

無職転生

異世界行ったら
本気だす

12

Ritujin na Magarotte
理不尽な孫の手



MFマックス

MUSHOKU TENSEI

– Jobless Reincarnation –

- VOLUME 13 -

Youth Period

– *Labyrinth Chapter* –

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ギース

エリナリーゼ

リーリャ

タルハンド

パウロ

ルーデウス

ロキシー

人物紹介

「ああ、良かった……」



CHAPTER 1

CONFIRMATION OF THE SITUATION

1

The rough story from last time: After hearing that Roxy was missing in the “Teleport Labyrinth”, Rudeus was stained in the color of despair. However, within his hands was “Exploration Record of the Teleport Labyrinth” which has almost everything about the labyrinth described in it.

Roxy is in a pinch.

After hearing that, even now, the impulse of wanting to jump into the labyrinth is spurring me on.

The location is the S-ranked Teleport Labyrinth, but luckily I had obtained a book describing a past exploration attempt.

I had already investigated things in regards to teleport magic circles as well.

If you have the time to observe each magic circle, then I'm sure just as written in the book you can conquer the labyrinth.

However, first we need to organize the situation.

Organizing the situation is important.

Roxy and Zenith might be in a fight against the clock.

In just five minutes, if the rescue is late, any chance to just barely save them might disappear.

However, for this reason, we can't afford to be impatient.

After organizing the situation and carefully preparing, we have no choice other than to definitely rescue them.

In a restless state, we might overlook something.

Overlooking something, making a mistake, then the probability we'll have a misstep increases.

As a result of that, let alone five minutes, one day, two days, even three days might end up being wasted.

We have no choice other than to proceed carefully.

This a setting where we can't afford mistakes.

If we were to fail, I'm sure that would connect together with "regret".

Regardless of the shape, if because of my mistake we were unable to save Roxy or Zenith, I'm sure I would have a large regret remaining.

"Dad. Here I have with me a Teleport Labyrinth book, a record of adventurers entering deep inside."

First, I presented the existence of the book.

"Exploration Record of the Teleport Labyrinth."

It was the book that Sylphy, disguised as Fitts-senpai, once recommended to me.

It's a book with the shape of the taboo teleport magic circles written in detail.

Different than other books, it's a book that paints out a description.

The reason it was able to escape the censorship of the Magic University would simply be good luck, or else because this is an adventurers record I'm sure.

Also, there's the possibility that this book is fiction as well.

The teleport labyrinth is a labyrinth that no one has conquered.

The possibility that it's a fictional adventurer's record exists as well.

Though I think that probability is low.

The shapes of the teleport magic circles written in this book actually resemble the real thing.

In reality, I investigated teleport magic circles myself as well, but this book has the most accurate moreover detailed ones written.

As a result of comparing it to other books, there's no mistake.

However, it might be... a different "Teleport Labyrinth".

We can't just ignore the possibility that more than two labyrinths exist in this world filled with teleport traps.

Even if the title of the capturing book is the same, if the contents are different, there's no meaning.

"If the contents of this book are the same as the labyrinth we're facing after this, then I'm sure this book will be very useful in regards to exploring the labyrinth."

After I said that Paul and the others' eyes were wide open.

"Hey Rudi... Wh, Why do you have something like that?"

"I thought it would somehow be useful, so I brought it from the library in Magic University."

"I see..."

For now, I'll keep hidden things about the teleport magic circles.

What we need to ascertain right now are the contents of this book and the contents of the labyrinths we're about to go towards after this.

"Please confirm this. And then, if it seems like it will work as a reference for exploring the labyrinth, let's make use of it."

After Paul took that into his hands and spent a moment gazing at the cover, he then passed it over to Gisu at his side.

After receiving the book, Gisu asked...

"Then, I'm going to read it?"

"...Please do."

Why Gisu, I had such thoughts as well.

However, since everyone had faces as if that was natural, I didn't ask.

In regards to Paul and their party, Gisu took that sort of role I guess.

He can do anything which is why he does everything, I certainly remember hearing that some time ago.

For example, “mapping” and “organizing information” in regards to exploring the labyrinth as well, I'm sure he's the one doing it.

“Dad. While Gisu-san is reading it, please tell me about the labyrinth.”

Straight from the front, I asked Paul various questions.

All of them were trying to confirm things written in the book.

“Sure, it's fine.”

“The types of monsters and names.”

“Their numbers up to the level they're on.”

“The situation inside and the color of the magic circles” etc...

Paul smoothly informed me about them.

First, there were five types of monsters.

Since Paul had only stepped foot down to the third floor, there seem to be monsters they haven't seen yet as well.

- Misfortune Spider, [Tarantula Deathlord] ^[1]

It's a huge poisonous spider. Even though it's a tarantula it spits out webs. Its poison can be healed using elementary detoxification. B rank.

- [Iron Crawler]

A caterpillar that is like a heavy tank. Hard and heavy. B rank.

- [Mad Skull]

It's a humanoid monster covered in mud. Since inside of its body a person's skull is buried, that is the weak point. A rank.

- [Armored Warrior]

Rusty armor with four arms. In each of its hands, it holds swords with a good cutting edge. A rank.

- [Little Devil] ^[2]

It's a monster with long arms, legs, and sharp claws. It moves by crawling along the walls and ceiling. A rank.

The careful part would be how many floors.

This, we don't know.

According to rumors, it's said to have six or seven floors, but among all those who entered until now, no one has seen the Guardian.

How far the first floor goes is a difficult talk as well, but according to the book, where the spiders are making a large quantity of nests is the first floor.

The place where a large quantity of caterpillars and spiders are is the second floor.

Mad Skulls can be found commanding groups of caterpillars and spiders on the third floor.

After you get to the fourth floor, the spiders and caterpillars disappear, it becomes just Mad Skulls and Armored Warriors.

And then, after you get to the fifth floor, the Mad Skulls disappear as well, it becomes just Armored Warriors and Little Devils.

On the sixth floor, it's nothing but Little Devils.

Things after that aren't written down in the book.

The situation inside.

From the first floor until the third floor, the inside of the labyrinth is an "Ant's Nest".

A curving tunnel with complicated passages and dead end rooms.

And then, it seems there's always teleport magic circles inside of the room.

According to the book, it seems that it changes into the shape of a stone ruin around the fourth floor.

Paul and the others haven't made it down to there yet.

Just, information about the monsters and the state of the vicinity up until the third

floor, they had gained some amount of information about that from numerous adventurers' trial-and-error it seems.

A model of a teleport magic circle.

It gives off a bluish-white light and has a strange complex design carved into it.

After hearing the details I think it's the same as the teleport magic circles I've seen numerous times.

The things I heard from Paul were mostly the same as the contents I had read in the book, the things they saw match together.

“This... sure is amazing... Haha!! As expected of senpai. You really... brought along something amazing!”

Around the time the explanation ended, Gisu closed the book while shouting with a somewhat excited voice.

It seems he finished skimming it.

He's a considerably fast reader.

Or maybe he only read the parts that they've touched on.

After seeing Gisu's state, Paul raised his voice in surprise.

“Hey, Gisu. Is it really... that amazing?”

“Yeah, it's amazing, Paul. If the things written in this are real, then clearing up to the sixth floor is already easy.”

In his excited state, Gisu handed the book over to Talhand.

Talhand gave a sidelong glance as he started to read and Gisu started to explain the contents written in the book to Paul as he couldn't hide his excitement.

“All of the things we couldn't figure out were written down. Which magic circles are fine to take, which magic circles are no good. Taking which magic circle will lead to which place and even what will be waiting on the other side!”

Somehow, it seems according to what Gisu saw, this book is “real”.

However, Paul was glaring at Gisu with a serious look.

“I see, and, using that book, do you know what happened to Roxy or Zenith?”

“That is... we don't know though.”

Gisu made a face like he had cold water poured over him.

“Gisu, don't get very excited. We already can't afford anymore mistakes.”

Paul said that in a low voice.

Carefully.

I'm sure we have no choice other than to proceed carefully.

If we blindly believe the things written in the book and end up being annihilated there's no hope.

“...I get what you want to say, Paul. But you know, in addition to the book, we've got an additional reliable vanguard and rear guard as well. First, we should be glad, right?”

While saying that, Gisu looked over everyone surrounding us.

Following along, Paul looked over them as well.

And then, he stopped his gaze on me.

“Ah... that's right I guess... sorry about that. It's just like that.”

On Paul's face, a smile floated up like he had some composure.

No matter how desperate of a situation it is, some amount of composure is required.

I'm sure Paul understands something like that as well.

“Alright, after we all finish reading it, let's decide on the formation.”

In an energetic voice after regaining himself, the atmosphere of the place softened a bit.

The members going into the labyrinth are five people.

Paul, Elinalise, Gisu, Talhand, and I.

Elinalise and I replaced Vera and Shera.

Since the labyrinth is narrow, even if we try to enter with a large number, we'll just end up being a hindrance to each other it seems.

In order for Elinalise to replace Vera and I to replace Shera, it became a formation where we completely stole away their job.

Elinalise the Tank.

Paul the Sub-Attacker.

I'm the Attacker and Healer.

Talhand can become both Sub-Tank and Sub-Attacker.

These four are in charge of the combat side.

Talhand's role is somewhat vague.

It seems he can use earth magic up to intermediate level.

However, it seems he plays it by ear as a Magic Warrior.

Since he's the utility type, supposedly he can fight anywhere.

Even though he looks clumsy, he's quite skillful.

No, all dwarves were skillful, weren't they?

"Looking forward to working with you!"

It seems he'll end up standing right in front of or right behind me, he patted my shoulder with a sociable feeling.

For some reason, I got chills down my back.

"Rudi is fundamentally in charge of the magic. After the combat ends we'll depend on you for the healing as well, can you do it?"

"No problem."

Offense and Recovery.

Even though it's my first time in a labyrinth I have numerous plain jobs.

However, during the time when I was an adventurer, my role was something like that as well.

I'm sure there's nothing we can't do.

With these four people, Gisu is added on.

He's useless in combat, but he can perform everything outside of that at a high level.

Confirming the map, establishing the direction to advance, management of food, sorting the raw materials. He has the judgement to withdraw from the labyrinth as well.

He works as the control tower and does odd jobs.

I guess it would become a feeling like a Director.

Since exploring labyrinths isn't just about combat, naturally as it is having someone take on roles like this is necessary.

The remaining three people.

It's become that Vera, Shera, and Lilia waiting on standby at the entrance of the city on support duty.

You could call it house-sitting, but it seems this itself is an important job in its own way.

At the time when large clans explore a labyrinth, I've heard that they assign people to house-sitting.

The majority of the preparations can be left to Elinalise and Talhand, the pros.

I'm an amateur when it comes down to exploring labyrinths.

If I make use of my knowledge from my previous life then I can think of this and that, but at the present I'll put that aside.

First, I'll follow along the pros' way of doing things.

And then, if there are any parts that I can think of something it would be fine if I make a suggestion.

A suggestion.

In my knowledge from my previous life, I don't know if the things I learned from Rogue-like type games will be effective. ^[3]

“First it's about our initial objective, but it's the third floor.”

After deciding on the formation, Paul declared that.

“There, we'll make clear of Roxy's whereabouts.”

We don't know if Roxy is alive or not.

However, in the case that she's alive, after we secure her, we'll return at once from the labyrinth.

Depending on the condition Roxy is in, we'll have her join the party after she has recovered and then venture even deeper into the labyrinth.

The six of us will check the fourth floor and beyond which we haven't been able to reach yet.

And there, after we arrive to the greatest depths, we'll search thoroughly all around and try to find Zenith who is believed to be there.

We don't know how many days it will take.

It's become an exploration wait and see. ^[4]

3

That night.

It became that I would be sleeping in the same room as Paul and Lilia.

It seems to have been the technician Gisu's refined way of creating a space for just us family.

Even though I say that, the time I've spent with Lilia not as family is longer.

Since the time I was born up until having my sister, she was a maid after all.

I can't help but see her as a maid.

Paul sees Lilia as a wife, but as a second wife.

Zenith is number one, Lilia is number two.

I wonder if Norn would be number three.

Aisha would be fourth and I'm even further below I guess.

"It's the first time I've slept in the same room as Rudeus-sama isn't it."

"That's right."

Speaking of Lilia, she seems to give off a respectful attitude in the atmosphere as if she only sees Paul and I as her employers.

Being brought along with that atmosphere, I became somewhat respectful myself.

"Husband's snoring is loud so without reservation please order me."

However, the contents of Lilia's words were light and overflowing with humor.

"Ah, yes..."

In regards to that I was unable to return it overflowing with humor.

What it would be good to talk about, I don't know well.

How did I use to talk with Lilia again.

During the time we were in Buina village I feel it was considerably business like.

"..."

Since a while ago Paul has done nothing but look at me and hasn't said anything.

I wonder what it is, it's a strange face.

It's not quite to the level of a grin, but his cheeks are becoming loose, that face.

"Umm, Rudeus-sama."

"Yes, what is it?"

"Is Aisha getting along properly?"

I thought over the answer to Lilia's question.

The topic of our family.

That's right, we're family.

Then, it would be fine to talk about the family.

"Yes. Aisha is giving it her best."

"She hasn't done anything to trouble Rudeus-sama?"

"Yeah, nothing at all. She takes care of all the cleaning as well, it's a big help."

"Is that so, it's fine if she hasn't said anything selfish."

"If she would be a bit more selfish then it would be more comfortable for me though."

After saying that Lilia quietly smiled.

It was a smile of relief.

"How about Norn-ojosama and Aisha? Have they been getting into fights?"

"That's right... there's some awkwardness, but for the time being there's no conspicuous antagonism. The fights are almost charming."

"I told her to always stand down to Norn-ojosama, but why did it end up becoming like that..."

While saying that Lilia let out a sigh.

"It can't be helped, Aisha is still a child as well. Isn't it important for the parents to give them an equal amount of love?"

"I see... that might be the case. Aisha is my child, but since she has Husband's blood in her as well..."

"Things like blood don't matter at all do they. We're family after all."

"...Thank you very much."

Paul didn't enter into the conversation.

He was just listening to my exchange with Lilia since before with the same expression and thinking about something.

“What is it, dad. Since just now, you've been grinning.”

“No, somehow, it's nice, I was just thinking.”



While scratching the back of his head Paul's face went red as he seemed to be embarrassed.

“What is?”

“That Rudi has. Properly become an adult and the scene of him talking to Lilia.”

The exchange between his adult son and his wife.

Lilia isn't my mother, but in regards to Paul they're both family.

It might be deeply moving.

Maybe it's something I'll understand as well when my child grows up.

“Come to think of it, Rudi. You, got married didn't you.”

“Yeah. Just about half a year ago.”

“I see, to think that Rudi would, just that other time we met, even though you were still this small.”

“My height has grown considerably over these past few years after all.”

Before I realized it my height had gotten to about the same as Paul.

I'd say around 170 cm.

Paul is a bit taller, but I might still grow a bit more, I think I might eventually overtake him.

“It won't be good if we don't have a grand celebration with everyone when we return.”

“That's right. After all dad, it's your first grandchild. You'll be Paul-ojichan.”

“Stop that, I'm still not that old after all.”

Even while saying that Paul was making a face like he didn't hate it.

And then it changed to a smile.

“That you've made a child, you mean, Rudi. You've become a “man” as well now right?”

“Husband, I don't know if you should be saying anything too vulgar...”

Paul with a grinning old man-like smile floating on his face rebuked Lilia.

“Isn't it fine, you know I, I always wanted to have this sort of talk with Rudi once.”

“However.”

“I'm sure you're interested as well, about Rudi.”

“I feel that it's unfair to use that way of saying it.”

“And, and, who was your first partner? After all Sylphy? Or else maybe Eris? If I remember you said you separated, but didn't it come down to that kind of talk when you separated?”

It seems Paul wants to have some vulgar Boys Talk.

I do have a part that wonders if it's alright to talk about that at this kind of time though...

Well, it's not like I don't understand.

It's been the first time he's seen me in a while and I'm sure Paul is in high spirits as well.

I'm sure he just wasn't able to make this sort of face in front of everyone earlier.

I have some parts where I'm happy to see Paul again for the first time in a while as well.

Since Paul and I get along well after all.

The day after tomorrow we're entering the labyrinth, that sort of composure will disappear.

For just today, it should be fine to unfasten that restraint and talk about it.

“Dad has a bit of confidence, in regards to that, after all. I'll hear you out on it all. Even if I look like this, during the time when dad was young I played around quite a bit after all.” [5]

It can't be helped, why don't I keep you company then.

This sort of partner that I can frankly talk about out in the open like this, it's only somewhat but I felt I wanted it as well.

“That's right, then there are a number of things I want to ask about though...”

“Really now, even Rudeus-sama...”

“Lilia is saying it like this, but if it comes down to the other side she's quite intense.”

“Husband!”

“Come to think of it, at some point already, there was a time when Lilia-san tempted you right. Please tell me about the situation at that time in detail.”

“Even Rudeus-sama, please stop it!... Really.”

While watching us like that Lilia let out a voice with a sigh mixed in.

However, that face was smiling.

After that, we continued to talk like that until late into the night.

4

Late night.

The lights are out and I'm laying sideways on the bed.

I wonder if Paul and Lilia are already asleep.

On the bed nearby I can hear a steady sleeping breath.

It seems the two won't start messing around after confirming that I'm asleep.

Paul did say he was trying to abstain until Zenith is found.

I'm sure he's properly abiding by that.

I got a bit excited from the talk with Paul and I can't sleep.

I couldn't have ever possibly thought that the day would come where I have real experience and can take part in the ero talk.

In life you really never know what can happen.

Well, putting that aside.

In regards to the matters this time.

After all, this time I might be dancing in Hitogami's palms again.

I have such a feeling.

Thinking about it, the only reason I was able to obtain that book was because I went to the Magic University.

If I hadn't gone to the Magic University and been told to investigate the teleport incident, I would have never encountered that book and been in a situation to challenge the Teleport Labyrinth without anything.

That suggestive Hitogami's speech was the same as well.

Whether I regret it and about putting my hands on Rinia or Purusena.

I have the feeling like he spoke in such a way that he knew I would oppose him.

If Hitogami hadn't said anything, or else if Hitogami had said to "Go".

I have the feeling that the probability that I would have "stayed" would be high.

I've had rebellious feelings towards the Hitogami after all, and it might be about the same weight as things with Sylphy on that scale.

In that case, I'm sure I wouldn't have just done something irresponsible.

For example, I might have tried to dispatch Ruijerd, Badigadi, or otherwise Zoldat.

I wonder if the Hitogami acted while anticipating all of that.

All of the things that I would need to rescue Zenith, I went to the school in order to obtain.

I wonder what in the world the Human God [Hitogami] is...

Really, I wonder what he wants me to do.

Could it be that he really just finds it enjoyable to watch me?

The same as always, I don't know what his endgame is.

Just, there's no mistake that he's my ally.

I wonder if he might show up again around tonight.

That timing would be way too convenient I guess.

If things go well, then I'll give something to him as an offering.

Though I don't know what that guy likes, so I don't know if he'll be happy.

While thinking that I fell asleep.

Hitogami never appeared in my dream.

CHAPTER 2

ENTER THE LABYRINTH

1

Teleport Labyrinth.

If you were to just take a glimpse it appears to be nothing but a cave.

There's no special feeling.

It's just a hole opened up in just a cliff.

There are many spider monsters in its vicinity and many monsters trapped those spiders' webs, just that.

Even if you were to see a photo, I'm sure no special feelings of any kind would come up.

However, if you go there yourself it's different.

From there you can almost intuitively feel that it's a labyrinth.

Something eerie.

However, I also felt something that was stimulating my curiosity.

I wonder if all labyrinths have this kind of atmosphere.

“Well then, Rudi. We're going just as we arranged, is that fine?”

“Understood.”

Paul patted my shoulder and nodded.

We took the formation we arranged the other day and entered the labyrinth.

It's my first labyrinth, but I'm not really all that excited.

It's just the pressure of trying not to make a mistake.

“Husband, the fortunes of war be with you.”

“Everyone, please take care.”

Lilia, Vera, and Shera were returning to the city from here using horses.

During the time when a large clan conquers a labyrinth, they create a support camp at the entrance of the labyrinth as well.

However Lapan is thankfully only one day away, or even half a day away if you hurry.

There's no particular need to setup a camp outside of the cave.

“Now then.”

The inside of the cave is dark, but it wasn't to the point of seeing nothing.

The interior of the cave was shining, to a dim degree.

However, this darkness would be fatal I'm sure.

“I'm going to make some light.”

“Yeah.”

Soon after entering I used the spirit scroll I got from Nanahoshi.

The bright light spirits flew up and started to circle around above us.

Gisu invoked the same scroll as I used.

Since his role is that of the scout, he needs a different light source from us.

We tested it out yesterday, the scroll can be used by even Paul and Gisu.

Naturally, since it lasts longer with more magic power, it's still best if I use it, but it seems the consumed magic power is almost nothing.

With this, we were delighted at not having to carry along a torch.

After all, it would be a hindrance to have one of your hands sealed off.

The light from the spirits is brighter than a torch, even with little magic power they last a long time.

If this was to spread, torches might disappear from the market.

“Paul, your son sure brought along a lot of useful things.”

“Well yeah. He's the son I'm proud of after all.”

Paul put his hand to his chest with a boasting spirit and Talhand let out a voice mixed with amazement.

“It doesn't seem he has a father he can feel proud about himself though.”

“Don't say that, since he's bothered over it.”

With a sigh mixed into the voice Paul's shoulder drooped.

“Look, let's hurry and get a move on?”

With Gisu's words we ventured further into the cave.

2

First floor. [6]

We start walking through a cave like an ant's nest.

The walls and ceiling have white threads stretched all around them and even further inside there's bluish-white teleport magic circles shining.

There I sent the light spirits and it gave off an almost fluorescent light.

“Occasionally there are magic circles that don't give off any light so caution is necessary, was it?”

“That's right Rudi. Make sure you firmly step in Gisu's footprints.”

Gisu was leading about ten steps ahead.

He wears unique boots.

The places where he steps leave behind footprints with a deep cross mark.

It seems the bottoms of his shoes have something like a cross shaped iron plate attached.

Of course, they're not a magic item imbued with magic power.

I wonder if they're something born from the wisdom of adventurers.

They seem like they help to prevent slipping and they clearly leave behind footprints as well, a useful item.

Although, on this first floor it's easy to spot the teleport magic circles.

The monsters that appear on the first floor are the [Tarantula Deathlord].

However, on the floor, there were different spiders that the Tarantula Deathlord probably use as their staple food.

It's a spectacle that would probably cause someone who hates spiders to faint.

Inside of that group of spiders there are clearly outlined voids.

They're void places that are either circular or square in shape. There's a teleport trap.

If someone doesn't like to step foot on the spiders, then, in no time at all, they'll be teleported somewhere, is what it means.

As a result, we continued walking while stepping on the spiders with a [Crunch].

It's not a very good feeling, but it can't be helped.

Well then, the countless B rank Tarantula Deathlords haven't come out into the pathway.

Occasionally there's one or two of them, but after they're discovered by Gisu they're quickly exterminated by Paul.

Up until now there's no place for me.

“He~ ... Well, if it's like this it's easy going.”

Paul has two swords in his hands and is rapidly advancing.

Two swords.

One of them is the thing he was almost always holding at the house. His beloved sword I'm sure.

I don't know if it's has some sort of special power, but it's cutting the Tarantula

Deathlords in two in a single strike.

Rather than the cutting edge of the sword, I'm sure it's Paul's technique.

In his left hand is a sword with a shape I've never seen before.

I guess it would be categorized as the so-called short sword.

It's not short enough to be considered a dagger, but not long enough to be a long sword.

It has a hand-guard that covers around the hand and somewhat curved double-edged sword. [7]

The reason there is a hole in the center of it, I wonder if it's so it doesn't get stuck to things it cuts?

He's not using it very much.

Paul fundamentally fights using just the sword in his right hand.

I wonder what he uses the sword in his left hand for.

The results of his chuunibyou I wonder?

"...Really, it's easygoing isn't it!"

It doesn't really matter though.

Each time he finishes one off Paul does a fleeting glance towards me.

Annoying.

I wonder if he's thinking something like he wants to show off to me how cool he is.

I understand that Papa is cool already, so I'd like for you to not let your guard down.

"Paul! Properly look ahead!"

Look, Elina-obaachan's reprimands have started flying.

"It's fine I say, we've already entered the first floor any number of times, it's easy."

"That negligence will cost you your life you know."

"I get that, even if you didn't say it?"

“In the first place, you've been going too far since just now. I'm in front right!?”

“If it's on the first floor then, there's no difference is there?”

Elinalise and Paul started up a dispute.

Behind me I heard Talhand say, “Really now, they've started.” and let out a sigh.

“Putting myself aside, it's Rudeus's first time in a labyrinth itself, so as an adult properly show him how things are done as an example!”

“That's why, I was trying to loosen that tension, it's become the opportunity for conversation right?”

“Stop spouting lies, just now I felt you giving off the flippant atmosphere exactly like the time when Zenith just entered the party!”

“No well, if you're going to say that I can't deny it though. What's this, you've, considerably started nagging haven't you.”

“It's only natural. Paul is similar to my son after all. I'll do the scolding as well!”

After saying that and Paul laughed a bit.

“What do you mean son, since you've spent such a long time with Rudi, your feelings have even transferred to me? Stop with that. If you act like my mother then I'll start getting goosebumps.” [8]

“...Oh my, Rudeus you didn't tell him?”

“What?”

“That Sylphy is my grandchild. The fact that he's married my grandchild would mean you're related as well. Since that's the case, the parents of that grandchild, Paul and Zenith, you two are the same as my children as well.”

Paul's legs stopped.

