give an answer to Jack.

Rumors said that the mercenary << Slaying Wind >>, who was said to be able to fight toe-to-toe with the strongest mercenary, could turn the tide of battle just by taking part in it.

Although he didn’t use magic like << Swords of Flame >> and << Blade Demon >>, his skill on the sword was said to surpass both. In battle, his existence was considered the same as the god of death, and Ritz nor his party could believe that a renowned swordsman like him could be the lowest ranking adventurer.

Putting aside whether Loren being << Slaying Wind >> was true or not, they couldn’t deny the fact that he alone was turning the tide of this fight, and started getting hope that they would be able to survive.

“Don’t you guys think this is going to work out somehow?”

“Overly optimistic. Not good.”

Nim said coldly to Quartz, whose voice was getting lighter.

“You saying that we shouldn’t be hopeful!?”

“No. It’s not good to leave it up to him. We have our pride as silver ranks.”

“That’s true, but...”

Jack scratched his head at Nim’s assertion.

Nim then pointed to Loren, who was still charging at the goblins coming towards them without even slowing down.

“That’s not good.”

“Huh? What do you mean not good?”

Jack and Ritz had no idea what she meant.

Nim was able to realize it thanks to elves’ excellent sense of hearing.

“That great sword. It’s about to break.”

“What!?”

What Nim pointed out was something Loren was already aware of.

Although he continued to change goblins into mutilated corpses, the sensation he was getting from the grip as well as the noises from the blade told him that the great sword wasn’t going to last much longer.

Loren knew that ever since he was a mercenary, getting excited or receiving a serious injury during battle pulled a trigger inside him, and that made him able to display strengths that he normally couldn’t.

He couldn’t choose when he wanted to use it so it wasn’t that easy to use, but Loren had been saved by this power more times than he could count.

Of course, there was a downside to it, and the recoil usually left him powerless and exhausted, but he decided that he was fortunate that it had activated.

Fortunate for Loren, but unfortunate for his great sword.

Loren knew that it wasn't going to last as long as his body.

He used the strength in his arms and the speed that he was swinging it around with to make up for the weakening blade, but it seemed to be at its limit.

As Loren cut off the head of a mock-goblin, not even sure how many he had killed up till now, it happened.

As the mock-goblin's head hit the floor, a loud clang sounded from Loren's great sword, and the blade broke off.

"Damn it!"

Loren cursed without thinking, but his broken sword didn't mean that he couldn't fight.

The great sword's blade was originally quite long, so he was still able to fight with the bottom half that was still intact.

But a shorter blade meant less damage, and although he could swing it faster, each blow did less.

"Hey, this is bad! His weapon broke! Are you done yet!?"

Ritz, who watched as the wind flung the broken blade at the wall, asked Lapis, who was still working on the control panel.

She glanced up as she heard the blade crash into the wall, but immediately returned her eyes to the control panel in front of her.

"Hey, how is it?"

"I can't finish immediately even if you rush me."

"I can see that! But your partner is going to be in trouble soon!"

Along with Loren's damage, his reach got shorter as well.

It meant engulfing less goblins in his attacks, and he couldn't keep it up for long.

If there was no chance of the flow of goblins stopping, Lapis was their only hope.

"I know, I know! I put in the commands for shutting down and stopping the goblins! But the last one... The end code isn't going through!"

Lapis' voice got louder and rougher from her irritation.

Ritz, who couldn't understand half the things she just said, softened his voice slightly and asked.

"What do you mean?"

"To put it simply, the controls won't stop! If this would shut down, the other commands I put in would go into effect, and both the ruins and the goblins would stop and would start falling apart!"

"If it just needs to stop, can't we just destroy it?"

"Please do it if you can! This is something that survived for hundreds of years, and still works like it's supposed to! It will stop if you destroy it! Please try!"

Ritz told Lapis to back off a bit, and swung his sword down onto the control panel.