He slowly turned around towards me and came back.

The formation crumbled and everyone stopped their feet.

“He... Hey, what does this mean Rudi... Sylphy is her grandchild, it sounds like Elinalise is saying some ridiculous things though.”

Come to think of it, I didn't say it did I?

“Somehow, it seems that Rawls-san was Elinalise-san's child.”

“Rawls was? That guy, never said a single word about that.”

“Well, it seems various things happened in the past and he was keeping quiet about Elinalise-san's existence.”

“Ah... I see now... It's not like I don't understand.”

“Rather than that, let's keep moving ahead. Be careful to absolutely not let your guard down.”

“Ye... Yeah.”

Paul said words like he understood and returned to the advance guard.

“Seriously... A connection between my family and Elinalise has been made you say... Seriously...”

While leaving behind such muttering.

It seems it was a considerably large shock.

3

The first floor was easy.

Just as Paul said, he must have come down a number of times already.

With breaks in-between, we continue down the passage and end up breaking through a large room with Tarantula Deathlords crowding about in it.

Cleaning up the swarms of monsters is my role as the magician.

However, before we entered the first large room, Talhand gave me several pieces of advice.

“Listen well. Don't use fire.”

“Why?”

“If you use fire, then poison will fill the room. It's especially necessary to be cautious on the deeper floors.”

“...It can't be cured using detoxification?”

“It can't be cured.”

By poison, he's probably referring to carbon monoxide poisoning.

If you use fire in a closed off space, the oxygen will be consumed and your consciousness will eventually get hazy.

This is the same, even with fire magic.

“After that, attacking the ceiling is forbidden, as well. You understand the reason, right?”

“It's because the cave might collapse, right?”

“That's right. That's why, it's better not to use water much either. Use ice as much as possible.”

“Understood.”

If you were to use a large amount of water, the ground would become loose.

Well, some water should be fine, I'm sure. There's earth magic, as well.

Even though I say that, if while using earth magic you unknowingly start using the earth from base supports inside the cave, it could be a problem.

If you take out the support for the interior of the cave, it's possible it might lead to a cave-in.

Then, I'm sure ice is the safest.

The safe choice is to go with what has been suggested.

For that reason, I went with the choice of advanced water magic, [Blizzard Storm].

It's magic that rains a large amount of ice spears.

In order for Paul and the others to not get caught up in it, I start cleaning up the ones around the crowd's center.

“Oh, as expected of Roxy's disciple, the magic you use is the same...”

I heard Talhand's murmur from behind.

It seems Roxy used [Blizzard Storm], as well.

That makes me a bit happy.

“Moreover, chantless, huh? I can understand why you're Roxy's proud disciple.”

While triumphantly listening to Talhand's words, the spiders were annihilated.

We advance ahead.

After clearing through the spider nest, we step on the teleport magic circle inside.

Walking through the passage, aiming for yet another spider nest.

We've repeated that about five times since we entered the labyrinth.

Of course, in regards to the magic circles, it's to investigate whether there are any differences in the book to reality.

We know where all of the magic circles on the first floor lead to, but it was for the sake of confirming the book's credibility.

Two-way teleportation.

Shape, color, characteristics.

We continued forward while checking these off, to make sure everything matches.

It was roughly one hour between arriving at each magic circle.

Since we repeated that five times, in terms of time, it would be about five hours, I estimate.

In the final room, there was a magic circle that had a stronger hue of blue and was somewhat larger than the others.

The deeper blue colored magic circle was the magic circle that leads to the next floor.

The final room on the first floor was full of spider nests.

There, two magic circles were lined up.

They're magic circles with a similar shape, if it was someone who doesn't know

anything, I'm sure they wouldn't know which is the real thing.

Nearby, on the side of one of the magic circles, a large circle mark was carved into the stone.

This is something that Gisu left the last time as a marker for the correct one.

After confirming that there were no mistakes within the book, we stepped onto the magic circle.

The second floor.

4

Second floor.

From here on, there are giant steel caterpillars [Iron Crawlers] crawling around.

The small spiders on the ground have disappeared, and there's a decrease in the number of spider nests.

The ground floor has become smooth.

The [Iron Crawlers] with a height of about one meter and a width of about two meters, give off a plump impression.

They're close in image to the worms that come out in Nausicaa. ^[9]

Just as they appear, they're solid and tough.

And, unlike their appearance, they're fast.

Rather than a slow caterpillar, they have speed more like a centipede.

It seems like they're allies with the tarantulas- while the iron crawlers tank, the spiders shoot off sticky threads from behind.

If you get caught in the sticky thread then the crawlers, with a body weight of about one ton, will trample you it seems.

The iron crawlers are tough, even Paul can't defeat them in a single hit.

No need to even mention Elinalise.

That's why, it's my turn there.

I can fire two magic spells at the same time.

While firing [Blizzard Storm] at the spiders in the back, I finish off the Iron Crawlers that Paul and Elinalise attract with one hit, each with a rock bullet.

It seems the iron crawlers are tougher to kill with a normal rock bullet, but I don't have much issues.

Mine easily pierces straight through.

Even though I say that, as expected of a worm, I'd say, if the place it hits is not an instakill, they writhe, struggling about violently.

"With this, there's no place for me to take a turn."

Since I was energetically working, Talhand muttered that uninterested from behind.

He's stationed close behind me for the sake of whether it's needed.

Even though I say that, in order to avoid falling into that sort of worst case pinch, I'm making sure to follow the three points to remain careful about, including the one Gisu said.

Therefore for the time being, Talhand has nothing to do.

However, that's fine.

If we can have some reserve strength remaining as we advance, then that gives me a sense of relief.

The Tarantula Deathlords continued to send their sticky threads flying.

I didn't think that tarantulas make spider webs, but I'm sure these guys are different.

Occasionally, they make it over to where I am, but since I have my Demon Eye opened it will never hit.

Even if it were to hit, they have no attack power. If I just burn it with fire magic, there's no problem.

"Ah, damn it..."

"Ueh... It's sticky isn't it."

Even though I say that, it doesn't seem like the advance guard can avoid it all, so Paul and Elinalise end up all sticky from the threads.

“Here, don't go wasting too much now!”

Although it would be fine for me to burn off the sticky threads, since Gisu has some kind of liquid that can melt the threads, I just weaken them with it.

It seems to be some kind of unique chemical circulated on Begaritt Continent, and it is harmless to the human skin.

It does no harm, but Elinalise was grumbling about how it makes the skin rough when it was spilled.

It's almost like detergent.

Maybe I'll try taking some home and washing dishes with it.

“Alright, let's take a break for a moment here.”

After the combat.

With Gisu's words, we sit down on the spot.

Talhand and Elinalise remain standing on lookout, just like that.

After Paul sat down, he immediately started to unfasten his armor and sword, wiping the body fluids of the monsters from the surfaces.

During the short break, he finished inspecting his equipment in an instant.

It was a familiar way of doing it, and Paul ended up asking something a pro would ask.

“What's wrong? Rudi, you should finish up quick as well.”

“Ah, yes.”

After receiving a somewhat harsh rebuke from Paul I inspected my equipment as well.

Even though I say that, since I'm just firing magic from a long range, there's few places to check.

Nevertheless.

Paul is quiet.

During the time of the first floor every time we had a break like this he would somehow come out asking, "How is it?", but as expected now that we've gotten to the second floor his seriousness is apparent.

Daddy is cool. ^[10]

"Cheh... It's stuck to it."

While Paul was rubbing the fluids on his armor with some kind of cloth he was cursing.

"How about trying to use the chemicals that Gisu used just now?"

"That's for dissolving the threads, right?"

And while saying that, Paul put some of the chemical on the cloth and started rubbing it.

And then, it was almost a surprising level of white.

No, the armor wasn't white though.

"I... it came off didn't it? Thank you."

"No-no."

As I thought, it's detergent.

If I buy some before I return home, I wonder if Sylphy would be delighted.

If possible, it would be good if we could make it to the other side, though.

After Paul removed the filth, he quickly put the armor back on, put his sword on, and walked over towards Elinalise.

Just as I was thinking about changing places with Talhand and Gisu, they called out to me.

"Senpai, lookout is fine."

"Is it fine?"

"Don't mind it, that old man hasn't worked after all. Rather than that- it's about from here on out- I'd like to hear a bit of senpai's view."

“Is it fine for dad not to join in?”

“It's fine, rather than that guy, senpai is smarter after all.”

While Gisu was saying those sorts of abusive things, he took the book and a map out of his bag.

What he spread out was two maps.

One of them was cleanly mapped out, but the other one was produced as we stopped along the way.

“We'll soon be at the third floor. The place we lost track of Roxy is... here. If we're lucky, Roxy should still be in the vicinity of there. If it's just as the book says that is.”

“Yes.”

According to the book, it seems the teleport traps are made to only teleport to the same floor as they're on.

Even if they're called random warp, the moment you step on them you won't suddenly find yourself in front of the boss on the lowest floor or anything.

Roxy warped on the third floor. ^[11]

According to the book, if you step on a teleport trap, then you'll go straight to the monster's den.

We don't know if the magic circle she stepped on was random or else the one way passage.

In any case, if she's still alive, then the probability that she's on the third floor is high.

Of course, there's also the possibility that she luckily managed to escape to the second or first floor, as well.

However, these two floors were ones Roxy had explored a number of times as well.

If it's someone who has as much ability as Roxy, then she would have already been able to move around the second floor. And then, it wouldn't be strange for her to have made it out of the labyrinth by now.

It doesn't seem like she is past the third floor, after all.

“Useful magic for the purpose of searching, you don't have any right?”

“Yeah, I don't have any.”

I could try thinking about the application of magic I can use right now, but I can't quickly think of anything.

“It's fine, with your intuition, Senpai, but where around here do you think Roxy would be?”

“Intuition you say.....”

“In this labyrinth, we can't really just go walking always following the right hand side and searching thoroughly after all. If we're going to search, then that sort of thing is necessary as well.”

“Then, how about around this area.”

For the time being, I try pointing to a relevant blank space on the map.

“The eastern area from where she was teleported, huh? Then, let's search around there.”

How relevant.

I feel like it would be efficient to just search thoroughly, following the right hand side, though.

However, we have no one in this place who can do a scientific analysis.

In any case, we have no choice other than to walk around searching places we haven't checked.

“Honestly, without Roxy, we couldn't break through the second floor. It's thanks to senpai. Those iron crawlers are troublesome.”

“I'm sure.”

The monsters here have a bad affinity with Talhand's specialty attribute.

In terms of combat potential, if it comes down to it, Paul could get entangled in the threads as well, and can't properly take care of the advance guard.

Vera is unreliable as the advance guard, as well. There's no way she could follow through as well as Elinalise.

In order to pass through here, I'm sure someone who can use ice or fire type magic is necessary.

Therefore, if Roxy ends up missing, it's not strange for their progress to be at a stand still.

Rather, after Roxy disappeared, I'm amazed they even managed to come back.

“We thought we could manage something, but after all, there are few magicians in this area. And not a single person has the backbone to challenge the teleport labyrinth, as well.”

It seems Gisu tried to do something in his own way.

Thinking about it, the time when we got here he was trying to persuade someone in the guild, as well.

It didn't seem to be going well though.

“I'm sure Gisu-san has had various troubles as well.”

“He~... It's fine. Rather, didn't I say it's fine as newbie? If you use the honorifics then my back gets itchy?”

“...I get it newbie. Next time, I'll introduce you to a cute female monkey, you can scratch each others backs.”

“Oh, that sounds nice. There isn't a red-light district around here, after all. Rather, who are you calling monkey? Hey!”

There's a variety of things I'd like to talk with Gisu about as well, but I'll put it aside for now.

I confirmed things about the route from here on out with Gisu.

The map Gisu made was truly easy to read.

However, if you were to compare it to the first floor that had been completely mapped, there were a number of holes on the second floor.

If Zenith or Roxy happened to actually be inside of one of these holes... Such a thing better not happen.

It leaves me a bit uneasy, but first we should check the third floor.

Rather than starting at the closest place, the second floor, we should search in the place with the highest probability.

“Gisu, approximately where are we right now?”

Elinalise stuck her head in.

In response Gisu pointed to a spot on the map.

“Right now, we're around here.”

“Then, soon we'll be at the end of the second floor, right?”

“Yeah, but spiders and iron crawlers will still come out.”

“For the composition of the monsters to change midway, it's a troublesome labyrinth isn't it?”

Elinalise suddenly flipped back her hair.

Even her proud hair rolls were effortlessly getting soft.

“By the way, Gisu, why do you call Rudeus Senpai?”

“Iih... In the Dorudia race prison, just a bit...”

“Dorudia prison, you say, that one from what Ghyslaine said before? What happened with that?”

“After we return, I'll tell you about it in detail.”

While grinning and laughing, Gisu discontinued the conversation.

The Dorudia race prison, how nostalgic.

The me from back then had so much freedom.

I can't get away with that appearance now.

Oh my, on top of the bed it's always that appearance, isn't it?

It seems I have the composure to have such a conversation now as well.

5

And then, we arrived at the third floor.

In terms of time, it was about 10 hours, I'd say.

It was exceedingly fast.

"I thought it would take a few days to get here."

"In order to get to places without the map that might be the case."

The nonchalant murmur I let out was picked up by Paul.

I guess it's only natural that advancing as you fumble about and using the map as you advance are different.

There's already no more small spiders on the floor.

Occasionally, there's some sticky threads on the wall, but the presence of living things is weak.

In exchange for that, I get a somewhat eerie feeling drifting about from deep darkness within the dark cave.

From here on out, it's the real thing.

First, we're going to find Roxy.

"..."

Thinking that, I feel like I can smell the nostalgic scent of Roxy drifting about.

No, it's not my imagination.

This is Roxy's scent, it's Roxy's presence.

There's no way I would be mistaken.

I can feel something stirring within my chest.

Here.

I'm confident in Roxy's continued existence.^[12]

CHAPTER 3

HER FEELINGS AT THAT TIME

1

--Roxy's POV--

I heard a small noise and woke up.

The surrounding area is dark and narrow.

It's a confining space.

This room I had reached at the end of all of the teleporting was narrow, like a cradle.

The size of the area is barely enough to allow one or two people to lie down.

Even the ceiling hangs low.

It's low enough to nearly brush the top of my head.

At this height and narrowness.

As long as I am occupying this area, no demon will metastasize here.

As I sit at the very edge of this space, I recline against the wall behind me and fix my gaze on what lies before me.

There is a Magic Formation there.

And this Magic Formation shines with a ghostly pale light.

It is a Metastasis Magic Formation.

When I place a single foot on it, I will be teleported somewhere.

The most probable place is to a monster den.

A room of death, filled to the brim with different kinds of demons.

One Month Ago.

I blundered into a trap.

The only excuse I can make is [It couldn't be helped.]

During a battle, I leaped away to avoid an oncoming attack, then I took a step backwards, and then I tripped on a stone.

This caused me to stagger forward with my other foot,

And with that step I landed on a Metastasis Magic Formation.

Before we entered the combat, we had confirmed there was a trap there.

And yet, I easily wound up stepping on the trap.

Ahead of where I metastasized, there were an absurd number of demons.

There were 20, no... 30... I guess?

I am a magician.

I myself happen to think that I am an excellent one.

Even though I cannot use the chantless magic, I can use chanting omission, so I am able to cast faster than most other magicians around.

But despite all the enemies I've become accustomed to battling...

There was never a panic I had felt like this one.

I expected to be wiped out immediately.

No matter how many I destroyed, demon after demon kept surging forward.

As demons continually began to appear one by one and fill my field of vision.

The demons of this labyrinth, after all, knew the routes of all the metastasis magic formations.

And so, this place had become a demon's nest.

This place was where demons lie in wait for their victims, the so called [Trap] room.

I was prepared for death.

But I still fought.

My magic was not infinite however.

And my intuition tells me sooner or later it'll run out, and I'll probably end up succumbing.

I know my limits.

I probably have about 30% of my MP left, no it's probably closer to 20%, and the number of enemies it seems hasn't decreased at all.

Only the number of corpses has increased, and the demons still continue to surge forward one after another.

It was a complete and utter checkmate.

There will be no rescue for me.

Was I forsaken by everyone after all?

If I were in someone else's shoes, wouldn't I leave behind such a clumsy woman?

No matter how much magic I can use, a fool who walks into traps is a burden.

No, I don't think they deserted me.

Rather, Paul was also in the range of the trap's activation, did he metastasize to another location?

With the obvious lack of fighting potential, did he have to withdraw temporarily?

Either way, help hasn't come.

While I fought desperately, I couldn't help but begin to lose my composure and began to sob and wail.

I felt the magic power within me decrease ever steadily.

Meanwhile, I noticed one bright light.

In this wide room were six magic formations.

Yet, not a single demon has appeared for a while from around any of them.

Perhaps, there might possibly not be any more demons around the place where the magic formations are.

It's All-or-Nothing.

I used every spell at my disposal to break through the swarm of demons, and I launched myself onto the magic formation.

And at last, I had arrived at this room.

I had managed somehow to survive.

It was pure luck.

I could produce as much water from magic as I wanted.

I had a bit of food stored in my backpack.

Somehow I will recover my magic and escape from here.

And so I spent the rest of that day in thought.

The next day, I stepped on the metastasis magic formation.

And the destination point was a passage I was still unfamiliar with.

Apparently, being teleported to these random locations was a typical characteristic of the metastasis magic formation.

However there were no signs that there were people nearby.

I was doing the mapping by myself, in order to escape the labyrinth, I continued moving forward.

Though I had thought about waiting for a rescue effort, but there was the possibility that the rest of Paul-san's party had been wiped out as well.

I can say with confidence that the metastasis trap is a terrible thing.

I walk around the passageway, and discover 3 metastasis magic formations.

I make a mark on a nearby rock, and jump into the first one.

I metastasize to an unfamiliar passage.

I repeated this action several times.

If I don't do things this way, I won't be able to advance in this metastasis labyrinth.

While I try and be careful not to step on a trap, or any of the metastasis magic formations hidden in or by rocks, I advance ahead.

Have I managed to advance ahead, or have I ended up just going back? I just don't know.

I cannot seem to grasp where my current location is in this metastasis labyrinth.

My senses are unreliable.

Though I am uneasy, I must somehow keep on moving forward.
And I need to secure some new food supplies.
So I defeat a demon, eat its meat, and continue onwards.

How many times have I metastasized into a demon's den?
I fight desperately, and find similar magic formations where demons don't emerge from.

Then, I return.
To this same narrow room.

How many times have I repeated this I wonder?
Five times? Ten times?
The magic formation before my eyes always sends me to a different point.
However, I somehow always end up returning back here.

I became drained, mentally and physically.
As could be expected, I was tired.
My biological clock tells me about a month has now passed by.
And after a month of going around and around, there are no useful results.

The fights are not easy.
No, there is never an easy fight.
I receive many attacks, blood loss often causes my consciousness to dim.
How many times now have the demons begun to run into the magic formations to block themselves from my magic?
I began to think that these demons actually have brains after all.
In the end though, I cannot help but just waste my magic power breaking through their blockade.

I feel like I'm being cornered.

My joints ache.

I ate all the food already.

The demons here are tough and taste horrible too.

If I don't use detoxification magic when I am eating, my body health becomes poor.

I can feel my physical strength falling.

Only my magical power do I possess in excess.

I have no idea what will come next.

Will there be many more enemies?

Will there be more cleverly coordinated enemy attacks?

Will my magic be exhausted, and my limbs torn from my body and eaten by these demons?

Only good luck will allow me to avoid having to break through a group of demons just to end up back here, the next time.

Just thinking about that prevents me from stepping onto the magic formation in front of me.

Perhaps the demons here have realized my existence.

They know that I am in the narrow room.

And they know when I step on this magic formation in this narrow room, that I will once again be returning to that den.

Surely they are waiting for me.

Hiding, and waiting for that moment when I finally make my fatal mistake.

I have a hunch.

That there won't be a next time.

[...]

It was here. It wasn't when I came here that I became truly conscious of my own death for the first time.

Surely no one will discover my corpse.

I doubt there will be any items left behind to be discovered after I die.

I will die, unable to leave a trace.

Scary.

I am so scared.

My back teeth began making a chattering sound before I had realized it.

Impulsively, I wanted to just unleash a loud shout, but instead I just gripped my staff tightly.

How many times have I looked upon death up until now?

I had lived as an adventurer, so I have witnessed people dying in my presence before.

I've seen a demon cleave a powerful warrior in half like a withered branch right before my eyes.

And I've seen an intelligent magician squashed like a tomato by a demon right before my eyes.

An accomplished and clever thief, a nimble swordsman...

All of them I have seen die in my presence.

On the days I saw such things, I dimly became aware that my turn would also come someday.

But at the same time, I also thought [At least I am safe!]

However, now that I actually have to face it, I am scared.

What have I managed to accomplish up until now?

There are things I still want to do.

I even have a dream!

That's right, my dream...

I want to become a teacher.

I love teaching other people.

Even if I have no talent for it, I love to teach.

Then, when this business is over, when we safely rescue Zenith-san, I am going to go take the examination for magic teachers at the magic academy.

I will be a school teacher!

A teacher at the Magic Academy.

I parted with my Shisho there after an argument.

Maybe I will argue with my Shisho again.

Though, I have a feeling it'll be better this time around, perhaps.

...that person was greedy for recognition, I wonder if they've at least made it to being vice-principal already?

I want to feel what it's like to have ordinary happiness.

That's right. If I was a teacher, I could possibly even get married.

Marry a man I have come to love, we would live together, and spend passionate nights together as well.

Even though I am of the Magic Race, with a short and childlike figure.

I still think there is at least a chance.

[Haa~]

The scorn leaked out.

Even if I do say so myself, with the situation like this, to remember something like my dream...

I'm going to die.

My dreams will never come true.

I will only die a miserable death.

When it comes down to it, there is no way I'll be saved anymore.

I have never known of such a person to be rescued from a situation like this.

.....I do not want to die.

However, I put my foot forward, and stepped onto the magic formation.
Because I do not want to die.

2

My feelings proved correct.

I metastasized to an unknown passageway, some of the magic formations that I marked had moved, and it seemed that I was naturally being driven towards another demon's den.

The moment I saw, I realized it was impossible.

Demons were piling on the corpses of the other dead demons onto the magic formation.

Is it because the demons don't metastasize into that narrow a room after all?

Since it's become like this, then there is no option left other than to get ready to take the plunge.

[All while fighting this crowd?]

I did think their formation was beautiful.

A heap of corpses, defending the metastasis magic formation that leads to my refuge, the demons are deployed radially around it.

At the vanguard are the [Iron Crawler], who have moved in front and devoted themselves as the front line of defense. On top of them are the [Death Road Tarantula], evil red spiders, moving and stopping occasionally to spit out threads while on top of the backs of the [Iron Crawler].

At the rearguard is what looks like a huge clay doll standing there, the Mad Skull, shooting out clumps of rock.

I began to weave my magic while thinking, [This is clearly an army.]

“Oh, armor of the majestic land, gather around me and become my trappings, <Earth Fortress>!”

The surrounding soil began to take the form of a fortress around me.

Eventually, it covered the top of my head, I became protected within the dome.

However, I had to stop once it reached a certain height.

I don't need it to reach the ceiling.

If it's to the extent of my chest-height, it is enough to block the charge of the Iron Crawlers.

“Oh, falling rain, I call upon you to scatter, and flood the whole world! <Water Splash>!”
Innumerable drops of water suspend themselves aloft around me, and then become bullets which tear through the area.

However, as the offensive power of this magic is extremely low, the demons were barely kept at bay by this spell.

I understood that, though.

So, I began chanting the next spell immediately.

“Blue Goddess, fly down from heaven and wave the scepter which would frost the world! <Icicle Field>!”

All the demons' exteriors, which were covered in the sticky water droplets from before, made a hard sound as they quickly froze solid.

[Water Splash] and [Icicle Field], and then the melded magic [Frost Nova]. The entire forward guard of the demon army came to a complete stop.

I still had to hammer more magic in there. Advanced level magic.

“King of Frost. Supreme ruler of the great snowfields.

Clad in white, oh King of Naught, who reaps all passion.

Cold-hearted king, which rules the frozen death! <Blizzard Storm>!”

The magic that I shortened was complete.

A spear of ice shot out towards the entire area.

It flies out in a wide arc before me.

The spear of ice pierced into the demons behind the frozen vanguard, one after another.

I did not manage to defeat the enemy vanguard.

While statues of ice play the role of the wall, I chant advanced magic, and instead

struck at the back row.

When I traversed the labyrinth near Shirone, this was the strategy I learned.

The strategy of victory.

However...

[...Just as I thought.]

At the same time the demons in the back row are dying, demon after demon springs up from the metastasis magic formation.

Stepping over the pile of demons I just defeated, the new wave of demons filled the room at a surprising pace.

[Is it no good after all?]

The room quickly became full of demons in no time.

My heart quickly became full of despair, as well.

At the same time the room filled, I began to lose my composure.

This is bad.

I can't break through if I don't first do something about that mountain of dead bodies.

However, I don't have enough hands.

[Kuu~!]

From the distance, the Mad Skull sends a rock bullet flying.

Part of the Earth Fortress is destroyed, and the Iron Crawlers who had their movement dulled, began to restlessly squirm through the gap.

A cold sweat slowly rose to the surface of my spine.

“Flaming sword of my charge, tear my enemies to pieces! <Flame Slice>!”

The blade of flames sprung forward, and the shell of the Iron Crawler is made red-hot.

The Iron Crawler writhed around as it died.

Iron Crawlers are weak to fire.

However, it is not a good idea to use fire in a cavern.

It's like something is tied around my neck.

I have no choice but to use it.

“Oh, armor of the majestic land, gather around me and become my trappings, <Earth Fortress>!”

Once more, I create a wall of soil.

The residual amount of magic I possess steadily decreases.

I must hurry.

What's the best way to do it?

How can I survive?

Think.

I defeat demons absent-mindedly while I think about how to survive.

However, I cannot think of any way.

Have I finally been checkmated?

Is it already time for it to end?

Is it here that I am to die, after all?

Even as I continue working to kill demons, I think so.

[...~Aah~]

My feet stagger.

My head swims.

I feel the magic power inside of me beginning to dry up.

I know I will faint after I fire off a few more spells.

[I don't want to...]

I grab on to my staff.

I do not want to die.

I do not want to die.

Even though I think this, in my mind, one thing after another begins to re-surface.

Soon after I was born, I remembered my parent's disappointed faces.

In the quiet village I lived in, I was the only one unable to talk with the others.

My parents pitied me and taught me words.

I was impressed by the magician who came to visit my village, and so I learned magic.

I rushed out of the village, knowing only beginner rank water magic.

After I headed out, I met three boys.

I traveled with them as an adventurer for many years.

One of the companions died, and so the party dissolved.

Then, I traveled to Central Continent.

I had met many people, and thereby came to know of the Magic Academy.

I then entered the academy.

I took a class for the first time, and I was impressed.

I got a good score on a test, and the results of my practical skills test made others jealous.

I talked about many things with my friend in the dormitory.

When I became advanced-rank, I met my Shisho.

From Shisho, I learned saint class water magic, and it came to the point where I could easily use it on the spur of the moment.

My Shisho said this and that, and got angry.

I graduated around then, and left to travel without saying anything to my Shisho.

I thought myself good enough to work in the Asura Capital City, so I traveled there.

However, with no work to be had, I gradually moved towards the border.

And at the border, with no work to be found either, I was at a loss.

But, it was then that I found the piece of paper asking for a tutor.

I met Paul and family, and I had also met Rudi.

I was surprised to see the love affair of Paul and his family.

I was excited and jealous of the talent Rudi had.

I watched Rudi who did not get carried away with magic like I did, and my feelings of respect towards him rose.

Once I had taught Rudeus water-saint class magic, I had left.

I began to dive into the labyrinth near the Shirone kingdom.

After traversing the labyrinth, I had become employed by Shirone kindgom.

I taught magic to Prince Pax, and it was dreadfully different than when I taught Rudi.

I realized the lack of talent I had as a teacher.

A letter came one day from Rudi, and I worked very hard to make a book on the Demon God Language for him.

I found myself disgusted with Shirone Kingdom, and so I left.

It was then that I heard of the Metastasis Event^[13].

I met Elinalise and Talhand.

I was surprised at how free Elinalise and Talhand were.

I traveled around the Magic Continent.

I met my parents again after so long, and was able to confirm that they truly did love me after all.

Then, I met Kishirika.

And then, and then...

Such scenes streamed inside my head in an instant.

An Iron Crawler approaches in front of me.

The room is warmed by the heat of the previously cast fire magic, so the effect of Frost Nova has weakened.

It's already over.

I do not want to die, I hate this.

I HATE THIS!

[No... NOOOOoooooo.....!]

I swung my staff around awkwardly.

Sticky threads come flying at me, and entwine my staff.

In an instant, my staff falls to the ground.

[I do not want to die. He-, help me, somebody...!]

I edge backward, but there is a wall behind me.

An Iron Crawler approaches.

How many of these are there?

I can't cast any more magic spells.

Am I going to be eaten alive like this?

I hate it, why does it have to be like this?!

[Somebody, please save me.....]

Ah~.

...~ah.

I guess I'll never be able to meet my mother again.

At that moment, that was my final thought.

And, as the demon who approached before me, I squeezed my eyes shut tightly.

3

I waited for an eternity, but that moment never came.

Did I die instantly?

As I thought that, I realized I wouldn't have been able to think that if I was already dead.

I am unable to reason what has happened.

However, I no longer hear any sounds.

Perhaps, I have already appeared here in the world after death.

I'm scared, but I open my eyes.

Filling my view was a sight beyond anything I could have ever imagined.

It was a world of ice.

Death Road Tarantula, Iron Crawler, and Mad Skull.

All had become statues of pure white ice.

The Mad Skull, which was inside the inner part, collapsed with a crunching sound and fell apart.

The skull and the main body cracked and collapsed onto the ground with a loud sound, similar to a window breaking.

It was completely frozen to the very core.

Compared to my own Frost Nova, which only freezes the surface, this power is in another league entirely.

I doubt there is a demon left alive after this.

“...Eh?”

I don't understand what just happened.

I reached for my staff, while being confused.

“Hyaaaah!”

The staff was so cold, that I dropped it instinctively.

In this world of silence, I heard a clanging sound.

Was that the reaction to the sound? One voice reached my ear.

“Ahh, what a relief...”

Walking confidently between the statues of ice, it was a solitary young man.

The moment I laid eyes on him, I began to feel my heart beating really fast.

It was the man of my dreams.

Features that seemed kind, and hair that seemed to be soft.

He was tall and wearing a robe, but despite appearing to be a magician, he also seemed to be solidly built.

Dressed in grey robes and holding a large staff, he came towards me.

He looked down at me with a face that seemed to be openly relieved.

“EHH? Ehh?”

「ああ、良かった……」



I was embraced tightly.

It was a warm, powerful, and reliable pair of arms wrapped around me.

It was a lightly sweet scent mixed with a little bit of sweat. However, it seemed to be a nostalgic smell to me.

He squatted down, and buried his face into the nape of my neck, and as he inhaled deeply he was moved to profound emotions.

“Su~u.....”

“.....!”

And then I had noticed something.

I had not had any kind of a bath for about a month.

“Ah!”

The second I realized this, I pushed him away.

“What's this?”

His face had a surprised look.

Ah, I'm hopeless. I did something inexcusable like that.

Even though he just came to rescue me.

Ah, but still, I don't want to be thought of as stinking...

Ah, no... wait... do I really need to worry about such a thing right now?

What's this?

I can't follow this line of thought.

“S-Sorry, I think it may be a little smelly...”

“S-Smelly... is it? Ah, I'm sorry!”

I received a bit of a shock when he started to smell his sleeves.

“Ah, not that! I meant myself. Because I have been trapped in here for a month now.”

“Oh, that's what you meant? Well, I don't happen to mind it, you know?”

“Well, I do happen to mind it.”

I shouldn't have said that.

Well, it was fine as it is thought.

I should first give him my thanks.

Then, I should properly hear his name.

“Thank you very much for taking the time to rescue me.”

“No, it's only natural that I do.”

Only natural?

No companion I know would feel any kind of obligation that would make them try and rescue me from certain death from such an amazingly large crowd of demons.

Ah yes, his name. I must hear his name.

“*ahem*... Pleased to meet your acquaintance just now, I happen to be called Roxy Migurdia. If it is at all possible, would you please allow me the honor to receive your name?”

After I said that, he suddenly froze like a statue.

Did I say something strange?

“J-just now... pleased to meet my acquaintance?”

“Eh? Ah, have we met somewhere else before now? If that's the case I am truly very sorry, but I cannot seem to remember it at all...”

Come to think about it now, I have a funny feeling that I have seen someone like him before.

Now, where could it have been?

He does seem to look just a little bit like Paul-san...

Could I really have forgotten such a person?

"I can't seem to remember you..."

He looked blue in the face.

Did I anger him?

Whether I like it or not, I have certainly met someone like him somewhere.

There's something about his face I can recall, something from a long time ago certainly...

“Remember... Re... member.....”

His head bobbed from side to side, and he staggered backwards several steps.

Suddenly, it seemed like he was holding something back in his mouth...

"EEEEEEEEEEEEEEHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH"

He vomited.

...

That little boy Rudi - after such a small amount of time, had grown up to become an adult that I now knew as Rudeus Greyrat.

Paul-san and everyone else who caught up shortly after had brought me back to safety, and it was then that I understood how narrowly I had escaped death.

CHAPTER 4

MAGICIAN OF PERSISTENCE

1

It's my first time seeing Roxy in a while and she hasn't changed very much. Be it her age or her atmosphere, they were the same as always.

It's probably just because the labyrinth trapped her for a month, I'm sure. The labyrinth considerably weakened her.

The labyrinth wore down her cheeks, made bags under her eyes, loosened her braided hair, and dirtied her entirety, appearing almost like a vagrant child.

Even then, Roxy's "Roxyness" hadn't been lost or damaged at all.

However, Gisu immediately gave out the judgement to return. I'm sure it's the correct decision.

Talhand was carrying Roxy on his back as we returned above ground.

I declared that I would like to carry Roxy, but by removing me from the combat potential, we wouldn't be able to escape the second floor.

Therefore, it can't be helped.

Letting this kind of man, who gives off a shaggy-haired impression, carry Roxy is just fine.

I did have such feelings, but no one objected, including Roxy.

"Excuse me, Talhand-san. I've troubled you."

"It's fine. It's no good if I don't help you occasionally as well, Roxy."

"Do I smell? Since it was enough for Rudi to vomit, I think it should be considerable, though."

"Hahha, if I were to think this much stinks, then there's no way I could get by as an

adventurer.”

Along the way, I heard such a conversation from nearby me.

I had heard that Roxy and Talhand had traveled together for a long time.

It was a conversation where I could feel that relationship of trust.

It makes me a bit jealous.

“Sensei. I didn't particularly vomit because sensei smells, you know?”

Succumbing to my jealousy, I called out behind me with my voice.

Roxy took a glance in my direction, and then quickly turned her face away.

“The... Then why did you vomit?”

“Since the happiness of meeting with Roxy and the sadness of being forgotten were mixed together, my stomach ended up tightening up.”

“...It's not like I forgot about you. I just couldn't connect together the old cute Rudi and the current Rudi.”

Roxy grumbled that out and then, just like that, remained silent.

Well, I've grown as well; I guess it can't be helped.

“...”

It was a short conversation, but hearing Roxy's voice for the first time in a while gives me a pleasant feeling in my ears that I might just rise up to heaven like that.

2

With Roxy's return, the housesitting group raised cheers of joy.

Since they started exploring this labyrinth, it would be the first pleasant news, I guess.

I just want to bury that news into a hole I've dug myself already though.

No, I won't say it.

Regardless of the cause, something happy is something happy.

Lilia promptly put Roxy into the bath.

During that time, I was trying to think of something I could do for Roxy's sake and was loitering around outside her room, but Vera drove me away.

I guess it means you're not supposed to approach the room when a girl is in the middle of bathing.

I absolutely did not have an ulterior motive.

I just thought I wanted to do something for her sake.

Really, just that.

Although certainly, I do have a previous offense.

This time, I'm innocent.

I thought about asserting that, but I decided to let it pass.

...No, this is fine.

It's about me.

Suddenly, I looked to my side and saw neatly folded laundry.

It's not confined to my hand just like that grabbing the white cloth at the very top and putting it in my pocket. ^[14]

I can't afford to let the pitiful whispers of the past get to me.

This time, it's "still" innocent.

Thinking about it like that, this is fine.

In order for Roxy to recover her strength, she needs several days of rest.

Even though I say that, she's an adventurer as well.

Without external wounds, she still has enough physical strength left to walk on her own.

If she just eats some good food and gets sound sleep on a soft bed, I'm sure she'll soon make a comeback.

It really doesn't seem like there's any problems.

Nevertheless, I suddenly ended up showing Roxy my unsightly places.
I hope she's not disillusioned.
Suddenly vomiting was impolite.
But, it was really a shock.
Even though I never forgot about Roxy.
I thought that Roxy forgot me.

...Come to think of it, Sylphy also said she received a shock when she thought I forgot her.

I wonder if Sylphy had these kinds of feelings at that time, as well.
After I return, it won't be good if I don't apologize to her.

3

Roxy continued to sleep for almost a full day.
I'm sure it can't be helped after spending a month in a labyrinth filled with monsters.

I was loitering around again in front of her room, in order to be the first one to say good morning, and Lilia drove me away again.
Since I was able to get a fleeting glance at Roxy's peaceful sleeping face at that time, I decided it was fine.
It would be good if she gets better soon.

On the second day, Roxy got up.
With a wobbling movement, she came over to the table where we were eating.

“Good morning to you, Roxy-sensei...!”

“Yes. Rudi... Rudeus-san, Good... morning.”

In this place, including me, there weren't more than four people.
Elinalise, Paul, Talhand...
Gisu and the other three were currently out shopping.

The exploration group does nothing but rest at the time when they're in the city while the standby group moves around is the composition.

Gisu is in the exploration group as well, but, for some reason, he also commands the standby group.

A hard worker, or rather, that person sure is dedicated.

Wouldn't it be better for him to just quit as an adventurer and become a manager?

“Everyone...”

Everyone here focused his or her gazes on Roxy.

Roxy created a humble expression and then, matched her gaze and lowered her head with each person, one at a time.

“This time, I've caused you quite a bit of trouble. I'm already fine.”

The responses to her actions were varied.

One said it was fine, and put their hand around her shoulder.

One nodded, and said it was only obvious.

One drank some alcohol, and offered the alcohol bottle.

One lost for words, and moved by her return.

“Well, if you want to say your thanks, say it to Rudi. If he hadn't suddenly started saying something weird like, 'Tou-san, I can feel the presence of God,' and started breaking down the walls as he ran ahead, we probably wouldn't have found you alive after all.”

Going by the manner of speaking, Paul made it almost sound like I'm a dangerous person, but when entering the third floor, for some reason, I knew Roxy's location.

Then, I had the premonition that Roxy had fallen into a dilemma.

Since I felt it was an emergency, I proceeded straight towards the voice, not minding the danger of a cave-in.

Straight ahead was a wall, but without minding it, I just blew it down and continued straight ahead.

Why did I have that sort of premonition? I don't know.

For some reason, I was convinced of it.

I'm sure, the bond between Roxy and I brought us together.

I'm sure that's the case. Yeah.

I do, just a tiny bit, think that the Hitogami might have done something as well, but I won't believe it.

My God is only one person.

Wait a minute, if it comes down to that, that would mean this is the guidance of God as well.

Then, there's already nothing strange at all.

Just as I was thinking about that, while facing me, Roxy lowered her head a second time.

“Umm, Rudeus-san, that is, thank you very much.”

...I wonder why...

I feel an endless distance from Roxy.

I know this sensation. I learned about it in school.

It's the name formalities.

It's because she's calling my name like that.

It's because she's using reserved manners like Rudeus-san.

“Please don't mind it; it's only natural after all. Rather than that, please call me Rudi like before.”

After saying that, Roxy somewhat cast her eyes down, and whispered a response.

“Th... That kind of way to call you, isn't it too overly familiar?”

“No way, saying it's something like over-familiar... If sensei was going to call me something like Rudeus-san then I might as well have tou-san call me Rudeus-san as well.”

“Hey now, what does that mean?”

I didn't hear anything else, like Paul's comment.

“Please call me Rudi like before, with familiarity in it. No matter how many years have passed already, Roxy Migurdia is my respected sensei after all.”

After saying that, Roxy blinked her eyes.

Was I too thoughtless? Her face is red.

I wonder if she has a fever or something.

And then, she smacked her own cheeks.

“Yes. That's right, isn't it...? Rudi.”

“Yes, sensei.”

Suddenly, almost as if she was ridiculing herself, Roxy looked at me while a smile floated up. ^[15]

That face was becoming somewhat red now.

“Nevertheless, that is, you've gotten big.”

“I'm a human after all. It doesn't seem sensei has changed.”

“Yeah... just as small, as usual.”

“Though, I don't think you're as tiny as you say.”

“Is that so...”

How nostalgic.

If I close my eyes, I can vividly remember things about being together with Roxy.

The day we met.

The day I was first taught magic.

The day I received the sacred object.

The day I learned the Saint class magic.

The day we separated.

The days of exchanging letters.

All of them are important memories.

“Nevertheless, that was some magnificent magic. Even without me saying it, you seem to have properly been continuing your training. Was that Emperor ranked water magic?”

“By that, which one do you mean?”

I wonder if I used something like Emperor rank magic.

“The magic at the time you saved me. That power, quick effectiveness, and range. It was splendid magic. Isn't that the Emperor rank magic I've heard about in rumors, [Absolute Zero]?”

It's different.

That was just a [Frost Nova].

While moving through the second floor, I heard from Talhand that [Frost Nova] was an effective magic Roxy used, and I just used it as an imitation.

But, Roxy was making a face completely like, [How about it? It's the correct answer, right?]

I wonder if the correct option is to respond, [That's not it.]

Roxy is a specialist in Water magic.

For her to mistake the magic she saw, I wonder if that would embarrass her.

I wonder if this is where I should call out black as white.

Although, it's a lie that will be exposed quickly.

Saying that's correct here and then secretly telling her it was a lie later would be the wise way of doing it, I'm sure.

No, but, after hearing that it's Emperor class, what will I do if Roxy makes a displeased face?

I had heard that my [Rock Bullet] had power matching Emperor class though, but in reality, I can't use magic that high rank.

Hmmm. What should be done?

“No, that was just a [Frost Nova]. Though, it seems to have a higher rank than the one Roxy used.”

“Ah... Is... Is that so? Excuse me.”

While I was hesitating, Talhand gave a response.

Something about doing unnecessary things.

Here I should follow up...

“Really, Roxy is the same as always, isn't she? Although, I agree with the opinion that if it's Rudeus, it wouldn't be strange for him to use Emperor class magic.”

However, without a moment's delay Elinalise followed up.

“After all, Rudeus is a magician who can put the entire Magic University into order with but a glance.” ^[16]

Saying unnecessary things.

And after looking around, everyone's gazes were gathering on me.

All right, it's here.

“The current me is here all thanks to sensei's education.”

After confidently saying that, Roxy was looking at me with suspicious eyes.

“Rudi... That, I heard it in a variety of places, but do you really think that?”

“It's only natural, right?”

Roxy's teachings are my foundation.

Go outside, talk to people.

Get along with everyone, without prejudice.

Always give it your best effort.

Those teachings have taken root inside of me.

For this reason, I was able to build up a good relationship with Ruijerd.

There were certainly times where I didn't protect her teachings, but that is that.

People aren't always able to maintain the highest state, after all.

What's important isn't whether I was able to perfectly follow them.

It's whether I use it as the foundations.

In that sort of meaning, I respect Roxy.

To the point where I want her autograph.

"You've just been advancing me at your own convenience. Even without my teachings."

Roxy laughed in self-ridicule.

"Becoming this splendid. It's the exact opposite of someone like me, who got trapped in a labyrinth after making a mistake."

And then, she fell prostrate on top of the table.

I can see the whirl in her hair and it's a bit cute.

"The Shisho is splendid and the disciple is splendid as well, isn't that fine?"

The one who said that was Paul.

He said something good.

That's right, I'm not particularly splendid or anything, but Roxy is a splendid individual.

So what if she's losing to her disciple on some small parts.

Roxy can't be weighed against something like that.

"Without Roxy, we wouldn't be here. Be more confident in yourself."

It seems with Paul's words, Roxy recovered a bit.
Raising her body and she was nodding deeply.

4

Afterwards, we started up a meeting after Gisu returned.
A gathering where everyone shows their face, including the standby group.

"It's while keeping an eye on Roxy's condition, but I'm thinking we'll do the next exploration in three days."

The director Gisu was informing us of this.

"Isn't that a bit too fast?"

The one who responded like that was Paul.

Exploring a labyrinth unexpectedly wears down on your nerves.

Especially a place like the Teleport Labyrinth that are filled with traps, where you have no choice other than to fight, while being careful not to take a wrong step while fighting.

Still putting aside the rear guard, like myself, the burden on the two advance guards is big, I'm sure.

"It's better for Roxy to enter a labyrinth sooner, rather than later, to correct herself."

"Hn? Ah, I see, I get it now. Certainly, that's true."

Paul nodded, but, I couldn't agree with it a bit.

Isn't it severe on Roxy, as well, to suddenly re-enter after her life was in danger?

"Doesn't sensei need just a bit more rest for a short while?"

"Hn? Ah... Senpai might not know this, but if a time comes up when you almost die in a labyrinth, if you don't re-enter it soon after you'll catch a curse that will make it so you can never enter a labyrinth again."

“Curse? Is there that sort, as well?”

“Yeah, I don't really know why, but after you're imprisoned in a labyrinth and fearful of death, you end up being unable to do anything, it seems.”

Ah. I've read about something like that in a manga, in my previous life.

A variety of panic disorder.

The so-called PTSD.

As a medical treatment to cope with it, I have heard that it's good to repeat the mistake you made soon after to cure it, as well.

I guess that means those sorts of things are the same in every world.

“Besides, Senpai is a beginner at labyrinths. It'll be better to enter a number of times at a short pace, to gain some experience, I'm sure.”

“I see now, that makes sense.”

After that conversation, the surrounding faces all opened their mouths.

“I can lecture, if it's on moving while using both attack and healing magic.”

“It's probably better not to use the method Rudi used, or breaking down walls, to advance very much. There's the danger of a collapse.”

“If you'd like, I can go to the front.”

“I just thought, but Paul would you like to switch positions with me?”

Everyone had started talking about their impressions from last time and opinions on next time- Gisu, the director, was putting them into order.

Everyone's serious.

I thought it would be done more on the spot, but it seems that isn't the case.

Even if it's rotten, this is still a party of S rank adventurers, I guess. ^[17]

In regards to this meeting, the things I had to say were few.

It was just to the level of others asking about my thoughts on entering a labyrinth for my first time.

They're pros, I'm an amateur.

No matter how good I am with magic, I'm sure, it's no good if I forget about that premise.

Even if it went well the last time, it's not limited to going well this time as well.

"For the time being, next time I'd like to advance to clearing the third floor- it's dependent on the developments- but I'd at least like to search until we find the magic circle to the fourth floor, is that fine?"

"No objections."

Fundamentally, we continue ahead until we find the stairs to the next floor, and then decide whether we'll continue or return later.

In the case that we return later, afterwards, we take a straight line back to the point where we made it last time, and advance the exploration.

Last time, we descended down to the third floor, all at once, but it isn't limited to this time.

Since it seems that the longer a trip runs the greater probability that we'll fall into a trap, I guess, we greatly desire speed.

"Come to think of it, according to the book it seems the fourth floor gives off a completely different feeling. Becoming like ruins or something."

"In other words, it could be possible that there's a newer section as well."

"Hn... Well, that's what we should consider next time after the third floor. Next time it's the third floor."

"Yeah."

It seems when labyrinths, which exist for a long time, attach to adjacent labyrinths, they become situations with two magic crystals at the heart.

In such labyrinths, it seems the feeling of the labyrinth changes midway through it.

It seems that such a characteristic matches up with the Teleport Labyrinth.

Even though I say that, it seems that not all labyrinths with those characteristics have two magic crystals either.

It's only limited to being a possible problem.

According to the book, there should only be one magic crystal in the Teleport

Labyrinth.

However, there's the possibility that it wasn't originally a teleport labyrinth but just a normal labyrinth you can find anywhere else. Then it collided with some kind of ruins, and became the teleport labyrinth, as well.

Some kind of ruins.

Right, for example, teleport ruins.

“What is that, a book you say?”

And there Roxy voiced a question.

“It's a book that Rudi brought along; it seems to be a memo of some fellows that cleared down to the lowest level of the teleport labyrinth. Roxy you should read it as well.”

Gisu handed over the book in question to Roxy.

“He~, there was this sort of thing... I understand, I'll carefully read through it tomorrow.”

It seems Roxy's plan for tomorrow is reading.

Then I'll stay in the inn as well.

I want to talk with Roxy more.

Though I don't know what would be good to talk about with Roxy?

If she's reading the book, then I guess it would be fine to talk about the contents of that book.

The asking Roxy and the teaching I. Yeah, that's nice. Quite nice.

“Well then, it's about the formation, but let's tamper with it a bit. Talhand, take over.”

While I was thinking that, the topic progressed to the next stage.

Talhand cleared his voice with a [Cough].

This man decides the formation.

It's because he was in the very back and saw over the scene the most.

“Hmm, leave it to me.”

Nevertheless, he stinks of alcohol.

This man always smells like alcohol.

When it comes to night Gisu drinks as he's bathing in it as well, but Talhand continues to drink throughout the day.

Although, once we start exploring the labyrinth he stops drinking for a period.

I wonder if he's a man capable of switching habits ON and OFF.

“The basics won't change from how they were until now.”

Prepared on the table was a paper with two lines drawn on it and small stones with different colors.

First Talhand placed the light blue stone.

“First, just the same before, Roxy is the rear guard.”

“Yes.”

Roxy nodded.

And then, right next to that he placed a grey stone.

“Rudeus is Roxy's support. Roxy is the type that makes mistakes when things happen outside of her assumptions, but Rudeus possesses the “foresight” demon eye. Unlike his age he's considerably calm as well, he should be able to keep any mistakes in check beforehand.”

“...Yes.”

It's a remark almost as if Roxy isn't composed enough.

I'd like to object, but Roxy did make a mistake and step on a teleport magic circle after all.

It will become a snake in the bush.

But, after giving it some thought...

I can't predict things that I can't see with my foresight eye.

In other words, I have no choice other than to watch Roxy.

If I think of it, it's a just cause to have Roxy always in my field of vision while in the middle of exploring the labyrinth- it's not bad in my regard.

Imagining myself watching Roxy, I start to feel happier after all.

"Let's try having Paul and Elinalise change places. Paul is in front and Elinalise is in the back."

While saying that, Talhand switched the red stone, Paul, with the yellow stone, Elinalise. Even though that's the case, they're almost side-by-side.

I'm sure it's more of a change of roles.

Previously, their main roles were Elinalise being the shield and Paul being the support, but this time it's the reverse.

Paul is the main shield, and Elinalise is the support.