But he couldn't even make a scratch on it.

His sword got deflected off the control panel.

"What the!?"

"There is a magic spell protecting the surface, it won't break with normal attacks! We need something like a cursed sword to break it!"

Their conversation reached Loren's ears.

He didn't understand the technical parts, but he understood that in order to do something about this situation, they needed Lapis to stop the control panel or

something to destroy it.

He also knew that Ritz had tried to destroy it, but a magic spell was protecting it and couldn't do it.

After collecting all the information, he got an idea.

He had no idea if it would work, but he didn't have anything to lose at this point.

"Lapis! Get away from there!"

He swung his sword in a wide arc and forced a bunch of goblins off of him, and shouted at her direction.

Without checking to see if Lapis did what he told her to, he plunged his hand into his pocket and found what he was looking for.

It was something that activated when the user willed it, but to make sure that it would activate for sure, he had to say he wanted to use it out loud.

Loren threw the object at the control panel and shouted at the top of his lungs.

"Activate!"

The object flying through the air was a pendant that was emitting gold light.

"The << Mana Lost >> pendant!?"

Lapis, who was hurrying away from the panel, saw what it was and started moving away even quicker.

When the pendant landed on the panel, it released the charged-up mana it had gathered since the goblin mage had used it, and from Loren's shout, disabled the magic that was protecting it.

"Come on, break!"

Loren raised the remains of his great sword above his head, and heaved it at the panel with all his remaining strength.

It flew across the room and crashed straight into the panel.

Even without the spell, the panel was quite hard, but it still couldn't handle Loren's full strength and force, and the sword sunk deep into it.

“W-whoa, that was dangerous...”

Although some of the pendant's mana had recharged, it seemed that there wasn't too much, as the range of its magic didn't reach Lapis.

Even so, Lapis was about to complain that Loren could've made her lose control of her limbs once again, when Loren suddenly collapsed right in front of her eyes.

“Wha-!?! Loren! Loren, are you okay!?”

Ritz and his party watched Lapis panic and run towards Loren.

Around them, the words on the control panel slowly disappeared, and all the goblins around them dropped down one by one, as if someone cut the strings of a puppet.

Chapter 24

Waking to Promising

“Loren, you’re awake. I’m so glad.”

Loren woke up to Lapis peering into his face and something heavy pressing onto his stomach.

He raised his right hand and slapped it onto his forehead and pressed down.

He felt a soft bed under him and a clean blanket covering him.

The heaviness he was feeling was Lapis sitting on top of him, and when Lapis moved her face right up to his, he flicked her forehead quite hard.



“Ow!?”

“Don’t recklessly sit on top of a guy.”

Lapis leaned backwards, her hand on her forehead and tears in her eyes. She then gave

Loren look full of complaints and pointed around the room with her other hand.

“There’s nowhere to sit down other than here.”

Loren, still lying down, turn his head to look around.

It was an ordinary hospital room.

Other than his bed, there was a table and a shelf, but no chairs.

Strong sunlight and a gentle breeze was coming from the window, and the breeze was flapping the curtains on it slightly.

“A hospital...?”

Loren decided that he must be in a hospital, and Lapis nodded.

“Yes, this is a hospital. Do you want to hear what happened after you passed out?”

Loren nodded without hesitation.

He remembered up until he had moved to destroy the control panel, but he had no idea what happened after and how he was alive.

“What’s the last thing you remember?”

“Up to when I threw my sword.”

Loren lost consciousness before he could see if he was able to destroy the control panel.

Since he wasn’t in the ruins or in the afterlife, he knew that he must have succeeded in destroying the control panel, and wanted to hear from someone who knew what happened after that.

“It looks like your consciousness and memory is fine. People who let their consciousness and power go out of control often have mental damage, but I’m glad that Loren’s berserk seems to be a harmless one.”

“There’s good ones and bad ones?”