"Gisu is the same as previously."

Talhand placed the light brown stone far ahead.

And then, finally he put his own stone protecting the middle.

"I don't think it will be necessary, but there's a large number of enemies on the third floor. I'll become a wall between the rear guard and advance guard."

Scout: Gisu

Advance Guard: Paul (Main) and Elinalise (Support)

Middle Guard: Talhand

Rear Guard: Roxy (Main) and Rudeus (Support)

It's become this formation.

Excluding Gisu, it's become a feeling kind of like the Five Bamboo mahjong tile.

The formation of Windbreaker might be close. ^[18]

“Are there any comments?”

I raised my hand to those words.

“Is it fine to assume my fundamental role hasn't changed?”

“Humu. In regards to the minor coordination, it would be good to talk it out well with Roxy.”

After hearing those words, I look at Roxy.

She looked at me and, with a somewhat nervous expression, swallowed deeply with a [Gokuri].

“I understand. Sensei, I'm in your care.”

“Yes, look after me as well. I'll give it my best to not drag your feet down.”

Rather, the one who would be the one pulling legs down would be me, though.

I wish Roxy would be more confident than she is.

Certainly, in terms of aggregate magic power and the number of magic that we can use, I might win.

However, higher strength status doesn't decide everything.

By adding in experience, she truly displays the real worth of strength.

If we were to consider those, I think Roxy is above me.

She remained trapped in the Teleport Labyrinth for a month, and she continued to fight there until the end. Not to mention Roxy's mentality; that she'll even go back down again only a few days after it like nothing happened is amazing.

If it was me, and I got into her severe situation, then I'm sure I'd vow to never go into a labyrinth again.

The wise man does not approach danger.

It's fine to rephrase it as chicken.

I'm a coward.

“Alright, this side should be fine like this. Next is talking about the standby group.”

After that, Gisu quickly gave out directions to the standby group.

Gisu handed a list to Vera for things to buy while we're exploring. Shera described Roxy's condition and then prepared medical treatment items based on Zenith's expected conditions.

And then, Gisu asked Lilia to do a good job putting the other two into order.

If the Exploration Group Leader is Gisu, then the Standby Group Leader would be Lilia.

Then the Party Leader is Paul.

If you were to ask what this leader does, it would be making the final decisions and a roll call.

“Alright, then everyone: in preparation for three days from now- disperse.”

With Paul's command, we all broke up.

5

Next day.

I was loitering around (again) in the surroundings of Roxy who was reading on the first floor of the inn.

I wanted her to ask me if there was anything she didn't know.

Not anyone else, but me.

“Umm, Rudi...”

“Yes, what is it? Sensei!”

“You're distracting me wandering around in front of me.”

Roxy said that while smiling bitterly.

“Please excuse me.”

I lowered my head and planned to leave that place.

I see.

I'm distracting her.

That's right, isn't it? I'm just a hindrance to her reading, aren't I?

It's no good to be a hindrance.

That's not my real intention.

I just wanted to be of help to sensei.

But, it can't be helped.

If I'm a hindrance, then it can't be helped.

I'll go somewhere.

That's right, I'll go to some kind of unpopular bar.

Occasionally, it might be good to drink alone.

Let's do that.

“Rudi.”

However, there I heard a voice call out to me from behind.

“If you have the spare time to keep wandering around, there are various points in this book that I don't get. So, please tell me...”

“Yes!”

I immediately sat down next to Roxy.

I think it was the fastest Mach in the world.

If I had a dog's tail attached, I'm sure it would appear to be floating in the air from how fast it would be wagging around.

“Where is it? Please ask anything.”

Ah... at any rate, Roxy is really small.

I'm sure it's in part related to the fact that my body is bigger, though.

If I were to put her on top of my lap, I'm sure I would snugly be able to wrap her up.

I'm sure she would get angry if I were to place her there, though...

“...”

And then I look, Roxy is looking at me with slanted, upturned eyes. ^[19]



“What's wrong, sensei?”

After asking that, Roxy quickly turned away and faced the book.

“No, it's nothing at all. It's about this part though...”

Before one knows, I've considerably outgrown her after all.

She might be mortified over it.

It seems she's bothered over her short height after all.

While such exchanges continued, I spent almost a full day reading together with Roxy.

I'm satisfied.

CHAPTER 5

WITHOUT A HITCH

1

Including Roxy, the exploration of the labyrinth restarted.

Just according to schedule, we descended down to the third floor, all at once.

The enemies on the third floor are Tarantula Deathlords, Iron Crawlers, and the additional Mad Skulls.

Mad Skulls are A rank monsters.

Their outer appearance is of a giant mud-golem with no neck.

The height, I would say, is around 2.5 meters.

They appear quite wide and solid as well.

Somewhere around their chest they have a skull buried, and that is the weak point.

I guess that's right, Ja*ra or Sa*eru might be close. ^[20]

Although their movements are dull, no matter how much you attack the mud parts, it has no effect; and if it comes down to a dangerous situation, the skull in its chest hides further inside of its body.

In regards to attack methods, other than attacking people physically with its body it uses magic almost like a rock bullet, as well.

However, the reason why it is included as A rank, isn't that.

Monsters of low intelligence obey its commands.

The iron crawlers and the tarantula deathlords become the servants to the mad skull.

In contrast to its golem-like outer appearance, it has high intelligence. It uses the iron crawlers as an advance guard, has tarantulas protect the middle, and it stands as rear guard in the formation as intruders attack.

Mad Skull is a command-type monster.

The iron crawler's stampede combined with the tarantulas' sticky web entangle is the tactic from the second floor.

On the deeper floors, Mad Skull joins the fray, and they give out commands while using rock bullets.

For Paul and the others who were having a hard fight on the second floor, I'm sure these tactics were severe.

Despite fighting with all their might, they should have had no leeway to search for Roxy at all.

Nevertheless, with the addition of Roxy and I, we solve this problem.

Then, the monsters protecting the middle, the spiders, are no big deal. So, we take the initiative with Roxy as the advance guard, finishing the iron crawlers, and myself as the rear guard, attacking the mad skulls, and it works fine.

Paul and the other two are plenty to deal with the spiders.

Since I'm in the back and Roxy is in front of me,

Then, Paul and the others decrease the number of enemies.

Mad Skulls are weak to water,

Because they're mud after all.

If you increase their water content, they end up flowing away.

Otherwise, it's fire.

Drying out the mud, they become unable to move.

However, rock bullet works fine for me.

If I focus using the demon eye, I can snipe their weak point, the skull, with a single [Rock Bullet].

One shot, one kill, I'd say.

I'm a skilled sniper. But, I'm just a hornworm, or camper, who won't move from spawn point. ^[21]

“Fu...”

After annihilating the enemies, Roxy let out a sigh.

I peek at her face which looks out from under the brim of her hat.

I'm sure her magic power is decreasing; it's a somewhat tired face.

Suddenly, Roxy faces my direction.

While looking up at me with somewhat slanted, upturned eyes,

After our eyes met, she quickly avoided eye contact,

“Before long, I'm going to be out of magic power. Please allow some break time.”

With those words, we take a break until we return to the passage.

On my end, I still have plenty of room in my aggregate magic power.

Rather, it probably hasn't even decreased by half yet.

Fundamentally, I haven't even used anything but [Rock Bullet] either.

Roxy is the one freezing the enemies using [Frost Nova], it can't be helped; her exhaustion is fast.

“Excuse me, because the amount of my magic power is insufficient,”

Roxy said that with a sigh while sitting down.

“No, though I think you have plenty.”

Roxy's precision with her magic is extremely high.

With shortened incantations, she's completely using ranged magic and she is perfect.

Occasionally, even though the spray from [Water Splash] may get on Paul and the others, but after that, her [Icicle Field] freezes only the enemies, with a surprising precision.

Speaking of precision, in other words, it means limiting magic power.

Even though that's the case, she's continued to fight for a considerably long period.

It's, by no means, because her amount of magic power is insufficient.

Most likely, it's equal to or even above the amount of Sylphy.

"Well then, it's about the time I'd like for the magic circle to the fourth floor to be found, I'd say,"

Gisu compared the book to the map while scratching his chin.

After going down to the third floor, the second day since we entered will soon pass. According to the author of the book, the number of days it takes to clear the third floor is five days.

Although our pace is faster than they are, and after visiting the third floor a number of times, the map is well done, as well.

I'm sure the magic circle to the next floor will be found soon.

"Rudi, is it fine for me to borrow your back for a bit?" Roxy asked.

"Please do."

After responding, Roxy leaned on my back.

In the middle of break time, Roxy rests while drooping onto my back.

Rather than leaning against a cave wall, I'm sure leaning against a person's back is more restful.

The so-called side benefit,

"Nevertheless, I never thought I would get to see Rudi enter a labyrinth."

"That's right. Is there any kind of advice you have for me?"

"Eh... Since Rudi's basic movements, in regards to the party, are well done, there's nothing to say."

"Thank you very much."

"Chantless magic has an extremely high precision. It sure is amazing."

"No, I still have a ways to go."

Still a ways,

Right, still a ways to go,

After looking at Roxy, I really feel that way.

She doesn't increase the number of cards she has in her hand, but increases the number of things she can do.

Then, by combining the cards she has, she overwhelms the opponent.

In the past, I used to do that as well, but at some point unaware, it had become where all I use is [Rock Bullet] and [Quagmire].

It's no good like this, but against opponents to some level, it will win the battle.

Even though I say that, it's not strong against opponents who use clever techniques, based on that assumption.

My tactics are perfect against no opponents, as well,

The objective is high and there's no objective in front of my eyes.

Like this, I can't improve anymore.

"Rudi."

"What is it?"

"If, we're able to save Zenith-san and you have spare time, would you like to explore a labyrinth together with me?"

"Just the two of us?"

"Yes. Right now, we're in a cornered situation, in terms of time, but exploring a labyrinth is interesting. Wouldn't you like forming a party with the two of us, and entering an easier labyrinth?"

Labyrinths, huh.

Honestly, if Gisu weren't here, then I feel like I would quickly step into a trap, though.

However, Roxy is a person that is able to explore labyrinths alone.

Well, she's a bit clumsy, but she has actual results, as well.

If I follow along with her, I'm sure we could possibly conquer one.

"That's fine. After we return, let's enter a labyrinth together."

“It's a promise.”

“Yeah, it's a promise.”

In the corner of my field of vision, I saw Roxy's hand relax a bit.

“...Ah, I'm feeling a bit sleepy; I'll sleep for a bit.”

“Yes, good night.”

After saying that, I felt Roxy get comfortable and the power disappear from her back. I responded on momentum, but exploring a labyrinth requires a considerable number of days.

For me, who has no choice other than to raise a child, I wonder if I'll have that kind of time.

...Well, it's not a conversation for right away.

It will be fine if I have spare time.

After my child is born and it becomes a bit bigger, Sylphy and I will have more flexibility.

I'm sure by that time, I'll be over twenty years old, but, well, I'm sure there's no problem.

Nevertheless, I'm happy.

Being invited to a party by Roxy,

It feels like she recognizes my ability.

It would be good if I were careful to show her my good parts only.

While thinking such things, I slept for a bit as well.

2

After discovering the magic circle to the fourth floor, we thoroughly searched around the third floor.

However, we never saw the shadow or shape of Zenith.

We've arrived at the fourth floor.

The instant we came out of the teleport magic circle, at a glance, the surroundings had undergone a complete change from previous floors.

I have a recollection of those stone constructed walls.

As I thought, it's similar to the ruins where the teleport magic circle was.

I wonder if the same type of ruin ended up becoming a labyrinth.

"Gisu, what should we do?" Paul asked.

"Hn? We still have a bit more time."

"All right, then after we check the atmosphere of the fourth floor, we'll return once."

Paul said that with a sharp face, while I was looking around the surroundings restlessly.

No matter how you look at the times when he's down, Paul is a failure as a human, but, during the times he's properly doing his job, Paul sure is cool.

I don't think it's strange at all that Zenith would fall for Paul after seeing his figure, as well.

If I have his blood flowing through me as well, then that compliment Sylphy often says to me might be her true feelings.

"Sensei, when I'm putting on a serious face, am I cool?"

Suddenly, I asked Roxy something like that.

It might have been a bit narcissistic.

Roxy glanced over towards me from under her hat's brim and stuttered,

"Eh? Ah, uh... umm. We... Well, cool? I guess?"

And then quickly turned her face away,

Okay.

Just that reaction is plenty.

Roxy conveyed the feeling.

I asked something that was hard to respond to, didn't I?

Excuse me. It seems I was getting a bit too full of myself.

But, if Roxy were to suddenly girlishly ask, "Am I cute?" with both hands carrying light sticks, I would affirm that with an elevated cheer from the front seat. ^[22]

Men aren't cool by their face alone.

It's their heart.

Heaving a heart of steel that burns red with fever is essential.

Every one hit by such a heart will be knocked out in a single hit.

"Rudi, it's the enemy."

After looking ahead, there were two armored monsters, each with four arms, walking towards us.

The Armored Warriors,

For the time being, it seems these types of armors are of the undead attribute.

And then, I've learned what works well on the undead is Rock or Holy attacks.

If you fire a somewhat large [Rock Bullet] with a good amount of mass, then generally everything will be blown to pieces in a single hit.

"I'll preemptively attack it with a [Rock Bullet]."

"Ah, Rudi, that's no good."

Just as I was preparing my staff, Roxy stopped me.

"I've heard that Armored Warriors use the techniques of the Water God style. If you carelessly fire off magic, then a counter will come flying back."

Water God style,

I haven't encountered it very often, but it's a style of swordsmanship that focuses on warding off and countering.

Warding off and countering Water God style, for some reason, works effectively even

against magic, as well.

I don't really know specifically how to become like that, but others say they have a sword technique that allows them to counter attack magic and send it flying back.

Even if it's the usual situation, then I would still feel it's fine, but the opponent is holding four swords.

Since it's not a human, it might take on four opponents simultaneously and match up counters for all them.

"I see- then what should I do?"

"Stop its feet and provide backup. Since it's the first monsters, for starters, proceed with caution."

"Understood, Tou-san, I'm going to use [Quagmire], please be careful of your step!"

"Sure!"

The armor type monsters have power and they are absurdly skilled with the sword as well, but their legs are slow.

Also, the armor is heavy and it should sink easily into the mud.

Even though I say that, if I don't release a deep-set [Quagmire] then there's the possibility it might escape, as well.

I don't think it will lead to a cave-in so easily, but it's still better to minimize magic that changes the terrain.

About to the knees, I guess.

"[Quagmire]!"

Just as the Armored Warrior was about to take a step forward, the quagmire was created.

Both of those fellows sank up to their thighs into the mud.

From there our formation's two advance guards sprang into action.

"Paul. I'll go in from the left."

"Understood, you always take the left, don't you?"

“If my sword is on the side with the wall, then it's difficult to move.”

“Just being selfish now... and whoa, how dangerous!”

It seems Paul has plenty of composure.

While warding off the Armored Warrior's sword strike with the sword in his right hand, the dagger in his left hand has already cut off one of the arms in a flash.

The armor seems quite solid, but it seems that has no effect.

Swordsmen of the Sword God style are monsters.

And, maybe that dagger's cutting edge is razor-sharp, I wonder.

It seems Elinalise is somewhat being suppressed.

By no means is she taking any large attacks, but with her attack power, she can't effectively damage them.

“Let's support them. Rudi, let's simultaneously fire off magic: on Elinalise-san's side.”

“Understood,”

I prepare my staff.

What I'm using is [Rock Bullet].

If it's right now, when its legs are stopped, then it can't evade, as well.

Just, exactly how much speed it can ward off, I won't know unless I try it.

“Talhand-san!”

“Sure!”

Talhand prepared his shield and stood in front of us.

If a sword attack comes flying towards us, it seems Talhand intends to be the barrier.

As long as he doesn't die instantly, I'll use advanced healing magic.

It would be good, as long as he can avoid getting hit in a vital point.

“[Rock Bullet], [Stone Cannon]!”

“Gallant sword of ice, I seek conviction of this one! [Icicle Edge]!”

Timing it in sync with Roxy, we fired off at the same time.

A bullet-type shell and blade of ice like Ultra Slash went flying. [23]

The armor instantly moved to ward those attacks off.

Just as two of the swords moved, and were preparing to intercept the attack, Elinalise attacked using her shield with good timing, causing its stance to collapse.

The rock bullet blew off one of the armor's arms and the ice blade deeply pierced the chest of the armor.

The armor stopped moving and soon after crumbled into scattering pieces.

Simultaneously Paul's fight ended, as well.

"As expected, after it reaches A rank then it won't so easily be defeated."

Though I said that, the actual amount of time we spent fighting was just about a minute.

Although we weren't able to defeat it in a single hit, it didn't even enter the realm of a hard fight.

As expected of one who has reached Advanced with all three of the major swordsmanship styles.

In terms of talent, I'm sure it was enough that he could have made it to the level of Saint.

No, in reality, Paul might already be as strong as a Saint rank.

Something like the strengths of people can't be measured well in terms of rank after all.

"Tou-san, could it be, you've gotten a bit stronger since last time?"

Ah, no good,

I said something that might make him get full of himself.

A grand story of bragging might start up.

“Hn? No, that's not the case; almost to the point that I feel weaker than me in the past.”

However, without even grinning, Paul only took one glance over here, and then faced ahead.

“Now, without being negligent, let's go.”

With Paul's words, I came to my senses.

That's right.

Right now, we're in the middle of a labyrinth, we have no choice other than to stay on guard.

Nevertheless, Paul today sure is cool.

I'm sure if I were to tell Norn about these adventures with Paul, she would be delighted.

“Oh my?”

By chance, Elinalise peeked at Paul's face.

And then put her hand to her mouth and lightly laughed.

“Oh Paul you, what are you grinning about? It's disgusting.”

“It's fine for you not to put those kinds of things into words.”

“You must have been quite happy to be praised by Rudeus, weren't you? I understand it. [Giggle].”

“Shut it... won't you be silent?”

I retract my previous statement.

As I thought, Paul is being Paul.

After that, we defeated a number of Armored Warriors and Mad Skulls, and then we decided to return.

Walking back, it took roughly 15 hours.

As expected, labyrinths sure are time-consuming.

I wonder if Zenith is all right, as we're slowly progressing like this.

No, being impatient and becoming stranded, as Roxy did, or worse, are some things to avoid.

We must move with caution.

Right now, it seems to be going well.

While remaining tense, we're not overly jumpy; we still have some leeway in mind.

Our condition is the greatest balance.

Continuing just like this is for the best, I'm sure.

3

After returning once, we'll inspect our equipment and such, and then we'll come back.

After returning, we started a meeting right away.

And from there, we proceeded to buy a number of essential things.

Since we were running out of scrolls for the light spirits, I started drawing more.

As expected of the Labyrinth City Lapan, they sell parchments and dyes for drawing magic circles, so I can make them with no problem.

If I make one then, after that, Shera-san can learn and do the rest.

It seems Shera-san did work for the Milis Church, drawing things like scrolls, so it's a specialty of hers.

She said she could make about 50 of them, working today.

How dependable.

Gisu bought some chemicals that were strong against armor type monsters.

If you land a hit, then, supposedly the joint parts coil up and its movements get slower.

Since they're heavy, I suggested putting something like oil on the ground to make them fall, and Gisu, laughing, said Paul would trip.

After I responded with an, "I see," he laughed even more.

Paul and Elinalise were viewing over the available swords for sale.

It seems they're searching for a good bargain sword for Elinalise to use.

Her estoc is a magic item imbued with magic power.

If you swing it, it has the ability to send a vacuum blade flying from the tip.

But, since the previous labyrinth run, it's inconvenient when the opponents are Armored Warriors.

Even if it weren't for them, there's the Iron Crawlers as well; using her estoc is somewhat of a hard fight against armored opponents.

I understand that.

It seems the dagger that Paul uses in his left hand is a magic item bought in Lapan.

Its ability is [Armor Break]; where the harder the opponent's armor is, the sharper the cutting edge gets.

It's a considerably rare ability.

The ability is so uncommon that the sellers sold it as a bargain item, as the sellers treated the dagger as a dull blade and said it can't even cut dried meat.

Paul said something like, "My keen insight noticed this sword's ability."

However, I know it.

This ability was the same mentioned as a warrior's weapon in the [Legend of Perugia] that I read in Buina village.

That, although the warrior's sword can't even cut through dried meat, when matched against a clump of steel it easily slices it in half; it's a demon sword.

There's no doubt. It caught Paul's attention at the "can't even cut dried meat" part.

But well, it does explain why he can display such a high attack power against those Armored Warriors.

The fact that it's effective even in his non-dominant hand means it really is strong.

Elinalise bought a one-handed Gladius.

The ability [Shock Wave] imbues within the Gladius. When one pierces with it, it releases a force.

The damage isn't high, but it seems like you can use it in an instant to send the

opponent flying backwards and make some distance.

Since it's something that has an ability with practical use, it seems to have a considerably high price, but, with several round magic crystals from her bag, Elinalise bought it.

Those magic crystals: How many does she have?

During the night, Talhand and Roxy drank alcohol together.

And since others consider me an adult now, I can drink some alcohol, as well.

Even though I say that, it's not as if I can get dead drunk in front of Roxy as well.

Just to the level of socializing,

The subject was supposed to be how to arrange the three of us magicians, but at some point, it seemed to change into a lecture on 「what it means to be a man」 by Talhand-sensei.

A man is, in other words, muscle, one within whom flesh and a heart of gold dwells—that kind of story.

It's not a conversation for magicians to have.

However, it was a conversation of interest.

That's right isn't it; after all, it's no good if men aren't sturdy.

Well, it seems Roxy didn't care around that point and started to get tired.

It can't be helped.

After spending such a day off and then being told, “Have a safe trip,” by Lilia, we re-entered the labyrinth.

4

We were able to easily break through to the fourth floor.

In part, it was because of our improved equipment and preparations, but we were lucky, as well.

We were able to arrive at the goal in almost a straight line.

In terms of time, it was only about three hours, I'd say.

We almost didn't encounter any monsters, as well.

Temporarily, we returned to the fourth floor and started walking around to fill in the map.

After all, there was no sight of Zenith.

After that, we returned once again, and then started to clear the fifth floor.

In addition, to the Mad Skull and Armored Warriors, the Little Devils appear on the fifth floor.

Little Devils are demons with large mouths with sharp fangs.

With long limbs, they cling to the ceiling using their sharp claws.

If I were to put it into a single word, they give off a creepy feeling, kind of like a certain Alien. ^[24]

Although it doesn't have a frightening outer appearance to that extent, though, Little Devils are a strong enemy.

After all, they move by crawling along the cave's ceiling and walls.

The fact that they travel along the ceiling and walls means that the formation is useless.

They can pass by Paul and Elinalise fighting the Armored Warriors and come up to our place.

A spectacle that almost gives one chills.

We managed to defend against the first attack.

The Little Devil itself isn't very difficult.

It has speed and its attack power seems high, as well, but its defense is low; and it's not tough at all.

If we knock it off the ceiling then Elinalise can take the initiative using her new weapon, and the matter ends with no problem.

We can defeat the Little Devils.

Even if Little Devils are A rank and despite getting used to their eccentric movements,

the Armored Warriors are arguably a far more difficult enemy with their ability.

However, keeping your gaze above is no good.

If you were to only keep cautiously watching above, you might not notice the traps on the ground.

If you carelessly step in a teleport trap, there's the possibility you might get teleported to a strange place, as well.

“Well then, shall we use that?”

Usually this is where we would return once and be troubled over it; but we have the labyrinth book.

In the book [Exploration Record of the Teleport Labyrinth] there's written a groundbreaking method to deal with the Little Devils.

They absolutely hate the scent of a certain seed.

The Tarufuro berry is sold as a food, and apparently, if you burn it as an incense, the Little Devils end up coming down from the ceiling to the ground.

Not to mention they crouch close to the ground, changing their posture to best escape from the unpleasant smoke.

For that purpose, it makes fighting exceedingly simple.

If it's like this, then let alone B rank, they're closer to C rank,

The author of this book really did an amazing job investigating.

Since that's the case, we cleared the fifth floor in no time at all, as well.

Without finding the magic circle to the next floor, we ended up having to walk around quite a bit; our goal isn't to clear the labyrinth but to search for Zenith.

There's no problem at all.

Rather, you could say it's convenient.

5

And then, we arrived at the sixth floor.

“Gisu, how about it?”

“We can do it.”

Skipping the subject in response to Paul's question, Gisu gave a short reply.

There was almost no exhaustion.

Preparations were perfect.

We have momentum right now as well.

“Alright, then without returning, we'll keep going like this.”

“Understood.”

We did the preparations and we're not exhausted.

Then, there's no need to return.

The exploration continues.

CHAPTER 6

MAGIC CIRCLE ON THE SIXTH FLOOR

1

We arrived on the sixth floor.

There were an excessively large number of Little Devils on the sixth floor.

The appearance of Armored Warriors ceased and it's become nothing but Little Devils.

Since we have that one incense, you could say its become even easier.

However, nevertheless, the numbers are huge.

It's almost enough to make you wonder why there's this many Little Devils.

We identified that reason after we made it to the vicinity of the innermost parts.

In the innermost parts, the rooms continuing on the way to the magic circle were the Little Devil's nests.

A large number of Little Devils crowded together and in the corners of each room, there were a countless numbers of eggs.

Those dark oblong eggs, covered in mucus, were just like the eggs of that black and quick fellow; just by looking at them, I got chills. ^[25]

I wonder if it could be that, there's a queen somewhere and Zenith is being used as the seedbed.

Though I was having such scenes float into my imagination, it seems Little Devils have no such trait.

Though they do seem to be swarming, there doesn't seem to be any specific boss.

However, then where did these kinds of monsters come from and where are they planning to go?

Even though there's this number of monsters, it's not like there's very much food,

either.

“Roxy-sensei, monsters... what do they eat in order to survive?”

“...I guess that's right. There are a variety of theories, but it's often said that they live by feeding on magic power.”

“Magic power, is it?”

In forests and caves that have a high concentration of magic power, there are more monsters, as well.

Once, Nanahoshi said that all manner of things in this world have magic power dwelling inside, as well.

However, magic power is invisible to the naked eye.

It's hard to understand if it even exists or not.

No, for the time being, magic's existence should be proved with the Magic Power Eye that can see it.

Supposing it's possible for them to eat magic power, then why wouldn't they just take a bite out of self-made magic?

If not, there exist types of magic power that monsters can and cannot consume.

In the past, I think I once heard from Paul that monsters target the magic crystals deep inside of labyrinths.

I wonder if magic crystals are feast-worthy for monsters.

But, for that to be the case, it seems like the monsters in here do not target it.

It feels like, to the end, they're just making nests and living here.

I wonder if they're content with just living here.

Well, it really can't be helped, thinking about things like that.

After all, there are monsters that clearly can't eat anything like armor.

It's fine to leave the ecology of monsters to a monster scholar.

“Well, regardless of what they eat, it doesn't change the fact that they attack people on sight. Let's destroy the eggs as we find them, since they seem like they'll be a hindrance the next time we enter.”

While saying that, Roxy indifferently started to dispose of the Little Devil eggs.
Without using magic,
While using a dagger, she went around stabbing them, one at a time.
It's truly a dry expression.
That is also good.

However, I guess monsters give birth to eggs as well.
I wonder if Armored Warriors have some kind of larva as well.
I wonder if there's something like an Armored Felt Doll tottering around with toy-like swords.

Mama Armor and Papa Armor are smiling as they watch over cute Child Armor.
Then, they hear an intruder's footstep,
Papa Armor and Mama Armor tell their son, 'stay hidden,' and plunge into battle.
The one who appears there is Paul, with a demon-like face.
He thinks of Armors as nothing but bugs, slaughtering Papa Armor and Mama Armor.
Child Armor, seeing that, starts thinking of humans as enemies. As Child Armor grows up, it transforms into an Armored Warrior monster that attacks humans on sight.
...Or not,

"Rudi. What are you thinking about? Please come help me."

"Ah, yes."

Just as Roxy told me, I went to smash the eggs as well.
Connecting to the large room, there were three rooms densely packed with eggs.
If these eggs were to hatch, would some larva come out that clings to a person's body?
Well, there's no sign at all that they're going to hatch, though.

After that, there was no such happening, such as freshly born larva attacking Roxy's body, and we finished cleaning up.

And then we arrived at the innermost room.

The final place that was written about in the book.

A wide room.

It was a room made of stone.

Its square and, excluding the entrance, in front of each wall there were magic circles.

However, the instant we entered, we felt the strangeness of it.

In here, nothing exists beyond the magic circles.

Just before this room, there was a large quantity of Little Devils.

Enough that you would think there were over 100 Little Devils, as well as their eggs.

Even though that's the case, in here there are just the magic circles.

It's almost as if something protected the room, like some sort of sacred ground.

"It's before the protector Guardian, isn't it?"

"With this atmosphere, I would say so."

"It would be good if we remain on guard."

Paul, Elinalise, and Roxy while saying that, all tightly gripped their weapons.

In front of the Boss room, I wonder if all labyrinths have this eerie atmosphere.

"Well then, I wonder which leads to where..."

Gisu went around checking each of the magic circles one at a time, while holding the book in one hand.

The rest of us were on standby at the entrance.

"I'll help out."

"Sure, that'll help."

For the time being, I participated in checking the teleportation magic circles.
And, for some reason, Roxy followed along behind me, as well.
If Roxy is here, then it's reassuring.

“How about it?”

“They give off... the same feeling as written.”

Gisu, after asking, compared each of the magic circles to the book.
Each of the three magic circles in order,

The book has it written down like this:

“There are three magic circles.

We immediately understood that two of those would cause a random teleportation.
For that sake, we placed a stone marker in front of the magic circle that we believed to be the correct choice and stepped onto it.

However, that was a trap.

We were thrown into a strange room.

It was a room filled with dark and elongated bodied demons.

Right, it was the nest of Little Devils. The instant they saw us.....”

We soon found the stone they used as a marker.

A fist-sized stone had been cleanly polished.

On the surface of that, the digit six was carved.

It was something that wasn't on the floors until now.

“Somehow, it's moving, isn't it?”

“You think so? It feels ominous. Listen well, senpai, these sorts of legacies of parties that were annihilated aren't good at all.”

“Is that Jinx?”

“Right, it's Jinx.”

“Well, it's not like they were annihilated though, right...”

While saying that, I took a good look at the magic circle in front of me.

It resembled the two-way magic circles that I've stepped on a number of times until now.

But, this is different.

If you step on this then you'll be randomly teleported.

Or else, maybe all of the contents of this room thrown somewhere,

Then, one of the remaining two should be the correct answer.

However, these two very clearly have the traits of random teleport magic circles showing.

"Rudi, do you understand?"

After asked by Roxy, I shook my head.

"No, not at all. Though if it was Nanahoshi, then she might understand."

"Nanahoshi? Who is that?"

"In the Magic University it's someone that's researching teleport-... or rather summoning. Since she's knowledgeable about magic circles, as well, she might have been able to comment on it."

"Co... Could it be she's Rudi's lover?"

"Nanahoshi? No way..."

After laughing, while saying that, maybe if Nanahoshi were here then, or else Sylphy, otherwise maybe Cliff then.

I ended up thinking like that.

Nanahoshi and Sylphy were impossible, but it might have been good to bring along Cliff.

Even now, we could still return and bring him back.

Both ways it would take about three months.

Since Cliff isn't used to traveling, then four months.

No, even if we were to bring Cliff along, he might just tell us that he doesn't know, as well.

“Just in case I did some research on teleportation in the Magic University as well, though, as embarrassing as it is, I don't understand it at all.”

“Research on teleportation?”

“Yeah.”

“I see now, as expected of Rudi. Without blindly searching at random, doing something like trying to find out the source. It's not something that can be done easily.”

It seems there's been some misunderstanding, though; I searched the source following the advice of the Hitogami in order to cure my impotency.

Since that motive was impure, it's not something that I really want to tell Roxy.

Let's keep it hidden.

“...As a student of Roxy-sensei, then, it's only natural.”

“Even if you flatter me, nothing will come of it.”

Inspecting each of the magic circles had ended.

“How about it Senpai, have you understood anything?”

“No, not at all.”

In the first place, all of my knowledge about teleport magic circles comes from this book.

As long as the answer isn't written in that book, it's outside of my knowledge.

No, of course, I did research things regarding teleportation outside of that as well, though.

I don't know things that I don't know.

All I know is the three teleport magic circles in front of my eyes are “different things.”

Even then, I saw a large quantity of Nanahoshi's magic circles.

The things known as magic circles, if you change the details then the effect is different.

Therefore, I can just say this.

“If things written in the book are true, then that would be one of these is the correct answer, though.”

“...In other words, Senpai doesn't know either.”

“That's what it comes down to.”

I return to the entrance of the room.

Paul and the others there in the middle of the break were sitting down in a circle.

I reported all of the things that we investigated, as accurately as I could.

“Cheh... multiple choice is it.”

“...It's multiple choice.”

“Multiple choice huh, really...” [26]

Paul, Elinalise, and Talhand were all making bad faces.

“Multiple choices are dangerous... aren't they? If it's like this, then even three options would be better.”

Gisu said while looking up at the ceiling, something like what a weird, hat-wearing gangster might have said. [27]

I wonder if they have some kind of bad memory in relation to multiple choices.

It seems possible.

“Is that a jinx, as well?”

“Yeah, it's a jinx. When it comes to multiple choices, if we don't let Ghyslaine select them, it will fail.”

With those words, Paul and the others all nodded saying, “Right, that's true.”

Ghyslaine, huh?

I've heard a nostalgic name.

But, certainly for her, who is of the Beast race, it seems she would have that sense of smell.

“Ghyslaine, huh, at these sort of times, it's missing without her.”

“Even though she's only useful at these sort of times...”

“In the middle of battle without listening to directions she plunges in, she can't understand things people say. Unable to read or do calculations, when she can't understand what people are talking about she quickly snaps. But strangely when it comes to multiple choice she always gets them correct.”

That's a cruel way of saying it.

I feel pity towards Ghyslaine hearing that.

For the time being since she is one of my respected Shisho as well, I'd like them to stop there.

“Please pardon her, since she can already read, write, and do calculations now, after all.”

Ghyslaine put in effort for it, as well.

She's a child that kept tripping up as she went up the multiplication tables, but she gave it her best; and even learned up to division. [28]

“Ha... I heard about that from Paul, but I won't be deceived. There's no way that inukoro could do something an ordinary person can.” [29]

“I heard that previously as well, but honestly, I can't believe it either.”

Elinalise and Talhand were deeply in doubt.

Since Ghyslaine was considerably difficult to teach after all, I understand, though.

However, it feels strange, as well.

With all of Paul's previous party members lined up, only Ghyslaine is missing.

Even though Ghyslaine was the only one who kept in contact with Paul after the incident, as well,

The only person among Paul and the others that I knew from Buina Village isn't in this place.

Yeah, it's strange.

“Rather than something like that, what are we going to do?”

With Gisu's words, we returned to the topic.

There are two magic circles.

Which one should we enter, huh?

“Rudi, even you couldn't figure it out?”

After asked by Paul, I shook my head.

“Yeah. Even though I investigated it beforehand at school, please excuse me for that.”

“I see...”

Paul crossed his arms, closed his eyes, and pondered over it.

And then, before even one minute had passed he raised his face.

“For now, let's try taking a majority vote to check. From what we can see here, those who think the right magic circle is good, raise your right hand; and those who think the left magic circle would be good, raise your left hand.”

With Paul's words, everyone raised their hands.

Paul, Elinalise, Roxy were right, Gisu, Talhand, and I were left.

Three. We tied, each at three.

“Cheh... If it's like this, then we can't decide it.”

“Umm, Tou-san. As expected, I don't know about deciding it using majority rule.”

“Even if you say something like that... Then, is there anyone who has an idea?”

With Paul's words, Elinalise raised her hand.

“How about entering both of them, one at a time, simultaneously?”

“Are you saying to sacrifice someone among us?”

“If it were Paul or I, then making use of the incense we should be able to somehow or other manage to cut out from a crowd of Little Devils.”

Entering both of the magic circles, one at a time, and then the one that's the correct answer will return.

And then, if we immediately start searching for the mistaken one, there's the possibility we settle things without problems as well.

“It's rejected.”

“Oh my, Rudeus, is it fine to hear the reason?”

“For starters, there's no guarantee that either of those magic circles is the correct one.”

They appear to be random teleports.

Unexpectedly, there's the possibility that both of those two are traps as well.

All three of them are traps.

The correct answer is a different room.

Of course, that possibility is low.

According to the book, fundamentally after you've found all of the rooms then you'll be able to proceed to the next floor.

If we're to believe the author, this is the final room.

However, whether it's positioning or shape, these magic circles seem different and give off an artificial feeling.

That's right, I'm caught on something.

I wonder if it would really just come down to a simple multiple choice of luck.

If they've gone out of the way to prepare a fake two-way magic circle, then wouldn't it be fine for there to be just one other as the real thing I wonder?

As the answer to a puzzle, isn't having three of them just pointless, I wonder.

No, it's not as if it's an escape game; there's no obligation for the labyrinth to have prepared a hint, I guess.

“Then, Rudeus. Do you have any kind of ideas?”

“No, but just a bit longer, won't you wait a bit longer to come to a conclusion?”

But, I'm caught on something.

I have the feeling that I'm forgetting something.

Until I remember that, I feel that simply stepping foot on one of the two options is dangerous.

The moment two people step foot on them, there's the possibility that everyone in the room will be teleported at random, as well.

In the teleport labyrinth, if you don't make use of teleportation you can't get around.

There might even be a room you can only reach using a random teleport, as well.

“I want to try investigating it a bit more.”

I requested that, and...

“Alright, Rudi. We'll leave it to you.”

Before anyone else did, Paul was the first one to agree.

3

I was sitting in front of the magic circle thinking about it.

All three of these magic circles are fakes.

For the time being, I'm deducing that assumption.

After sitting down and giving it some thought, three things floated to mind.

One. The possibility that this room isn't the last stop.

According to the book, the Teleport Labyrinth works on a certain rule.

The rule is the main route follows just two-way magic circles.

Following with that assumption, there shouldn't be any mistake: this is the final stop.

However, where Roxy was wandering around, it was a cavern that you can't enter without using a two-way magic circle.

Inside of that cavern's maze, Roxy had over thirty one-way magic circles that she was forced to try in order to return to the two-way magic circle.

Furthermore, the real final stop might be ahead of at least one one-way directional magic circle.

Though, I feel the probability of that is low.

Two. In a place where the author of the book didn't realize it, just before a different member stepped on a trap,

The author of the book thought they stepped foot on the two-way magic circle, but in reality that wasn't the case.

Because of the random teleportation that a different member stepped on, the entire room teleported to a different place.

Which is why, following this premise, this two-way magic circle is the correct answer.

...I don't think so.

If there were such a trap, I'm sure Gisu would have found it.

Three. Actually, this two-way magic circle has a second degree to it.

Magic circles have a variety of shapes.

A doughnut-shaped magic circle; it's possible there's that sort of type as well.

A trap teleport magic circle concentrically outside the correct answer teleport magic circle.

I wonder if there isn't that sort of possibility, as well.

In other words, it's not the exterior; if you jump onto the innermost circle, arrival on the next floor is possible.

...That's stupid. From what places Ikkyu-san is this. ^[30]

Eliminating the impossible, all that exists is, after all, the first option.

Just as the author of the book said fundamentally, you need to take a bi-directional one.

After discovering that there are three varieties on the first floor, even up to the third or fourth floor, we never used either one-way or random ones.

With just that, we were able to make it here.

However, from here on, you might need to use not just two-way teleports, but some one-way teleports, as well.

...But, if it comes to that, then it might not just be here.

It's possible that where we are right now is a dead end as well.

Say the fork existed even more previously. For example, ahead of a one-way magic circle on the fourth floor might have been the true end.

Damn it... it's starting to get all mixed up.

In the first place, what decided the main path? Whether it is the floor number or the appearance of the monsters as we passed by,

Technically, the author of the book defined the correct path.

The original rule^[31] as well, might have been a completely unrelated coincidence.

After all, I wonder if deciding in that direction would be better.

Starting from the sixth floor, we start testing out each of the one-way teleport circles, defeat the monsters ahead, and search for a different route.

I have the feeling this is the correct answer.

But, look at the atmosphere of this room.

All of the veterans in the party felt it and said, "The boss is close ahead."

After all, I feel that this is a special place.

I feel that it's correct that this room is the last stop, as well.

No, that might be a trap in the labyrinth, as well.

Hmmm,

“There's no end to it, unless I say it.”

I stand up while saying that.

Need to go to the bathroom really quick.

“Tou-san.”

“What is it?”

“I'm going to water the flowers for a bit.”

“A piss, huh, I'll go as well.”

“Saying something like piss, how vulgar in front of women...”

“What do you plan to do by smoothing it over in this kind of place?”

No look, in front of Roxy is a bit...

I feel like I can't make mistakes.

No, though something like going to the bathroom, I guess it doesn't matter where she thinks I do it.

Together with Paul, I left the room.

We went into the room with Little Devil corpses and the ruins of the eggs.

We can just pick a suitable place in here.

While alternating with Paul on lookout here, we took care of our business.

“It's difficult, isn't it?”

Paul called out to me, while I was spacing out. ^[32]

“Yeah, I was having second thoughts come up, as if this room isn't on the main route. If there might actually be a different route and, if we don't go there, then we never arrive in the place where the boss is, maybe.”

“That's not the case. There's no mistake that room is the last stop.”

“What's your basis?”

“None.”

None, in other words intuition, huh.

However, you can't really ridicule the intuition of a veteran as well.

Even if it seems completely un-founded, it might actually be a subconscious conjecture based on actual experience after all.

“Well, there's no need to hurry. Tou-san and the others will wait for you. If you have any doubts, then ask and we'll respond as well. Don't try to come to an answer on your own.”

“Yes.”

I put a close to my business and changed with Paul.

While standing on lookout, I viewed my surroundings.

“Ah, and also Rudi- There's one thing I'd like to say, though.”

“What is it?”

“...Ah, No, I guess this is fine, for now. It's something I'll say when we return to the inn.”

“What is it; please stop with that. If you go saying something like that, in this labyrinth, it just brings up feelings of unease. Those sorts of things are called death flags, you know.”

“What is that...? If I say it right now, it might affect the morale of the party.”

I tilted my head to the voice I heard from behind.

Something that might affect the morale,

I wonder if there is something.

Maybe insecurity regarding Zenith,

Or else, something that will make the atmosphere of the place worse,

“Of the preaching type?”

“Well yeah. Something similar to that.”

“Certainly, if I was to get down and it dulled our movements it would be terrible after all. Feel free to tell me off a lot afterwards.”

“Heh... Well, it's not that kind of scolding. I was just going to tell you a piece of advice to prepare yourself on.”

After we return to the inn, huh,

It would be good if we could have saved Zenith by that time.

“Kaa-san. It would be good if she's safe.”

“.....That's right.”

It was something I just muttered out and it made the mood heavy.

This is no good.

But, even though we've searched this much, there's no end.

I'm sure Paul is feeling like it might already be no good as well.

It's probably better if I don't put it into words.

“...”

While listening to the sound of Paul's long piss I look around the surroundings.

The large room and the three rooms covered in eggs.

And then inner most room with magic circles,

All of them are adjacent.

I'm caught on something.

“This room... isn't it considerably oblong?”

“Hn? I guess so, what about that?”

This room is oblong.

The width is vast, because there are many bodies, it might appear square, but it's long in length.

It's a rectangle shape.

Those two long sides, each of them have two rooms.

Though all of them have different sizes,

However, something I've seen before.

Just recently,

And then, something is insufficient.

“...Ah.”

I realized it.

This place looks similar to the “Teleport Ruins.”

“Alright, shall we return... and, hey Rudi, what are you doing?”

Paul sent a puzzled sidelong glance at me, we quickly returned to the room with the party members.

I called out to Gisu, who was laying down like a large Buddha.

“Gisu-san, please come help me.”

“Hn, ah? Did you find something?”

“It's fine, so, over here.”

I pulled Gisu over to the vicinity of the center of the room.

“Please try searching around this area for a hidden stairway.”

“Haa... No, it's possible. Until now, all we saw were teleport traps. But, I suppose it might be possible that there's something like a hidden room, as well.”

Gisu came to an understanding on it himself, got on all fours, and started searching the floor.

And then, soon after made a face of shock and put his ear to the ground.
He took out his dagger and tapped it against the ground.

“Hey... here... it's here! Senpai. Underneath here, it's hollow.”

“Can you get it open?”

“Wait just a minute.”

Gisu tried touching around here and there on the floor.

He moved around the wall touching around.

And then returned,

“It's no good, it won't open up. It's probably the type you have to wrench open.”

“Is there any problem with breaking it?”

“Yeah... There's no trap. All right. Senpai, do it. It's here.”

While saying that Gisu carved a mark on the floor.

I aimed there and launched a rock bullet.

[Gan] a sound was out and the bullet smashed, denting the floor.

I guess that was too weak, huh.

“Just a bit stronger, you can do it, right?”

“Yes.”

Just as I was told, I raised the power and fired once more.

A large [Bagon] sound let out and a hole opened up in the ground.

“Alright, leave the rest to me.”

Gisu immediately got on all fours and started removing the rubble.

If you just open up a hole the rest is simple it seems.

In no time at all, Gisu spread out the hole and it changed into a square downwards entrance.

What appeared was stairs that lead down.

“Amazing... As expected of senpai, you get it well.”

“Well, since I've seen it once before after all.”

The teleport ruins.

There were four rooms with nothing at all and a single room with stairs leading down.

However, I wonder if originally it just appeared to be four rooms with nothing at all.

I wonder if, just like now, the stairs leading to the room with the teleport magic circle were concealed.

During the period, those ruins were used, in each of the rooms there might have been furniture; and it might have been made to appear that there was no such hidden stairway.

That deteriorated over the passing of years, otherwise maybe Orsted destroyed it or something and it ended up in that shape.

“Alright, everyone, senpai found some hidden stairs for us!”

With Gisu's voice, the other members all stood up.

After coming over to here and looking at the stairs.

And then, “Oh~” they let out voices of admiration.

“...Gahahaha, you're good!”

“Ow.”

Talhand was solidly hitting my back while laughing.

“As expected of my son!”

“Ouch.”

Paul hit my back as well.

“I see now, come to think of it, this place looks similar to the teleport ruins doesn't it!”

“Ow.”

Elinalise hit me as well.

“Oh, and wait just a second. There might be a trap. Senpai, hand over about three scrolls!”

Gisu hit me as well, while saying that.

“...”

After turning around, it was just Roxy raising her small hand in the air.

After her eyes met up with mine, while looking at me with upturned eyes, she suddenly speedily touched my back.

“Good work,”

Roxy whispered out those words.

That expression had just a bit of mortified feel to it.

I wonder if her disciple playing an active role bothered her.

Since all of my achievements are the same as Roxy's achievements, after all, there shouldn't be anything to bother Roxy.

All right, if the adventures from this time are talked about in the future, I'll say it was actually, because Roxy gave me hints.

“Alright, we can go on ahead, everyone, stay on guard.”

“Yeah!”

With Gisu's voice, everyone nodded.

After descending the stairs ahead, there was a teleport magic circle.

A two-way teleport magic circle.
However, its color was a blood-like red.

CHAPTER 7

GUARDIAN OF THE TELEPORT LABYRINTH

1

A red magic circle.

Until now, all I've seen were teleport magic circles that gave off a bluish-white light, but it's red.

Red, a color representing danger.

There are such words as Red Zone as well.

That is, it will lead to a dangerous place.

“It's ahead of this.”

The one who mutters out those words is Paul.

I'm sure that was an utterance of intuition.

I wonder if Zenith or the Guardian Protector will be there.

However, strangely, there's a feeling of conviction.

Ahead of this magic circle is the final part of the labyrinth.

“What should we do, Paul? We still have some leeway, but returning once first is also an option.”

The sixth floor was easy.

Thanks to the roots of Tarufuro, the Little Devils were the same as small fries.

We never had to use anything in particular; it wouldn't even be a stretch to say that our energy is full.

We relaxed quite a bit in the room just before as well.

“...No, we'll proceed. Let's inspect our equipment.”

“Understood.”

After hearing Paul's decision, everyone sits down to check his or her equipment. On the occasion, I take off my equipment.

I start inspecting it more carefully than usual.

“Look, Rudi as well.”

After Roxy tells me that, I sit down as well.

I take out all of my belongings from my bag and line them up on the ground to confirm.

I have few belongings.

At most, I just possess a number of the spirit scrolls.

“Rudi, my scrolls, do you want to take some of them?”

Just in the case something comes up, Roxy is carrying a number of scrolls.

They're Advanced level magic scrolls.

Through shortening incantations, with a considerable return ratio, she can use a number of magic.

Even though I say that, Advanced magic requires a somewhat long incantation in order to cast it.

Since the battle may come down to that, a time may come up where you can't cast in time.

It's a trump card for that time.

“I guess so, then how about several healing magic scrolls?”

“Yes.”

Since I can use magic chantless, I don't need Advanced level magic scrolls.

However, healing magic is different.

I should hold onto these, just in case a worst-case scenario happens.

For example, in case the Guardian crushes my throat or lung.

After receiving some Intermediate healing magic scrolls from Roxy, I fold them up and put them into the pocket of my robe.

If I don't use them, I'll return them.

I'd like to take one and return home with it, then have Nanahoshi or Cliff reproduce them.

No, reproducing them without permission was prohibited, wasn't it?

Though personally, I don't think the portion I use will be exposed.

"I don't know what kind of Guardian Protector there will be, but we have plenty of combat potential, Rudi. So you don't end up needing to use those scrolls, let's cover you with all our power."

"I'm in your care. Somehow I have a habit of freezing up, so when the time comes down to it, please help me."

"Yes, please leave your back to me."

While saying that, Roxy hit her own small chest with a [Ton].

How reliable.

"Rudeus, Roxy."

And then there, Elinalise tosses something over to us.

After catching what she throws, I notice it was a circular stone, almost like a marble.

The same kind of magic crystal that Elinalise carries a number of.

"If you run out of magic power, please use that."

"Is it fine?"

"It's just a loan. If you don't use it, please return it later."

"Ah, yes. Understood."

Running out of magic power towards the end of exploring a labyrinth is possible.

But, normally, at a time like that, you retreat.

After all, for that reason, you make sure to exterminate the enemies completely in the rooms behind you.

After escaping and waiting for your magic power to recover, you re-challenge the Guardian Protector.

However, there are also times when you can't escape from the Guardian.

If a boss traps you in a place like a competition field, you can't leave until you defeat it.

It seems there are cases like that as well.

The red magic circle in front of our eyes appears to be two-way.

However, in reality, it might actually be one-way.

As expected, it's probably not random.

“Alright, is everyone prepared?”

With Paul's voice, we all stand up.

After looking, everyone's faces are tense.

I'll put some spirit into it as I go as well.

“Rudi.”

“What is it?”

“I do feel it's bad to say something like this now though.”

Ah, this is a death flag.

“Then, please don't say it.”

“Su, Sure...”

Paul makes a depressed face.

The morale might have decreased a bit.