“Of course. Anyway, about the events after Loren threw Loren’s great sword.”

Thanks to the pendant and the broken great sword Loren had thrown at the control panel, it stopped functioning completely.

Due to it shutting down, the commands for stopping the goblins and shutting down the ruins went through. The goblins stopped moving and the ruins stopped as well.

“No one’s going to be able to restart those ruins ever again.”

“Really?”

“Yes, because you completely destroyed the control panel. It can’t be fixed either because the pendant got rid of the magic circuits inside it as well.”

Lapis believed that in the era that they were currently in, destroying those ruins were a good thing.

It hadn’t mattered to the Ancient Kingdom, but with the level of magic culture of current society, it wouldn’t be able to hand such a ruin.

Even if people tried to use it for military purposes, the only orders the goblins would take would be ones related to the ruins, so all they would be able to do is let the goblins loose in an area and spread fear and confusion. If it was going to be used like that, it was better if no one could use it anymore.

“Ritz and his party were quite mad, though.”

“That’s not surprising. We made the ruins useless.”

Although they meant it as a joke, it was a fact that they said some grudging things.

Since they had messed up their quest, it wasn’t surprising that they said a thing or two at them, but Ritz and his party didn’t resent Loren at all.

But Lapis decided that she didn't have to tell Loren that.

Ritz and his party did indeed gather lots of information on the ruins, but it didn't matter anymore because the ruins were pretty much useless now.

They weren't able to find treasure or anything else of great value, so the rewards for their quest didn't add up too much. Adding up the expenses they used to get ready for the expedition and treating their injured members, they were at a loss.

But despite that, Loren still saved their lives, so they were all quite thankful to him.

Even though Loren was misunderstanding how Ritz and his party felt about him, Lapis had no intention on correcting it since she was not the cause of the misunderstanding in the first place.

"It'll be troubling if I make weird connections, so."

Lapis already knew what direction she was going to take this conversation. Although Ritz and his party were high ranking adventurers and were good people, getting friendly with them was slightly troublesome for her.

That's why she was trying to make him think they didn't like him too much.

"Did you say something?"

Lapis' murmur hadn't reached Loren's ears.

Lapis decided that it was bad if something she let out carelessly and made Loren suspicious of her, so she forcefully continued the conversation.

"Although the expedition itself ended in a failure, they still did their work so they got a lot of the rewards, so I don't think you have to worry so much."

"But I still did something pretty bad though."

At Loren's apologetic tone, Lapis decided that it wasn't good to keep talking about it, so she coughed and changed the subject.

"The guild is going to send an expedition team to the ruins and make sure it's sealed properly. It can't be used anymore so it shouldn't need sealing, but I guess you can't be

too careful.”

If an official expedition was going to be conducted, they would search around the area as well, and that meant the girls in Sarfe’s party might be rescued.

Lapis realized the possibility but didn’t care at all.

Whether they get rescued or not, she wasn’t going to meet them ever again so it was a waste of time to think about them.

“Who carried me here? Where is this, anyway?”

“I did. I couldn’t let Ritz and the others carry you. Also, this is the hospital in Kauffa. They did offer to help, but they had their own injured to take care of.”

Loren and Lapis and Ritz’s party did get together within the ruins, but were originally separate parties. Since it was the norm for parties to take care of their own members, it would’ve been awkward if Lapis let them carry Loren.

“Looks like you helped me quite a bit.”

“No, no. Don’t worry about it. Speaking of failed quests, the quest for exterminating goblins that we took was considered a failure. Three members of the party hasn’t come back and we weren’t able to destroy the nest, and we don’t have any proof of hunting, so.”

The sack that contained the goblin ears was lost sometime during the fight.

Loren had to focus on fighting for his life so he couldn’t manage to keep track of it at the same time, and wondered where he dropped it.

As a result, they didn’t receive any sort of reward from the adventurer’s guild.

Loren sighed at his mistake.

“Sorry about that Lapis.”

Although Loren had lost the sack, Lapis could’ve harvested a lot from all the goblins that had stopped after the control panel broke.

The ones they killed were collected by the goblins but there were still a lot of goblins left in there.

But she didn't do that because everyone knew that they weren't out of danger just because the ruins shut down and Ritz suggested getting out of there as fast as they can.

Because of that she couldn't collect anything afterwards.

"Don't worry about it. Oh, and I've already taken the carriage fee that it took to get back here from your wallet, but the treatment fees and the hospital fees that were added are a different story."

Loren felt gloomy after hearing those words and didn't want to get up anymore, so he relaxed his body and kept lying down.

The sole reason he accepted the quest was because he had no money, but he lost the sack with the proof of hunting, and above that, he had other fees he had to pay.

The carriage fee that Lapis took from his wallet was money she had lent him as well.

When he heard Lapis say that she added the treatment fees and hospital fees, he looked at Lapis.

"I'll pay for them for you, so don't worry."

Lapis understood what Loren was thinking and answered.

"How long was I out?"

"Around three days. We took a day coming back so you've been here for two days, and the hospital bills will cost five silver coins."

Loren sighed as he learned that it was a cost that he couldn't pay, while Lapis smiled and moved her face closer to Loren's and whispered.

"You don't have to worry so much. I'm lending you the money, but I'm not going to ask for any interest."

"I can't pay it even if you did."

“I won’t remind you either. And you can pay in installments as well.”

In fact, Lapis was the only one who had a profit from the quest, but she was keeping it a secret from Loren.

It was because while she was looking for the manual for the ruins, she slipped things that looked valuable in her pockets.

Even a thief like Jack couldn’t notice her doing it, thus she was the only one who made it out with valuables in her hand.

All the things she found were accessories with magic spells on them, and decided that the person who oversaw the facility was a woman.

Also, she guessed that the << Mana Lost >> pendant that the goblin mage had was from the control room. She speculated that it took the pendant and left the ruins and eventually evolved into a goblin mage.

There was no way for her to check if it was correct, though.

“Aren’t the conditions a too good?”

“Instead, please stay with me for a while.”

She fired herself up as she got to the main point.

What Lapis was aiming for was Loren himself.

Loren was quite experienced and trustworthy, and he didn’t change his attitude towards her even when she told him that she was demon kind, which were hated by most people.

A person like that was already hard to find.

Not only that, Lapis left her home to learn about the world and she was disguised as a priest, but even though she was a powerful demon kind, there was a limit to what she could do alone.

But if she partnered up with a swordsman, they would be able to work as a party, and when she would need to partner up with a random party, it would cause less trouble

for her.

That was how hard it was for a priestess to move on her own.

People would keep coming to her with ulterior motives, and even if she could get into a good party, they may not let her leave even if she wanted to.

“I don’t think it’s a bad trade. What do you think?”

Lapis wasn’t comfortable with using money to bound Loren with her, but she didn’t want to lose him so she was willing to turn a blind eye.

Even when she put herself in Loren’s shoes, she could see the merits of moving with a priest.

A swordsman would benefit a lot from a priest who could heal injuries instantly.

“W-what do you think?”

Loren wasn’t responding.

Lapis was worried that she might have made him angry, so she asked him again nervously. He looked past Lapis and at the ceiling, exhausted, and replied.

“I’m in no state to refuse.”

“So, does that mean you accept?”

“Promise me. It’s until I pay off my debt.”

“Yes, that’s fine. I’ll be in your care Loren.”

Lapis’ face lit up brightly.

As he watched her smile from beneath her wondering when she would get off him, he wondered how he was going to pay her back.

But Loren had no idea.

Beneath her bright smile, Lapis was thinking of ways she could increase Loren’s debt

so she could keep him at her side.

This is how a broke mercenary started walking down the path of an adventurer.



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