No, important things aren't something you say right before a decisive battle. Those sorts of things are fine after we return.

“Alright, let's go.”

After looking at each other, we all simultaneously step on the magic circle.

2

Ahead of where we left the magic circle is a tremendously wide room.

If I were to say it in a few words, it's a giant temple room. ^[33]

It has a rectangular shape and is roughly a palace hall, and as vast as a baseball field.

Along the edges of the room, there are a number of thick pillars standing up.

The ceiling is high enough up that you have to strain your neck to look up.

The ground turns into something like tile, every tile engraved with an intricate relief carving, or an etched image projecting on each tile.

“Oh??!”

Deep in the interior part of that ashen palace is a single monster.

It is gigantic.

I've never fought a monster this large before.

The size is roughly two times larger than a Red Dragon.

Even from a distance, I could tell that it has sparkling emerald-green scales.

Its torso is short but wide.

From there, a number of heads branch out.

“A Hydra, for real, it's my first time seeing one...”

I hear Gisu's murmur.

Right, it's a Hydra.

A gigantic multi-headed dragon; I count nine heads.

“There?!”

But, where Paul's eyes stop isn't at the Hydra.

Beyond the Hydra,

the innermost room behind the protecting Hydra...

There is a visible magic crystal.

It is an emerald-green magic crystal of tremendous size.

Large enough to make the marble-like magic crystals that Elinalise carries seem worthless.

A magic crystal in the shape of a crystal about two meters (6 and 1/2 feet) in size.

I've never seen a magic crystal of this size until now.

However, that's fine as well.

The size doesn't matter at all.

Rather than something like that, it's the inside of the magic crystal.

Inside the magic crystal,

she is there.

Zenith is

trapped inside the magic crystal ^[34]

“Zenith!”

Paul shouts out.

Simultaneously, the thoughts of “Why?” come to my mind.

Why did it become like that?

Why is she inside a magic crystal?

Before I could put my doubts into words, Paul runs ahead, dual wielding swords in both hands.

The Hydra slowly raises up and turns its necks.

3

“You idiot! Don't be so hasty!”

I hear Gisu's shout.

“...!!”

Along with Elinalise clicking her tongue, she dashes after Paul.

Continuing along, Talhand starts running as well.

Elinalise couldn't catch up with Paul, who had a running start.

“I'm going to cover them!”

Roxy shouts.

There, I return to myself and aim my staff with the Hydra as the opponent.

First, we need to defeat the enemy.

Defeat it in a single hit.

I charge my [Rock Bullet] enough that it is able to blow away even a Demon Lord in a single hit.

“Quiet Fist of the Ice Man, [Frost Nova]!” ^[35]

Roxy starts incanting Intermediate magic and is preemptively attacking, as well.

A cluster of cold air overtakes Paul at a tremendous speed and impacts,

[Hi~n!]

Just before impact, an ear-splitting sound, like something scratching on glass, resounds in the giant temple...

“Wha!!”

Roxy's voice and her eyes are wide open.

There isn't even a single scratch on the Hydra.

Is it strong against ice?

By the instant such a thought floated through my mind, Paul is arriving at the Hydra.

“[Rock Cannonball]!”

I fire the Rock Bullet I had been charging.

The sharpened bullet flies while releasing a high-pitched sound [Kyuin].

It passes above Paul who was a few steps from reaching the Hydra.

It impacts on the Hydra.

[Hi~n!]

Again, that unpleasant sound is heard.

“It blocked!?”

It wasn't avoided.

It should have hit.

It should have been a direct hit.

However, the sound from just now,
the high-pitched sound just now, what is it?

Almost as if nothing is done at all, the Hydra calmly stands up.

There was not even a single scratch.

“Uoo... raaaa...!”

Paul's spirited loud yell reaches up to me.

The Hydra moves that head almost like a snake and attacks Paul.

Paul avoids it with the minimum movement possible.

In the next instant, the Hydra's head is spinning off in the air.

Paul swings the sword in his right hand,

with a tremendous sword speed.

For an instant, Paul's figure blurs.

He is moving at a speed that my demon eye's foresight can't see.

In the next instant, a different head of the Hydra is spraying blood.

Paul swings the sword in his left hand, slicing.

Since the off-hand sword was shorter, it isn't enough to completely sever its head.

Paul rotates his body midair and, making use of his centrifugal force, slashes again with the sword in his right hand.

The head of the Hydra that had been hanging loosely falls.

“Shaaa...!”

The Hydra lost its second head in an instant.

However, the Hydra had nine heads.

The Hydra uses one head after another and encloses, surrounds, and attacks Paul from every direction.

Paul back-steps to put some distance between them, but maybe because of the size of the step, he isn't able to escape from the attack range of the Hydra.

“Paul!!”

Then Elinalise catches up.

With her shield at the ready, she projects her sword.

I feel an invisible shock wave release.

[Hi~n!]

It's that sound again.

Almost as if it hasn't received any shock wave at all, the Hydra pursues after Paul.

“Murmuring of the Muddy Stream! [Water Current]!”

Simultaneously with Roxy's incantation, a cluster of water appears in front of Paul's eyes.

That cluster of water washes Paul away from the Hydra, escaping from the Hydra's attack range.

Paul is then rolling into a somersault when Elinalise faces towards and immediately enters a stance to cover him.

Just about midway there, Talhand stops his feet and starts the incantation for magic.

There were some irregularities, but the formation has become the shape of advance guard, middle guard, and rear guard.

What are we going to do about combat?

Paul's attacks were effective.

However, my rock bullet was blocked.

Roxy's magic as well.

Next would be either fire or wind, I guess?

Both of them have area of effect and are hard to keep from affecting Paul and the others.

What to do?

“[Earth Pillar]!”

Talhand's incantation ends.

It's earth magic.

Above the Hydra's head, a mass of rock appears and falls onto the Hydra.

[Hi~n!]

That sound was let out again.

Just before the rock impacts the Hydra, it dissipates almost like becoming sand and disperses.

It's that sound. When that sound is let out, the magic disappears.

“Does magic have no effect on that thing!?”

What should be done? Should we keep going on?

Or would it be better to run away temporarily?

What should I do!?

There, I hear Roxy's pressured voice from beside me.

“Rudi, that! It's healing!”

I look towards her pointing, where the two heads that Paul had lopped off.

One of those heads is stretching out to the end of the cut; the bones, muscle and flesh is swelling up and rebuilding the head.

The other head as well, following along with that, started to repair itself.

It can regenerate.

That thing's heads, just by cutting them off, you can't permanently damage it.

“Let's retreat!”

Roxy's voice.

However, it didn't reach Paul.

While raising a voice filled with fighting spirit, he is resolved on striking the Hydra with his swords.

Elinalise is in danger trying to support Paul's reckless fighting style.

"Gisu!"

Talhand's voice,

Gisu takes off running.

Gisu overtakes Talhand and moves up to just behind Paul; he throws something he was holding in his hand at the Hydra.

[Papa~n], I hear the sound of an explosion.

And then, from near the Hydra something like smoke is rising up.

A smokescreen, huh?

"...!"

While Gisu is shouting something, he starts pulling Paul backwards.

However, Gisu can't restrain Paul. In no time at all, Paul is about to shake Gisu off.

In the next instant, Elinalise bashes Paul in the face with her shield.

"...!"

Gisu releases his hold and says something, then Paul faces this way and starts running.

"Rudeus!"

I start to move after hearing Elinalise's voice.

I concentrate all the magic power I could into my hand and create a dense fog in the space between the Hydra and Paul.

A fog, like pure white steam, to conceal others.

However, I know that the Hydra is approaching us, as it makes a [DoshinDoshin] sound.

Even though its sound wasn't all that fast.

Paul and the others return up to the circle.

"Rudi, we're retreating. Ahead, to the magic circle."

"Yes! Sensei!"

I anticipate it and jump onto the magic circle.

4

Everyone safely manages to leave using the magic circle.

Roxy, Talhand, and Gisu,

Paul, who is breathing roughly,

And then finally Elinalise comes out, with some injuries.

Blood is flowing out endlessly around the area of Elinalise's shoulder.

"Are you all right?"

"It was just a scratch."

Elinalise's shoulder is completely shaved off.

Just from what I could see, there was no indication as if she had received a direct attack though.

"I was scraped by the scales."

Somehow, it seems that Hydra's outer scales are like sharkskin.

Even though I say that, it's still within the range that elementary healing magic can heal it without leaving a scar.

Back in my previous world's life, it would have required at least several tens of stitches.

What a convenient world.

“Thank you very much.”

Well then,

The problem is the reason for this injury: how to treat the person who caused it.

Paul sits down in front of the magic circle.

In addition, his eyes are fixated as well.

Blood thirst, surging from all over his body.

“Dad.”

“...That was Zenith. No mistake.”

Paul said that.

In those eyes, he can't see the fact that Elinalise is injured.

No, since Elinalise takes the role of shield, you could say it's her job to absorb attacks though.

However...

“Please calm down a bit.”

“Yeah, sorry about that. I'm calm right now.”

Paul's voice is low in tone.

It's the calm before the storm- such words came to mind.

He may be calm, but it seems he's not composed.

It can't be helped.

Certainly, that was Zenith.

From a distance even I realized, “Ah, it's Zenith”.

Then I'm sure if it's Paul, there's no way he would be mistaken.

The one inside of that magic crystal is Zenith.

She's trapped inside of the crystal.

I wonder why she ended up in that state.

No, the reason is fine.

Something like being warped inside of it during a teleport, I'm sure, there are various explanations.

It seems that being teleported inside of an object rarely ever happens; in reverse, you could say although it's rare, it still happens.

According to Gisu's story, wasn't the story that she was together with some adventurers?

No, they used the words that she was captured.

Hn? Could it be that Gisu knew about this situation...?

No, that can't be the case.

It can't be helped catching him on a slip of the tongue.

It won't be too late to question him over it after everything is over.

Besides, the problem isn't there.

"...I wonder if mother is still alive, even like that?"

"Huh!?"

After saying that, Paul stands up and grabs onto my collar roughly.

"Something like whether she's alive or not, it doesn't matter does it!"

"That's right."



Certainly,

It was a slip of words, I guess.

From the start, the probability that Zenith is alive was low.

I even considered the possibility that we wouldn't even find a corpse.

Even resolved that we may not find a single article of hers,

If she's dead then she's dead, something we should offer condolences to, is what I was thinking.

If it's like this, that she's still recognizably Zenith, then the situation is far better than we could have predicted.

“Stop the fighting!”

Gisu exclaims, but Paul still nears his face to mine in an intimidating way.

“Rudi, Zenith was over there. Your mother, why are you able to remain that calm?”

“Would it be better to panic more? What would be solved by getting distracted?”

“I'm not saying that!”

I know what Paul wants to say.

Certainly, right now I might be too composed.

Even though after we find my mother, whom was missing for six years, I'm sure it's not the behavior of a typical human.

...Well.

Even during the time when I was a child, I didn't interact with Zenith very much.

My recognition towards her as a mother is weak, as well.

Rather it's even strange that I lived with such an appreciation this life. ^[36]

At any rate, we separated at the time when I was seven years old, and I haven't met her in almost ten years, after all.

Even the fact that I'm taking on a heartless attitude might be something that can't be helped.

“For now, let's recognize the present condition.”

“Huh!?”

Ignoring Paul's intimidation, I indifferently try putting the things from just before into words.

“Magic was ineffective against that Guardian Protector. It possesses an absurd ability, [Regenerate]; its attack strength is high enough that just by contacting Elinalise-san, it was able to break through Elinalise-san's defense as well. And then, mother is trapped inside of that crystal. Putting it clearly, it's unknown whether or not she's even alive.”

“Something like that... even I know! What I'm asking about is your attitude at the time when your mother has been found!”

Gisu cut in after Paul's shout.

“Stop it with that! Have something like a parent-child fight after we return to the inn!”

Gisu forcefully pulled us apart.

Paul spit out the words, “Shit... screwing around like that,” and plunks down onto the ground.

It seems there was no reason for me to say it specially; even Paul understands the situation.

Just, my attitude bothered him.

Even I feel it too: it was cold.

But, it really can't be helped, right?

What are you telling me to do about it?

“Yes, stop with the fight there, let's start discussing things!”

Elinalise lets out a clap with her hands.

Paul and I slowly move and sit in the circle.

Roxy is making a somewhat nervous face while looking Paul and I over.

It seems I've caused her to worry.

"I'm fine."

"Is that so..."

It's not the first fight I had with Paul.

After things are over and we return to the inn, I'm sure Paul will be better as well.

Even I, who has weak acknowledgment of mother, at the point when I hear Zenith's voice and realize she's been saved, I'm sure I'll feel something as well.

That's right, there's no doubt that's the case.

This time, the gears are just a bit out of order.

"[Cough]. Umm, it's about Zenith-san's crystallization though. I think something can be done about it."

Roxy says that in a somewhat brighter voice than usual.

"Is that true?!"

The one who makes a happy face is Paul.

"Yes. Occasionally, there are times when legendary magic items imbued with magic power are trapped in magic crystals like that, but I've heard that if you defeat the Guardian, the crystal unseals and you'll be able to retrieve the contents."

It's a story I've never heard.

However, they're Roxy's words.

Roxy has no reason to lie.

"That is something that I know about as well,"

Elinalise agrees,

“I know about one individual who has been through a similar situation as Zenith, but they're properly living, even now.”

“...”

This is a lie; I'm sure.

Elinalise is the type to lie calmly at times like this.

Since it's for the sake of improving the mood, I won't blame her, though.

Although, no matter how much of a precedent there is, when the crystal melts, it's not confined to the person inside being safe.

Naturally, there's no need to put that into words.

It's something that everyone knows.

“The problem is that Guardian Protector... Honestly, it's the first time I've seen that species, as well.”

The one who takes the initiative and cuts off the conversation is Elinalise.

Gisu continues moreover,

“That's right; you can tell it's a Hydra just from seeing it. But a variety with those kind of emerald green scales, I've never heard of such a thing.”

“...Furthermore, it can even regenerate.”

Talhand crosses his arms while continuing to make a troubled face, as well.

It's known that Hydras are a species of dragon.

A dragon that has a number of heads- although it doesn't flock, even alone it's generally the ultimate class in terms of power.

Certainly, I had heard that they were living somewhere on the Magic Continent.

Just from what has been currently confirmed, I know of three types.

They're differentiated by the color of their scales; the known types are white, grey, and

gold.

Something like a Hydra with emerald green scales doesn't exist.

“That is most likely a Multi-Headed, Magic Stone Dragon, or [Manatite Hydra].”

The one who says that is Roxy.

“I've read about it in a book once. It's a demonic dragon, all of the scales of its body are covered in magic stones which absorb magic power. They were witnessed around the time of the Second Human-Demon War. It's written that they went extinct, together with the annihilation of the continent. I was convinced they were just a fairy tale though... to think they really exist.” [37]

Magic Power Absorption...

In other words, it is immune to magic, I guess.

“Does that mean that we're unable damage that thing at all?”

“If what's written in the book is true, then if you cast from zero distance it should be effective.”

“Zero distance, you say...”

That huge thing...

Furthermore, just by pressing against its razor-sharp body, you receive wounds as if put through a cheese grater.

Does that mean we have to directly touch the Hydra and use magic?

All of our fingers will end up chopped off.

“However, even at the point we're able to damage it, it can regenerate. What can be done...?”

“Regeneration is troublesome.”

“...However, it's not as if we can't defeat it,” I say.

The Hydra regenerates.

Even after hearing that, I am not surprised.

It's because I had the mythological knowledge that a Hydra regenerates.

“Even if we chop its heads off, they regenerate each in a few moments. What can be done to defeat something like that...?”

Roxy was groaning as she agrees as well.

However, I didn't think it was as troublesome as everyone else did.

Even despite up until now, I've almost never ran into regenerating monsters.

For some reason,

Because I have my knowledge from my previous life...

“For the time being, I have an idea.”

After raising my hand with a proposal, the looks gathered to me.

“If you cauterize the Hydra's opened necks with fire, they won't regenerate- is something I've heard.”

I start telling the story of the hero of Greek Myth of Heracles.

Heracles fought with a Hydra.

According to that, I know it was said that he burned the cut end of the necks of the Hydra in order to prevent the regeneration.

Honestly, it's just a myth after all.

Its credibility is unproven.

However, the response is good.

“I see now, burning the wound, huh.”

“We don't have any torches, but if it's a wound without scales then there's no worry about the magic being blocked.”

“There's value in giving it a try.”

I don't know just how similar the Hydras in this world are to the tales of Hydra in my previous life.

Though in my previous life, it's said that the Hydras have immortal heads...

On this side maybe, if you are to just burn all of the heads; it might all too easily die.

It's a negative way of thinking about it, but as long as it's a living thing, it should die.

"Alright, then let's try carrying that out and see."

With Gisu's words, the plan is decided.

My suggestion isn't certain.

However, things of certainty are nowhere to be found.

Honestly, I feel it might be good to return to the city once, as well.

Even though one could argue we have consumed almost no energy, the enemy is powerful.

It might be good to do preparations for a boss fight.

It's possible to hire skilled warriors just for the sake of the boss fight.

I don't know just how many swordsmen there are who can decapitate a Hydra's head. But with the city's number of adventurers, if we were to search, I'm sure we could find at least one.

"..."

But, I'm sure Paul wouldn't agree.

If I were to say something like returning now, his morale state seems to say he would then challenge the Hydra alone.

Besides, even if we are to return, I can't imagine that we would even be able to find items or mercenaries that can work well against that Hydra.

There are counter-measures,

We've already gathered the precise balance of people to do it.

Then, this is the part where we should advance ahead.

“Hey, Paul. This is fine, right?”

“...Yeah.”

“That's a reply with no spirit- do you get it? No one other than you can cut that thing's heads off.”

I'm sure Elinalise and Talhand would be able to leave a wound on those scales, as well. Still, it won't reach the point of decapitation.

Paul will cut off the heads and then I'll use chantless magic, immediately burning it. Such an assignment of roles is necessary.

Depending on the situation, it might require me to approach to a considerably close distance, as well,

In order to pinpoint burn just the wound, since the probability is high that the surrounding scales will nullify friendly fire, as well.

In that case, the other three people will act as a diversion to distract the Hydra from my attacks.

If the decoys take any damage then Roxy will heal them.

It becomes that sort of role assignment.

There's nothing but that.

Naturally, as it is, attacks will come for me, as well.

I will be standing in a considerably dangerous position: directly in front of the Hydra.

“Rudi...”

Paul's eyes are facing towards me.

He is looking at me with somewhat hesitant eyes and says:

“You are... really a reliable son.”

“That kind of flattery, let's save it for after we defeat the Hydra.”

“It's not flattery. I really think that.”

Paul says that and laughs at himself,

"I can't become calm like you, I couldn't come up with ideas either. I'm an idiot, who couldn't think of anything other than recklessly running in."

Paul continues,

The shape of his mouth twists, almost like he is chewing on the words with his molars.

"...I'm a terrible father. It doesn't seem like I'll be able to become a role model for my son."

Paul says in a tone bursting with determination.

His look was tremendously strong.

Yes, his eyes are filled with such strong power; almost as if his look can kill.

It's resolve.

Paul has decided his resolve.

"With that, let me say it. I know it's not something for a parent to say, though listen well."

"Yes."

I receive his look from head on:

"Save your mom, even if you have to die."

Paul says.

Facing his son,

[Even if you have to die.]

However, I don't feel he's a terrible old man.

This is trust.

Paul is thinking of me as his equal.

For this reason, he was serious.

Then I need to respond,

“...Yes!”

“All right, let's go!”

With Paul's words, everyone stands up.

The rematch with the Hydra begins.

CHAPTER 8

MORTAL COMBAT

The battle begins.

In the grand chamber, a massive Hydra was waiting for us,

Behind it were the magic crystals.

And trapped in the middle of the largest magic crystal was, without a doubt, Zenith.

When the Hydra sees us, it slowly raises its body.

“Alright, here I go!”

Paul sprints off,

Keeping a low posture like a dog, he is fast like the wind,

The kind of speed that would leave anyone in the dust,

However this time, Elinalise follows Paul’s lead as well.

From behind is Talhand, with a slow gait.

We progress forward, matching the pace of Talhand.

Gisu waits further in the rear.

Since he cannot fight, he's useless in this battle.

He can offer no real techniques for fighting with such a large-scale monster like a Hydra.

However, he is there for a reason.

Worst case, if we should be annihilated, his role is to escape and report what happened.

“RAAaaa!”

Paul reaches the Hydra,
At the same time, three of the Hydra's heads move.
For its size, the Hydra is quick.
All of its heads, each like a wild snake, move nimbly and independently.

But,
In a moment of blurring motion, Paul severs one of the heads from the Hydra.

All right, keep it up.

“[Fire Ball]!”

At the head of my staff, I put the full might of the magic power in my body.
A tremendously hot fireball blasts off towards the Hydra.

--But, it was no good.

The fireball begins to dwindle the closer to the Hydra it gets, and disappears on impact.
I hear an unpleasant sound as if scratching glass.

“As I expected, I'm going to have to get closer to use magic.”

If I do not close this distance and approach it, I cannot defeat it.
I won't be able to damage it unless I hit it point-blank with fire magic.

“So that's the plan, eh? Are you going to be able to fight up close, Rudi?”
“I'll be fine. While I trained, I didn't just limit it to magic.”

Although I confidently said so, my heart is beating out of my chest.
I am weak in close combat.
Most of my memories of close combat ended up colored with my defeat.
Beginning with Paul, then Ghyslaine, Eris, Ruijerd, and Orsted,

At each time, I was unable to defeat anybody.
Though, somehow, I had managed to get by in recent fights.
The stray dragon, Rinia, Pursena, and Luke.
I used the Demon Eye of Foresight to win against them.

However, can I win against this Hydra?

It's a no.

I don't believe I could defeat an opponent that warriors, such as Paul and Elinalise, struggle to fight.

In other words, just because I had managed to win a few battles recently, doesn't mean I can win against the Hydra.

But, I'm not fighting alone this time.

It's a team battle.

I have Paul, Elinalise, and even Roxy.

Talhand as well, though I can't verify his full power; surely it must be at the same level of the others.

I take off at full speed, and arrive just behind Paul.

"Rudi, don't you dare move away from my back!"

I listen to the instruction of Paul who's in front of me.

Elinalise flanks to the left and Talhand to the right,

And Roxy casts from the rear.

The formation is exactly like the Imperial Cross^[38].

"SHAAAaaaa!"

Three heads attack simultaneously.

It seems the Hydra doesn't move any more than three.

Perhaps it's incapable of moving more?

Or is it, because moving more heads would interfere?

I don't understand it, but it's convenient.

Elinalise sidesteps one head, Talhand bats away another.

And Paul cleanly beheads the remaining attacking head.

The head falls to the ground and begins writhing.

“Go now!”

“I'm on it!”

After I hear the shout of Paul, I dash quickly to the severed neck, and release my magic.

The fire magic hits the open neck, and the intensity of the fire illuminates the surroundings.

I scorch the Hydra's neck wound; while it makes a smoldering sound, the fire completely chars the neck.

“How's that...?”

While keeping an eye on the wound, I back step away.

I don't know yet if it was effective.

Almost immediately, another head attacks.

Paul stops the blow.

Elinalise parries it away with a shield.

At the edge of my view, a spray of blood comes up from Talhand.

“Kuh!”

“Power of the divine, become the nourishment for this body — [Healing]!”

When Talhand became injured, Roxy immediately ran, while chanting, to heal his wound.

Everybody else is moving about, overwhelming the Hydra, so no attacks can reach me.

I can do nothing but confirm it.

“...”

And as for the wound on the neck:

Does the cauterized section still regrow a head?

How did it go?

“...All right.”

No new head is regrown.

The wound remains unchanged.

There is no surge of new flesh, and no new head regenerates.

“It's working!”

“Hell yeah!”

Paul bellows and another head falls.

And I scorch that neck.

The heat is terrifying.

Indeed, the temperature of the heat begins to choke me.

However, to scorch the neck sections, I must use at least this much intensity.

If I fail to scorch the neck sections properly, a new head could regenerate.

So, we continue in this manner...

“...m! Cover me!”

My Demon Eye of Foresight catches the Hydra's movement.

<Two of the Hydra's heads that don't move, will aim for me.>

I evade one.

<However, the other one aims for the place that I evade to.>

“Leave it to me!”

In the place where I dodged the first attacking head, Elinalise jumps.
Jumping in with a slightly unnatural stance, she knocks one of the heads back.
She places her body between the Hydra and myself.
The shield is placed between the Hydra and myself.
Even while I hear a snarling sound come forth, Elinalise protects me.

A small squirt of Elinalise’s blood splashes on my cheek,

“Roxy! She needs healing!”

“Power of the divine, become the nourishment for this body — [Healing]!”

Roxy immediately remedies the wound of Elinalise.
And both return to their positions without incident.

“Rudi! Keep your sights on the third one!”

“Got it!” Paul shouts.

At the same time, another head falls, and a pillar of blood erupts.
I grill the neck.
My only job is to grill.
I'm grilling meat,
But I grill it diligently.

I leave the rest to the others.
I only focus on what's before me.

Paul cuts, and I burn.
Elinalise and Talhand protect me.

And Roxy protects them.

The fourth head drops, and I scorch the neck.

It's going well.

At least I thought so,

But, then the Hydra changes its movements.

Suddenly,

Yes, very suddenly,

The Hydra launches all five of its remaining heads exclusively at Talhand.

“Kuuh!”

“Talhand!”

The first attacking head Talhand avoids.

In the place of the second head, that he cannot avoid, Talhand rolls on the ground.

At this time, he grazes the body of the Hydra, rolling and rattling along the ground.

The third attacking head comes.

Talhand, flat on his arse, manages to catch the coming mouth with his shield and axe.

Then, the fourth attacking head:

The Hydra head bites Talhand's leg.

And for a moment, suspends Talhand up in midair,

“Guooooo!”

Finally, the 5th attacking head, reaches to devour the whole body of the immobile Talhand—.

“Oryaa!”

With a 'boom-boom' sound, the head crashes.

The heads of the Hydra, that is.

The fourth and fifth heads were cut off by the slashing attack of Paul.

"I'm alive! Thanks for the save!" exclaims Talhand.

"I burned them!" I report.

"Power of the divine, become the nourishment for this body — [Healing]!" chants Roxy.

While we hear each other at the same time, we work separately.

I burn two more necks of the Hydra simultaneously.

Just three remain.

"Hm?"

Again, the movements of the Hydra change.

It appeared to stagger backwards, in fear of us.

"It's going good; we just need one final push, Rudi!"

Paul goes forward.

No, wait.

Isn't this a trap?

Although we should attack, I don't know what this opponent is plotting...

Then, when I give it a moment of thought,

"Naah!"

One of the Hydra's heads,

An especially big head,

It tears the scorched part clean off one of the necks.

“What the?!”

With the cauterized part of the neck bitten off, the head regrows a few moments later.

“This is bad!”

While it cannot rejuvenate heads from necks that are scorched,
If it bites off the cauterized section, the head will regrow again.

“Don’t give it time to regenerate!”

“YAAAAAaaaaah!”

Elinalise, while moving, lets out a war cry. She dashes,
And thrusts her Gladius into the regenerating neck,

“Oh, great frozen protector, to the place thou demands, go.
Strike with the muddy stream of the glacier, [Ice Smash]!”

Magic hammers into the neck which was about to revive a head at zero distance from where Elinalise was.

The premature head, still without scales and with soft meaty skin, meets with a hunk of ice slamming into it, shearing it clean.

The neck writhes around, spraying blood like a freshly squeezed pomegranate.

“Roxy!”

“Oh, small cinder blessed with greatness, burn brilliantly, [Flamethrower]!”

Roxy, who was following up with Elinalise, shoots out the Flamethrower.

Although the scales dampen the magical power reaching the Hydra, the neck smokes

and burns.

“All right!”

Paul goes to pursue with the follow up.

However, the Hydra doesn't lower a head.

It rises its large body high up, raising its head to the ceiling, and glares my way.

Only three heads remain.

Am I frightened?

No, it's something else.

It's not that feeling.

It's a feeling of danger.

“Be on guard, something's about to come!”

“All right!”

Paul's confirmation.

From there, I act on intuition.

No, perhaps I can say that I act from my experience.

I have seen this posture only once before.

I recalled the Stray Dragon's body standing erect, then my figure, in front of an impending [Inhaling Breath].

“A fire breath attack is coming! Please gather close to me!”

“Right!”

Paul back steps swiftly, until he is just in front of me.

Elinalise and Talhand matches Paul's pace, tumbling close to me.

And Roxy leaps towards and clings on tightly to me.

I begin creating water.

A thick wall of water,

Immediately after the wall of water swelled, the Hydra spews its breath.

From all three heads, a terrific amount of flaming breath pours out and slams into the water wall.

Massive amounts of steam form, and the temperature in the room rises significantly.

“...!”

A dragon's flame breath boasts a horrifyingly high temperature.

It can liquefy steel and even vaporize a small marsh, in mere moments.

And this flame breath released simultaneously from three necks.

No normal magician has a spell to match this fire's intensity.

If five- no, ten- magicians concentrated to create one water wall, they might possibly defend.

But even then, it might still be impossible.

However, my magic reservoir is not normal.

“Dad!”

“Right!”

Paul leaps into the place where one of the Hydra's necks sealed.

The breath weapon seems to have restrictions on its usage.

While I don't know the exact reason, I understand that it cannot perform it in rapid succession.

Is it perhaps related to some kind of accumulation of magic inside the body?

I just don't know the reason.

But, I know flame breath is the last resort of a dragon.

And to spew it from all three heads simultaneously,
There will definitely be some recharging time.

If it was just one head using it, then perhaps another head might set up for a successive breath.

However, this Hydra didn't do it.

Maybe it has to involve the other heads.

At any rate, a chance has come.

“OOOooohh!”

Paul lops off a head.

And I scorch its neck immediately.

Two to go.

One head attached to a thinner neck, and one to a thick neck.

Is the thick neck attached to the main body?

Then that one is the last target.

“Dad, take the head on the thin neck!”

“Understood!”

Paul runs.

Elinalise and Talhand team up to take on the head attached to the thick neck.

“DaaRaaaaa!”

Paul cleanly severs the head.

And I immediately drive in my fire magic.

Excellent,

Only the main head remains.

We're going to win.

Coming this far, we cannot give it any chance to try and begin regenerating its heads. Even if the last head is invulnerable, our team should be up to the task of finishing the Hydra off somehow.

The moment I scorch the last neck with magic,

<The Hydra makes a trembling movement.>

I did not understand what that movement was.

Although my Eye of Foresight displayed this movement, I didn't understand it.

It was too big.

“Idiot!”

“!”

Before I notice it, Paul pushes me away.

Immediately before me, I feel something huge pass by.

Certainly, there are no heads left.

No, that's not right,

It's not that it was “without a head.”

It just happened to be “headless.”

The Hydra swings its headless necks around like a rose whip.

Eight necks,

Covered with hard scales like a grater, it was a bundle of necks.

The body shakes, and all at once, it moves in a sweeping motion.

“Rudiiii!”

Paul shouts for a second time, and kicks me back.

At the same time, with a colossal sound like 'daan', something falls right beside me.
Something,
I immediately fall to my knees.
At the place where I am,
Between Paul and I,

“U, uooooh!”

There are eyes in front of me.
The eyes of something at its wits' end,
The eyes of a cornered beast,
The eyes that try to find a way to survive until the very last second.
The eyes of the Hydra.
From around the area of the forehead, something like a horn appears.

“OOOOOOOOOOooo!”

On reflex, I immediately thrust my left hand into the eye.
Together with a 'guchari' sound, a burning sensation transmits up my arm.
The Hydra's eyelids closes.
The eyelids, wrapped in scales, closes shut, like a guillotine.

Simultaneously, I fired off a [Rock Cannonball].

As the Hydra's eyelids shut, the Hydra's head burst apart.
At the same time, I feel it jerk upwards.

After the jerk, I hear a 'pop-crack' sound resound in my head.

“R, Roxyyyyyy!!”

I endure the pain and cry out, the name of my most reliable Shisho,

“Oh, small cinder blessed with greatness, burn brilliantly, [Flamethrower]!”

Though her voice was small, it reaches my ears.

Roxy scorches the last neck until black, and it begins falling.

The massive body of the Hydra makes a thunderous noise as it performs its death throes.

A cloud of dust shoots up from the headless corpse; it falls to the ground in spasms of fear.

From the body of the Hydra, I could feel the life force disappear.

It cannot perform regeneration anymore.

The last head was vulnerable.

“Haa... Haa...”

Defeated,

It was defeated.

“We did it... ttu!”

In that moment, I recognized an acute pain in my left hand.

When I look, I am aghast.

“Uuuu...”

I have no left hand.

I see the skin and muscles cut by the eyelid’s scales, and I see the bones and muscles crushed with the closing eyelid.

And at the last moment, when it jerked up, the Hydra tore my hand off.

Blood makes a 'wheezing' sound as it spurts out of the artery.

"Hand, my left hand..."

Eyes,

In the eye of the Hydra, there is my left hand.

As soon as I thought of it, I see the main head,

Roxy, having used the fire magic with all of her might, carbonized the main head down to the base of its neck.

The moment I see it, I realize it.

There is nothing remaining of my hand.

Even if I search for it, I will probably never find it.

And even while searching for it to rejoin it- all the while- I'm hemorrhaging blood.

Aaah, I have to use my healing magic quickly.

"Angel of miracles, please bestow the breath of heaven which is the pulse of life,

Receiving it from the sky and the sun, Honorable God, who despises the crimson flow,

Spread your white wings, and fly down to the sea of light.

Let where you reach, the crimson not expel,

[Shine Healing]."

I chant the Advanced rank healing magic.

I know that with this advanced rank healing, it cannot regenerate a lost limb.

However, I still use it.

Pink skin swells around the severed part, and the outflow of blood stops.

Incidentally, the part of my face bruised from the time Paul kicked me seems to heal, as well.

“Fuu... Haa...”

My breath is ragged.

Calm down... Calm down.

My left hand is lost.

However, the Hydra was a considerably terrible enemy.

Arguably, it was a cheap victory if it only cost my left hand.

If at the last moment, if Paul hadn't helped me, I would have died.

“...You saved my life, Dad.”

I turn around, searching for Paul's whereabouts.

There was no answer.

Everyone stays silent.

Elinalise stands still.

Talhand is silent.

Roxy covers her mouth.

Gisu runs from the back of the room, pale in the face.

There is no answer from Paul.

“...Dad?”

Everyone glances ahead,

To the place Paul had fallen.

So, he collapsed.

I turn and face towards him.

However,

It wasn't simply a collapse.

He is unconscious.

His eyes are vacant.

And then,

I see there was no lower half to his body.

“...Ah?”

I can't comprehend my sight.

“Eh?”

Aa, I hate it.

What had happened? I know.

That's right.

I see it.

Paul sent me flying with a kick,

Because the main head reached the place where I was.

That's why Paul kicked me back.

For the sake of throwing me out of the way, he kicked; and then he was alone.

So he had to kick with all of his might.

I wasn't a child anymore.

In order to kick with all of his might, in such a way, he must've pushed out from his waist.

Paul, as a swordsman in this world, avoided step-back recoil from the kick he gave me.

He is a physically strong swordsman, and is able to wear touki.

In other words, he is capable of sending me flying with a kick, and staying in position.

Another way of putting it: he was blocking.

I don't want to come to the realization of that word.

Blocking.

“A, why?”

The moment I say that, Paul's eyes begin to stir.

Paul's eyes meet my own.

“ ... ”

Paul says nothing.

But he moves his mouth a little, expressing relief.

Having felt relieved, he exhales.

There is just a feeble vomiting of blood.

And his eyes lose their light.



Paul had died.

CHAPTER 9

PARENT

1

The moment the Hydra breathed its last, the crystal prison shattered.

Zenith was alive.

Though unconscious, she was breathing.

Scattered about the surrounding area were dozens of huge magic crystals and a large quantity of magic stones that comprised the Hydra's scaly armor.

Further inside the room, a large amount of magic items had been dropped.

If I sold those, I would become filthy rich.

However, no one gleefully went to pick the treasure up.

I surprised myself, at how detached I was completing the work.

There was a surreal feeling, like being in a dream.

I would reply if asked, but my thoughts were empty.

There was another me who seemed to be answering involuntarily.

I cremated the remains of Paul in that place.

Even though there were various reasons, I wanted to take the corpse back home with me.

But regarding the conduct of how to handle the dead inside a labyrinth, I did as I was told.

Only three items remained to be passed on as family heirlooms.

Paul's thin metal breastplate.

His tantou^[39], which could inflict heavy damage on the toughest of opponents.

And lastly, Paul's beloved sword, which he always carried around.

Under the care of my Fire Magic, Paul became a pile of bones in the blink of an eye.

Elinalise said that if I buried it now how it is, there was a chance Paul's bones could resurrect into a skeleton, and I agreed.

That being the situation, I broke off a single bone that I may take home with me.

I made a small vessel out of soil, and placed the bone I broke off inside of it.

“...”

There was a mysterious feeling.

My chest clenched up very tightly, and I did not understand the meaning of this feeling.

“Let's go back.”

On the return trip, I was worthless.

My surefooted steps were unstable now.

Although I used magic to defeat enemies, if Roxy was not near my side, I would have more than likely stepped on a trap.

Whenever I made a mistake, no one scolded me.

Elinalise, Roxy, Talhand, and Gisu all said nothing.

There were not even the comfortable words of complaint.

Everyone was at a loss for words.

We escaped from the labyrinth after the third day.

Everyone took turns helping to carry Zenith for this long time.

Even though there were moments of intense combat in the labyrinth, Zenith never woke.

Though I was anxious, however, since she was still drawing breath I was eventually persuaded that she was alive.

What we said to the three who waited for us back in town, I don't remember.

Certainly, Elinalise and Gisu gave a detailed explanation.

I was unable to say anything.

What could I say? There was nothing.

Shera broke down crying, and Vera fell to her knees in shock.

Even seeing such a scene, I was incapable of saying anything.

Lilia's reaction was different.

She had an expressionless face.

Concealing her own facial expression, she looked at me, and brought me into her tight embrace.

She conveyed so many feelings to me all at once: 'You've been through a lot, haven't you?' 'Thank you for all your hard work,' 'You can leave the rest to me,' 'Please, rest for a while.'

I, who had such a feeling of emptiness, had to put forth some effort to nod in agreement.

When I came back to the hotel, I took off my robe.

Looking around the shoulder area of the robe, I see a deep tear.

I should repair it with some sewing.

Though I thought that, I tossed the robe at some corner of the room.

Aqua Heartia, the tool bag, I tossed everything on top of the robe...

I collapsed in a heap onto the bed.

2

That evening I had a dream.

In that dream, I was in my previous form.

The form of the slovenly and subservient NEET.

However, Hitogami did not come out.

There was no white-colored room either.

It was just a memory of my previous life.

That's right, just a dream about my previous life.

I don't recall exactly when it was.

But I remembered a scene of that time.

In my previous live, at my house, even down to how my living room looked.

And then, the dream shifted to my previous life's parents talking about me in the living room.

Because it was just a scene in a dream, I didn't hear any voices.

However strangely, it was clear to me that I was the point of the discussion.

Were my parents at that time worried about me?

I didn't even know the cause of my parent's death.

Even though the both of them died at the same time, I wasn't even sick about it.

Was it an accident? Or, perhaps it was suicide?

Just before the moment of their death, I wonder what they thought of me.

How could I think of my own self as anything other than that of a shameless NEET?

Surely, there would have been an irritated feeling.

Yeah, or at least thoughts about how I was deplorable.

But, the truth is, I just don't know.

Sometimes, I saw my mother's face.

Or father whom, after a certain point tired of dealing with me, stopped saying anything at all.

At the time of their death, did they think about me for even an instant?

And then, there was me. Me, who didn't even attend their funeral. What was I even thinking?

To not even gather the bones of my parents; what on earth was I thinking?

Why? Why did I not even go to their funeral?

I was scared.

Even though my parents died, I could not lay my eyes upon them and grieve.

Other's turned eyes of contempt and hostility towards this shitty NEET.

Of course that wasn't all it was.

I was in no way an admirable person.

Actually, at that time, I didn't think the death of my parents to be a sad thing at all.

I don't think I was sad, because I didn't think my parents had any love for me.

The feeling of, [This is bad, what am I going to do now?] was stronger than the feelings of caring about the death of my parents.

From this point, I wasn't even able to stomach looking at myself.

I do not intend to justify my actions; it was just something that I did.

This situation of losing my last refuge of escapism put me between a rock and a hard place; this situation suddenly threw me unprepared into the depths of reality.

Everyone wants to have one or two places to escape himself or herself.

Though I have regrets, I however, am not being blamed.

But, at the very least,

I should have at least gone to the funeral.

I just cannot understand what was in my thoughts at that time.

I should have at least seen the last face of my parents.

I should have at least picked up their bones.

Was the last face of Paul not worth worrying about?

It wasn't a laughing face.

It wasn't even a face that seemed satisfied.

However, clinging to the corners of the mouth was a hint of a relieved smile.

What were your last words going to be?

What kind of faces did my previous parents express when they died?

Why? Why didn't I see it?

Oh, how much I wanted to return and see their faces.

3

The next day.

Waking up was the worst.

The feeling of wanting to do nothing exerted its influence over my whole body.

However, somehow I cheated it, and got out of bed.

I went to the next room, to Lilia and Zenith.

When Lilia sees me, she gives me a look of astonishment.

“Rudeus-sama, are you feeling all right now?”

“...Sort of, for the time being. Wouldn't it be troublesome if I kept resting?”

“It's okay even if Rudeus-sama needs to rest a bit longer, no one would mind it at all.”

Listening to Lilia's advice, I went to the bedroom where I followed an urge to keep resting.

However, more than that, there was an urge to do something, the feeling I had to keep moving forward.

“Please allow me to remain here.”

“...Is that how it is? Understood, please, have a seat then.”

In the end, I decided to examine Zenith's state, with the company of Lilia.

How many days has Zenith been asleep for now?

It was three days out of the labyrinth, one day to Lapan, and so on the fourth day, she has still not awoken?

No matter how many times I look at her, it seems to me that she is just asleep.

Even though she's been asleep for however many days, I don't get the sense that she's lost any weight.

Rather, she's actually very healthy looking.

The same way the Zenith in my memory looked.

Nor, does it seem that she's aged even a little more.

Her hands and cheeks felt warm to the touch, and when I put my ear near her mouth, I heard her breathing.

It's just she hasn't woken up.

Maybe she'll be this way for a while.

If she stays like this, won't she eventually weaken and die?

Such a thought instantly crossed my mind.

However, I don't dare speak it aloud.

There are things I don't need to say, and there are things I just shouldn't.

Lilia and I just quietly watched over Zenith.

Occasionally, Vera or Shera would come and talk.

However, what they talked about didn't remain in my memory.

I ate a meal with Lilia.

I wasn't feeling very hungry, and the food managed to stick to my throat.

Though I tried to wash it down with water, I nearly vomited it out anyway.

It wasn't until midday that there was any kind of change in the condition of Zenith.

Lilia watching with me saw Zenith slowly opening her eyelids with a small groan,

“Mmn...”

In that room were Lilia, Vera, and I.

Vera immediately ran off to call the others.

I attentively watched over her as she tried to straighten her body upright.

Normally, when someone is asleep for a number of days, it's difficult to sit up. However, Zenith was able to sit up almost entirely on her own, with a little help from Lilia.

“Good Morning, Madam.”

Lilia's smile blooms when she spoke to Zenith.

Zenith after rising up looked at Lilia with a particularly dim face.

“...Mm?”

Zenith's voice.

It was a familiar voice to me.

If I thought about it, when I was born into this world, I had heard her voice first.

A voice that emits a feeling of relief.

I felt relieved.

Paul had died.

However, we managed to save the person whom Paul wanted to rescue.

She was safely alive.

We accomplished Paul's will.

When Zenith hears that Paul has died, she will begin to mourn.

And, most likely, cry.

However, between Lilia, Zenith, and I, we can at least share the grief three-ways.

“Mother...”

It seems like now is not the best time to say it.

When she is able to take it easy and understand the present situation a bit better.

It'll be fine after that.

It's best to take things slowly and sequentially.

I don't think it would be wise at all to push the harsh reality on her so suddenly.

First, meeting Zenith after all this time, shouldn't it be a pleasant thing?

“...?”

Zenith had a look of mild confusion.

With an action, she pushed my chest away.

She had forgotten me.

It can't be helped.

It's the same as it was with Roxy.

Because time has passed, my face has changed.

It might be a shock now, but it'll become a funny story later.

“Madam, this here is Rudeus. It's been nearly ten years since you saw him last.”

“...”

Zenith stares at me absent-mindedly.

And then moves her stare to Lilia.

In my mother's eyes they reflect the face of Lilia.

“...?”

And then she returned to looking confused again.

The eyes of Lilia open wide.

Something strange is going on.

Definitely strange.

For a while now, Zenith's face was expressionless.

It's peculiar that she managed to get up after so long.

But, perhaps something else is the matter?

I don't have the words for it.

She can only groan.

And the current gesture,

A gesture that makes it seem like she has forgotten Lilia.

I can understand if it's just me, but how can she possibly forget the existence of Lilia?

Lilia grew a little older, sure.

But, not so much that there was a drastic change.

Even her hairstyle and clothes are the same as always.

“...Ae... A—...”

Her voice was poor.

Her eyes were dim.

Her words were lost.

We can only observe her reaction.

“Madam... could it possibly be...?”

Lilia seemed to notice it too.

[Could it possibly be?]

We understood the meanings of those words there.

It's a joke right, that she lost her mind?

Lilia and I talked about this many times.

“...”

We reached a conclusion immediately.

Though Zenith reacts to our voices.
However, she cannot reply with words.
That it's possible she can't understand what we are saying.

“Rudeus-sama... the madam... is lost.”

Zenith lost everything.
Her memories, knowledge, and wisdom.
All three things that is vital to form a person.

She's an invalid.

She's not capable of remembering Paul.
My mother doesn't even remember Lilia or I.
Who? How? What happened that it became like this?
To be not able to remember anything,

In other words, she cannot grieve the death of Paul.
We cannot share the grief with Zenith,

Such a fact is now made clear.

“Ah...”

My heart is broken.

4

Since then, I wonder how many days have passed.

My sense of time has become vague.
Waking, sleeping.
Sleeping, waking.

I repeated the motions many times.

When I slept, my dreams kept playing back the moments of Paul's death.

Paul slashes the Hydra.

The Hydra's neck swings around.

Paul pushes me away to evade the attack.

Then Paul moves and the Hydra moves.

I am unable to move.

Paul kicks me and sends me flying out of the way. The head of the Hydra falls in front of me.

Then, I jump to my feet.

I take a moment to reaffirm that I'm not in a dream, and then drop myself back into the bed.

I did not have the energy to stand.

Only enough energy to think; my thoughts are only on Paul.

Paul.

That guy.

He was by no means a praiseworthy guy at all.

He was a scumbag philanderer, and an egotistical show-off.

He was weak to adversity, and quick to escape to the bottle.

Surely, as material for a father, he would be disqualified.

But... I loved him.

But, it was a different kind of love.

The love of Paul was very different.

The Paul I came to know was more like a “partner-in-crime.”

While my mental age was superior, Paul's physical age was superior.

Even if you accounted for all the knowledge of my previous life, because I was a shut-in for at least ten years of that life, Paul probably had the upper hand in life experience.

But that doesn't matter.

Age doesn't matter.

When I talked with Paul, I got the strong feeling he and I were the same type of man.

I was never able to see him as a "father."

When I was a child, I never really thought much of him.

But,

Paul took the time to raise me properly, as his child.

This child, born from the contents of a deplorable thirty year old,

And who, no matter how others observed him, he exhibited strange behavior.

Paul saw me as family, and never looked away in shame.

There were certain parts that father and son couldn't meet.

But even then, this guy saw me without fail, as his relation.

There was never a time when he treated me like an outsider.

To the very end, I was his son.

He saw me only as his [son], the superman.

We were completely backwards.

But that guy had been my father the entire way.

And he continued being a father, even while he had to move around and balance so many things.

And then, he protected me until the very end.

He, the father, protected me, the son.

He risked it all, to save me.

Because it was the most natural act he could do as a father.

And because of that, he died.

It's a strange story.

Me, who isn't a child,
Paul, who was the father,

Paul, who had two real children,
Unlike my fake self, I mean, authentic, genuine children.

Unlike my fake self, who had his soul from another world put in a male body, he had
two docile, cute daughters.

Norn and Aisha.

Now, I will have to be the one to protect them.

Don't you have two wives as well?

Zenith, who you searched hard for over so many years and finally found,
And Lilia, who supported you all that time until you could find her.

Two wives and two daughters.

Four people in total.

How could you leave these four people behind, Paul?

Weren't they the most important people to you?

...for Paul, perhaps I might have been one of those as well.

Two wives, two daughters, and his only son.

All five of us are equally important to him.

Although, I never watched him in the capacity of a father,
That guy's thoughts always cherished me.

AAH! SHIT! WHY THE FU- ARGH!

Paul.

Please, please forgive me...

How many times did you say it?

[Rudi, I'll try and treat you like a man.]

Did you treat me as a man?

I got married, I bought a house, I took in my sisters, and I felt like I became properly independent.

I came to help you. I even took an active role in the labyrinth party.

It was my intention to remain independent.

Did you have any trouble seeing it?

And at the end, helping me, even at the cost of your own life. What did you want to tell me with your last words?

Yet, why?

Damn it, why...

Why did you still protect me, who became independent?

When I have to go back to Norn and Aisha, how do I tell them about you?

With the current state of things, how should I explain it to them?

To the extent of Zenith, what should I do for her?

And from this point ahead, how should I continue?

Can you teach me, Paul?

Truthfully, what did you think about at the end?

Shit.

Did you expect to die?

Ahh, goddamn it!

Why did I have to let you die, Paul, just when you were finally going to be free of all your worries.

...If only he lived, no one else would have to be troubled in the end.

[Hah, this is no good, isn't it?]

Sadness overflowed.

My tears endlessly spill out.

During my life... no, my previous life, when my mother and father died, I never truly wept.

I didn't even think it was a sad thing.

Yet, when Paul died, the tears came.

It's sad.

It's hard to believe.

The one guy who wasn't supposed to disappear had disappeared.

Paul was my father.

He was my father.

Even if I never thought of him as a father,

As much as the ones of my previous life, he was my parent.

5

I think and think,

I cry and cry,

I am so exhausted.

[...I don't want to do anything.]

With my lethargy, I have not been able to move from this one room.

Even if I know there are things that still need to be done, I cannot muster the energy.

I don't have enough power to leave the room even.

I sleep, I wake, and I sit.

Days wasted with barely changing my body posture.

Lilia and Elinalise took the time to come check up on me.

They talked about something with me.

However, I do not remember what it was.

It felt like I was suddenly listening to an unknown language, and I was unable to understand the words that they spoke.

Even if I understood the meaning of the words, it's still just as likely that I wouldn't have been able to give a proper reply.

I did not have the words.

I did not have the words, even for them.

Supposing,

Suppose for a moment that I, for example, could have handled a sword better in combat.

Then, I also could have helped in severing the neck of the Hydra.

Would Paul really have had to die then?

Paul and I would slice the heads off, and then Roxy and I would seal it with flames.

If I had been able to decapitate heads too, we could have defeated it far more easily than what actually happened.

Even if I could have at least worn touki.

Or, if I could have just dodged out of the way a bit faster.

By evading the attack of the Hydra, Paul wouldn't have had to protect me.

Or,

If I walloped Paul hard at that time, and made us return at once.

When we returned, we could have calmly held a strategy meeting.

We may have come up with a good plan for how to handle it.

Not the impulsive way we barely managed, but a really good idea.

If the plan was different, if it was just even a little different...

However, it's too late.

Paul has died.

I can no longer see the dead face of my parent.

Even if I come up with anything now, it is already far too late.

CHAPTER 10

FACING FORWARD

1

A certain tavern,
four people were sitting at a table.
Amongst the hustling and bustling inside the bar, only that place was gloomy.
All four of them had a dark expression.

“...So Paul died, huh.”

A woman with luxurious blonde hair and long ears.
Elinalize was whispering to herself.

“Yeah, he died.”

A man from the Magic Race that had the face of a monkey.
Gisu said that as he looked at the mug he was holding.

“He died protecting his son. That's his true wish.”

A male dwarf that had a burly beard.
Talhand replied without care.
However, he had no tension in his voice.

Even though he drank enough of his favorite drink to become wasted, there was no signs of him being drunk.

“With Zenith like this too, Paul wouldn't have been cheerful.”

At Gisu's words, Talhand went silent and focused on his drink.

Zenith had become a cripple, to which they had received quite a shock.

As people that knew Zenith to be someone bright and lively, the shock was even bigger to them.

Nevertheless, they were adventurers.

They were familiar with death.

Even if Zenith had died, they would have tolerated and accepted that fact.

“Well, she survived. Perhaps, there may be a chance to heal her.”

Talhand said that without any sense of confidence.

There have sometimes been tales of someone becoming a cripple due to a monster's poison.

However, there were no tales about them being healed.

If the neck was cut off, or if the head was smashed,

Even God-class healing magic would not be able to heal that.

“Even if she can walk, or talk, her memories won't return.”

Elinalize said that as if giving up on that idea.

“What, Elinalize. It seems you know a lot about this.”

“...That's just the way it is.”

Elinalize didn't explain it in detail.

She has lived much longer than Talhand or Gisu.

She said that as if she had seen cases similar to this one.

That's why she knows.

However, as if to feel that some form of hope wasn't gone, Talhand did not press any further.

“...So, the problem now, is that son of his.”

Talhand spoke.

“Yeah...”

Hearing that, his voice went up with a sigh.

Rudeus Greyrat.

Paul's son, although it has been close to a week, had not stepped out of his room.

“That guy, he's got no energy, and doesn't wanna do anything.”

“It's like he's a cripple himself.”

Elinalize and Gisu said in agreement.

Rudeus had become a shell of his former self.

Even when calling out to him, he did not answer.

With hollow eyes, he said [Oh] and merely nodded.

“Rudi was quite attached to Paul.”

The girl from the Magic Race with blue hair.

Roxy Migurdia, who had been silent up to now, whispered softly.

What she saw in her mind was a very young Rudeus who was learning swordsmanship from Paul.

Rudeus continued to swing his sword with a disappointed face no matter how many times Paul beat him down.

It was a boy that had a bundle of talent.

For someone that hadn't spent such time with that family, it was a dazzling scenery to the point of feeling envious.

“Well, I can understand Senpai's feelings. But, it'll be bad at this rate.”

“That's right.”

Rudeus has not taken a single bite since that day.

Even though he was encouraged to eat, he nodded with an [Oh], and didn't eat at all. At the minimum, though he was drinking water, it was clear as day he was becoming increasingly haggard.

His eyes were sunk, his cheeks hollowed, one would think that he looked like death.

If he was left alone like this, he'll really die.

Everybody here thought that.

“...We must cheer him up again somehow.”

At Roxy's words, Gisu glanced at Elinalize.

“Hey you, don't you do [That] all the time in times like these?”

“I can't do that.”

Elinalize replied immediately.

The one who didn't understand [That] was Roxy.

“What can't be done?”

“ ... ”

Gisu and Talhand looked at each other, then shut themselves up.

Roxy knit her eyebrows in puzzlement.

“Elinalize, do you have some kind of plan?”

“...I do not.”

Elinalize answered that like she wanted to get something over with.

“Well, anyway.”

Gisu was scratching his cheek.

Talhand was drinking his beer like it was something interesting.

“Well, anyway. In times like this, it's best to forget by going all out to play.”

“Play?”

“Men are self-interested creatures. By drinking beer, sleeping with girls, and feeling good, they immediately feel the joy of living, and would feel better again.”

“Ah.....! Ahh, I see.”

Even Roxy can understand what was being said.

She could understand what Elinalize, who was attracted to men, would do.

“I, I see. M-me, men are like that! I see! I see...”

Roxy was looking down with a red face.

When a man feels down, he makes love to a woman.

It feels like she had heard something like this before.

Especially for mercenaries, before and after the battle, would buy a girl to distract their fears.

There were even many adventurers who would head to brothels immediately after a near-death experience on a quest.

However, thinking of Rudeus and Elinalize getting together, Roxy was left with depression in her heart.

“Elinalize. Didn't you say this in the past? That you were good at comforting heartbroken men.”

“I did say that.”

Roxy was thinking.

Certainly, Elinalize was good at that.

She has numerous relationships with men on a routine basis, and have heard that she has also quite the technique.

With someone as experienced as her, it was possible to make Rudeus get back on his feet.

Though it was mortifying, it's something that can't be helped.

“That's rare. If it was the regular you, you wouldn't have left Senpai alone right now.”

She couldn't bear looking at Rudeus right now.

Even Elinalize wanted to help and comfort him.

However, she understood.

If she used Rudeus's grief as a reason to make love to him here, what will they do when they return?

Betraying Clif, betraying Sylphy.

Rudeus would not take that calmly.

“Even I have partners that I can't do.”

“Why is it that you can't do it with Rudi?”

Roxy glares at Elinalize.

“Even though Rudi is suffering so much...”

“Well...”

Elinalize started to speak, then realized.

That Roxy didn't know.

“Because Rudeus's wife is my granddaughter.”

“...Eh!?”

Roxy lost her grip on her mug.

The mug fell on the table with a clank.

While spilling its contents, the mug rolled on the table, fell on the ground, and made a dry sound.

“Eh, Rudi, is he married?”

“Yeah. He's married. He's about to have a child.”

“I, I see... w, well it's obvious isn't it, Rudi being of age and all...”

Roxy was unable to hide her trembling, and picked up the mug on the floor.

Then, wanting to drink what's inside, she realized it spilled, then ordered another one.

“Ah, please give me the strongest one in the house.”

Roxy folded her arms with her eyes spinning.

Marriage.

Of course Rudeus would get married, yeah.

It's something normal.

Yeah.

She kept talking to herself like that.

Then, remembering her own actions in the labyrinth, she grit her teeth.

She thought that Rudi was free and took the initiative.

She had wanted to make a good impression, but she was not treated as an obstacle because she was merely an acquaintance in the end.

It must have been laughable and ridiculous, being right beside him.

She wanted to scream, [Why didn't anybody tell me this?!]

But, she kept the complaint to the back of her throat.

Right now she wasn't worrying about herself.

“B, But, even though he's married, this is an emergency, surely even once would be fine?”

Roxy did not even understand what she herself was saying.

Just that she felt that she wanted Rudeus to get better again.

“...Maybe that is so, but I cannot do it.”

Elinalize said that with some frustration.

Even seeing her frustrated face, Roxy could not understand her feelings.

“...Here you go.”

“Ah, thanks.”

There was the drink that she had ordered.

Roxy stirred the mug, then drank it all in one go.

A burning sensation spread in her bone-dried throat.

It was frighteningly tasty, showing that the body really wanted that alcohol.

“Besides, for me to Rudeus...”

Elinalize closed her mouth there.

“Well, even if I can't do it, wouldn't it be fine if Gisu brings him to a brothel around here?”

“I wonder. Making love to someone he doesn't know, I doubt Rudeus would get better with that.”

“Well, what that child really needs, is someone reliable to lean on.”

“Then, Lilia?”

“Like I said...”

“Yeah, I get it, don't be so angry.”

Elinalize's heart was complex.

She doesn't want to interfere with Sylphy's marriage.

However, she wants to help Rudeus.

If she makes love to Rudeus, she may be able to cheer him up again.

She was confident in that.

However, she felt certain that is a mistake, and that it would be something that cannot

be undone.

If it was the usual, she would play the part of the villain.

Up till now, she had done so many times.

However, when she felt that she did not want to betray Cliff here, she could no longer do it.

“ ... ”

Then, silence followed.

Only the quiet sound of drinking continued.

There was nobody that called out to this uneven group of four.

Only over there was it as quiet as the night.

“In any case, Zenith had become like that.

I want Senpai to hurry and get back on his feet, then we can say good-bye to this town.”

With Gisu's words, the remaining three sighed.

“You're right...”

They were all tired.

It's been six years.

Six long years.

Since the Teleportation Incident, six years have passed.

It was definitely not a short period of time.

Heading from the Central Continent towards the Magic Continent, then crossing from the Magic Continent to the Begaritto Continent.

And, finally.

Searching in the Teleportation Labyrinth.

There were tough and painful times.

However, all of it was something one could look back and laugh at.

Certainly, the Teleportation Incident was an unfortunate event.

But, for them, it wasn't full of just misfortune.

The party that had split up gathered up little by little.

Elinalize and Talhand partied up once again.

Gisu moved for the sake of Paul.

Paul and Talhand got along again.

And, ultimately, Paul and Elinalize fought side by side once more.

Thinking that these things would never happen again, with Paul as their center, they got together again.

After rescuing Zenith, they would locate Ghyslaine, and everybody would drink together.

That is what everybody had thought.

However, Paul died.

With just that, they felt a sense of weariness that can't be described.

Like anything and everything had been ruined.

Even though they spent so much time building up to that.

The sense of weariness in that all had been trampled in the very end.

It wasn't just Rudeus who had become lethargic.

"Well, he's Rudeus, the son of Paul and Zenith. He may be depressed right now, but he'll eventually come around on his own."

"...I hope you're right."

"..."

At Talhand's words, two people nodded vaguely.

They knew Rudeus's weakness.

Nevertheless, he's already 16, no longer a child.
Even though it has been painful, his heart is that of a splendid adult.
Death visits everybody, and it is something adventurers are familiar with.
Parents will someday die.
Anybody will overcome that.
That's why, even Rudeus will eventually do so too.

“ ... ”

The only person that wasn't nodding was Roxy.
She had remembered.
What happened a long time ago.

2

--- Rudeus's POV---

When I looked out the window, it was evening.
I sat on the bed absent-mindedly.
How many days have passed since then?
It doesn't really matter.
No matter how many days it has been.

<Knock, knock>

Suddenly, there was a knock on the doorway.

“Rudi, may I?”

Looking up, Roxy was standing there.
Guess I left the door open.

“...Sensei.”

It felt like it's been forever since I spoke.

Though my voice was so hoarse that I didn't know if Roxy heard it or not.

Roxy walked briskly towards me.

It felt strange.

I wonder why.

Ahh, I see, she doesn't have her robe on today.

She was wearing a very thin top and bottom clothing.

How unusual.

"Excuse me."

Saying that with a firm tone, Roxy sat next to me.

For a while, we sat in silence for a few seconds.

As if choosing her words, Roxy whispered.

"For a change of pace, would you like to come out with me?"

"...?"

"Yeah, there are a lot of magical items that you can't find on any other continents. If we look around here, it could turn out to be quite fun, you know?"

"No..."

I wasn't in the mood.

"I, I see."

"Sorry."

Roxy's invitation.

I understand she was trying to cheer me up.

Normally, I'd follow her like a dog.

However, I don't feel like it right now.

“ ... ”

“ ”

Again, silence filled the room.

Again, as if choosing her words, Roxy whispered.

“...It's regrettable what happened to Paul and Zenith.”

Regrettable.

Is it fine to settle this with just the word regrettable?

Well, for Roxy, it's merely someone else's business.

“I also remember the time when the five of us lived in Buina Village quite well.

To me, it may have been the happiest time of my life.”

“ ... ”

Roxy said that quietly, and held my hand.

Roxy's hand was hot.

“When I was an adventurer, it wasn't rare for people close to me to die. I feel your pain, because I also experienced it.”

“...Please don't lie.”

I had met Roxy's parents before.

Those two were healthy.

I hadn't heard them talk about having any other children.

“Aren't your father and mother well?”

“Let's see, though the last time I met them was a few years ago, both my parents are fine. They could live for another hundred years.”

“Then, you don't understand!”

I felt someone rising up from the bottom of my heart, and I shook off Roxy's hand.

"Please don't say such thoughtless things!"

I yelled in a loud voice.

As I yelled, I felt my remaining amount of power come out of my body.

Even while Roxy looked taken aback, she whispered with a serious expression.

"The one who died, was when I was just starting out as an adventurer. He had partied with me, and taught me the basics of adventuring. Though he wasn't my parent, I considered him as an older brother."

"..."

"He died while covering for me."

"..."

"I was also in distress."

"..."

"That's why, I can at least understand a fragment of your feelings."

Then, you don't understand after all.

You don't know my feelings being torn between my past self who reincarnated and the current situation.

Honestly, I don't think I can get over this.

Even if I know what Roxy is thinking that can make me better again, I don't have the will to follow it through.

"When I lived at Buina Village, I was truly happy.

When I thought of going to the kingdom of Asura to work I couldn't find any jobs, so then when I went to the countryside, and thought of planning to start as a teacher, Rudi was overflowing with talent, even Paul and Zenith treated me warmly.

They may have been the ones that taught me the actual warmth of a family."

Saying that, Roxy looked at my eyes.

Her eyes were clear.

“To me, it was a second family.”

Roxy got up from the bed as she said that.

She went behind me, and when she knelt, she hugged my head closely.

“Rudi. I will share your sorrow with you.”

I felt something soft at the back of my head.

I could hear Roxy's heartbeat thumping.

It was a relaxing sound.

I wonder why hearing this sound made me feel relieved.

I wonder why I felt everything will be okay.

The same goes for the smell.

Roxy's smell made me at peace.

In such a hard time, when I remember Roxy's smell, it mysteriously became my support.

I wonder why.

The answer was coming out of my throat.

But it didn't come.

“I am your Shisho. Although I am a small and inadequate Shisho, I have lived longer than you, and am sturdy. I don't mind if you wish to lean on me.”

I grabbed Roxy's hand in front of me.

It was a small hand.

But, it felt big.

Looking at this hand also made me feel at ease.



I wonder if I'll be more at ease if I was closer to her.

“Even if it's painful, if two people share it, it will become lighter.”

Roxy parted from me as she said that.

Instinctively, I pulled Roxy's hand towards me.

“Ah.”

Her small body easily fell on my lap.

Our eyes met directly.

Her slightly sleepy eyes were wet with tears.

Her face was bright red, and her mouth was shut tight.

I placed my hand on her back and drew her closer.

The sound of Roxy's heartbeat was getting faster.

It was warm.

“It, it's okay, you know?”

I wonder what's okay.

“W, when males are grieving, when they sleep with a woman, I heard they would feel refreshed.”

Who said that?

Ah, must be Elinalize.

What is Roxy saying at a time like this?

“Women are the same, they also want to forget painful things, and it's painful for me when Paul died. If Rudi is okay with it, I don't mind at all if you sleep with me.”

Roxy kept talking hurriedly.

“That's right. I want to forget about all this. But with a body that has no appeal... If you don't like it, you can go to a brothel you know?”

Roxy kept talking as if making excuses.

This person was a girl that I never ceased to respect.

If I did what I was told and slept with her, I wonder what it would be like.

“W, well, even though I look like this I'm very experienced, and I think I can do much better than the other little girls. We'll do this casually, just to wash away this bad mood, and just try it out for once...”

Roxy's incoherent words could not reach me.

I was in the mood.

Just hearing her heartbeat I felt so much more relaxed.

If I get closer to her, I wonder if I would feel even more comfortable?

I was thinking of excuses like that.

“Ah, well, if you're talking about someone who would be better, I don't mind bowing to Elinalize... ah!”

I pushed Roxy down on the bed.

Very violently.

It might be that I was venting out all my anger.

3

The next morning.

What I woke up to the first thing to was Roxy's sleeping face.

The innocent sleeping face of Roxy with her hair down.

At the same time, the thought [I did it now...] crossed my mind.

“Haa...”

I sighed.

What should I say to Sylphy...

“...”

My worries have increased by one.

But, for some reason, I felt like my vision became clear again.

As if all my worries had been a dream.

I still had some feelings of depression within me.

But this was not me at my most depressed.

It could not even be compared to yesterday.

I wonder why.

I wonder if it's because the act of creating life healed the sadness of losing it?

“Mn.”

Then, Roxy's eyes snapped open.

After she took a long hard look at me who was in front of her, she squirmed as if trying to hide her body under the blanket.

“Good morning, Rudi...”

Then, she murmured while facing away.

“Um, how was it?”

Asking me [How?], I won't lie.

I treated Roxy very violently.

Roxy being experienced was a flat-out lie.

Even so, she accepted everything, refusing to complain about the pain.

It's something I am grateful and apologetic for.

As someone who loves Sylphy, praising Roxy felt like a taboo.

To be frank, Roxy's body was small, and slightly did not match my size.

But, it would be a lie to say I didn't feel good.

Right now, I am certain I feel quite relaxed.

I do not have to lie and hurt Roxy's feelings.

“It felt great.”

Roxy's face quickly turned red.

“Thank you very mu... no, not that, I wanted to ask if you felt a little better.”

Oh, that.

I failed.

“Yeah.”

“Then, if you hug me in return, I'll be happy.”

“...Yeah.”

As I was told, I hugged Roxy.

Roxy's skin was soft, moist and a bit sticky.

She was sweating after all.

From her soft skin, I could hear Roxy's heartbeat.

It was a relaxing sound.

“Rudi's arms are quite burly. It's as if you weren't a magician at all.”

“...I've been training.”

Roxy said that while stroking my chest and arms.

With such a cute act, my love for Sylphy wavered just a bit.

I slowly pulled away from Roxy's body.

Then, I got up.

I felt like I wanted to ask her something.

“Roxy-sensei. May I ask something strange?”

“...What is it?”

She probably noticed the atmosphere around me.

Roxy also got up with a serious face, and sat in a kneeling position on top of the bed.

A naked Roxy sitting on top of the bed in kneeling position.

Because it was so erotic that it might be bad, I turned away my gaze.

Covering my bottom half with a blanket, I continued to talk.

“This is just a made-up story...”

With that introduction,

I began to talk.

A story of a certain man.

As a fiction to the end.

A man who secluded himself when bad things happened to him when he was young.

He was close to twenty years old, and lived like trash while leeching off of his parents.

However, one day, his parents had suddenly died.

That man not only did not go to the funeral, but on the contrary did the worst thing a human being can do.

Seeing that, his other family members beat him up and threw him out of the house.

The man had lost everything, but luck brought him to a new land, and he turned over a new leaf, and devoted himself to change for the better.

His lifestyle was going well, and he thought that he would be happy if things kept like this.

But, currently right now, because of a big failure, he let a person important to him die.

Because of that, that man remembered his parents' deaths.

That man only then had mourned his parents' deaths.

I told that kind of story.

The more I talked about this, it felt my heart was spewing out pus.

I wonder if I just wanted someone to hear this.

Was it something that easy, I wonder?

"..."

Roxy listened quietly.

Not cutting in with agreement, just silently listening.

"What do you think that man should do?"

"..."

Roxy remained silent.

She might not know how to respond when being told such a story all of a sudden.

There would be no way that she would believe that this was a story of my life.

She is a wise person, so she may think that there is a hidden meaning to it.

"...If it was me, I would go to my parents' graves. I don't think it's too late even now. The same with talking to the other family members."

"But, the graves and the family members are far away, and he can't easily go to them. He may also be unable to return. That man has another life, he made a family in the new land, and he cherishes them dearly."

"He can't go back?"

"Yes. In the first place, the possibility that he can't go back is quite high."

Roxy again became silent at that.

But, this time it was short.

“In that case, there's nothing to be done. Now, he should take care of the family that's in front of him.”

Roxy's words were awfully cliché.

They were words anybody could come up with and say.

It wasn't special or anything, just something that was obvious.

“Even Paul would have wished for you to do so, Rudi.”

Roxy said something obvious in a matter-of-fact way.

Self-flattering.

Commonplace words.

Words that she heard from somewhere.

“Please face the future. Everybody is waiting for you.”

But, my heart felt refreshed.

Yeah.

It was common.

The death of my parents in my previous life, and Paul's death as well.

This was something obvious.

There is no choice but to accept that and face forward.

I am living in this world.

And I will continue to live in this world.

Paul's death, and Zenith that became a cripple.

The anxiety of going back and telling that to my waiting family in the north.

The anxiety of not knowing what to do now.

It was a future full of anxiety.

But, I mustn't run away.

I have no choice but to solve what's in front of me right now.

Though I do not know specifically what I should do.

I have no choice but to solve them one by one.

Coming to this world, hadn't I already decided?

That in this world, I will live it to the fullest.

Then, I must not turn my eyes away.

No matter what kind of difficulties occur from now on, I will overcome them.

It's no good if I don't do at least that.

Yes, I've realized once again.

Though realizing that, it's not like the pain subsided.

However, I felt that I broke out of something.

“Sensei.”

“Yes.”

“Thank you very much.”

Again, Roxy has rescued me.

Even giving thanks would not be enough.

CHAPTER 11

RETURN HOME

1

Zenith.

I decided to talk to someone about her.

Once I calm down to think about it, I realize that her problems aren't mine alone.

I have someone I can discuss it with.

Because I still have a family member here.

"Sensei, I want to talk to Lilia about the future."

"Yes, that's for the best."

Roxy and I tidied ourselves and leave the room.

Right as we came out, we ran into Elinalise leaving her own room as well.

Her eyes widen when she saw me with Roxy.

"Roxy, you..."

"Rudi, sorry, I have some stuff to discuss with Elinalise. Please see Lilia on your own instead."

Stuff?

What could it be?

Well, if she said it like that, maybe it's better if I'm not present.

"I understand."

I left Roxy and headed toward Zenith's room.

I glanced back briefly before entering. Roxy and Elinalise went into their room as well.

“ .. ”

Anyways, I entered Zenith's room.

Zenith was sitting on her bed, with Lilia on a chair beside her.

The scene reminds me of a hospital room. I bit my lips.

“Lilia.”

“What's the matter, Rudeus-sama?”

Lilia was visibly fatigued from serving Zenith.

First things first, I need to know what she thinks.

“Sorry for making you take care of mother.”

“No, this is my job.”

“Oh.”

Job, is that it?

Even though no one is left to pay her?

“How's mother?”

I sneaked a peek at Zenith and noticed she has been staring at me the entire time.

But, she does nothing, said nothing.

Yet she still stares at me.

“Well, even though she has no memory, miraculously her body is healthy. She has stamina and no strange complications. Stuff like eating and changing clothing, she can do it on her own after being taught once.”

“Is that so.”

She's not a complete invalid then.

The only thing she lost was her memory.

“According to Shera-sama's diagnosis, it's a symptom of being trapped by magic crystal and overwhelmed by magic.”

“Can it be cured?”

“According to Elinalise-sama, probably not.”

According to Elinalise?

Is she familiar with these types of situations?

Still, I think it's too early to give up.

At least, there's no good doctors around here to examine her.

“I will take good care of madam. Master is no longer here, so I'll take care of her from now on.”

“I'll do everything I can as well...”

After I said so, Lilia replies immediately,

“There's no need for that.”

It's like she's pushing me away.

“Eh...”

A voice of shock came out of my mouth, but at the same time I realized that it wasn't so unreasonable.

Dad died, Mom is in trouble, yet I couldn't do anything.

Even if Lilia hates me, it isn't unreasonable.

But Lilia continues,

“Rudeus-sama, forgive my transgressions, but what I'll say will be impolite.”

“What is it?”

“I think Rudeus-sama has things you'll have to do.”

“-- My own things?”

“Master said so as well.”

I don't think Paul would said something like that.
That guy is too self-centered for that.

“Serving madam is my purpose. It's why I'm here.”

Lilia is tired.

Very, very tired.

Yet, also tough.

She already left Paul's death behind her and took the next step.

I need to learn from her too.

“Lilia, there's something I want to ask you, but it might anger you.”

“...I won't be.”

“What are the things I must do?”

Even though this is the question I should figure out myself, but I asked anyways.

Lilia stared at me in shock.

Even for someone as thick as me, I have some idea.

But I really want to hear it from someone else.

“In my opinion, first you need to tell Norn-sama about Master's death.”

Yes.

It's time to head home--

2

Next day.

I gathered everyone together and declared that we should leave the city.

Almost like I am now the leader, but everyone confirmed my decision.

Is it because they consider me as Paul's replacement?

In that case, then I will play that role.

First I want to discuss our route home.

To avoid talking about the Teleportation Magic Circle, I explained that we have some special method of travel.

Also, I forewarned them not to let the word out about this.

“But, Gisu seems like the type that would leak once he's drunk.”

“Ah, well, even in that case I won't fess up Senpai's name. Don't worry.”

That guy doesn't know how to shut up.

I won't tell them the exact coordinates.

Maybe I should make them wear blindfolds before entering the ruins.

Oh, that's a good idea.

Let's do that, blindfolds.

“Travel should be fine, but Senpai, are you really okay now.”

Gisu seems still worried about me.

A frown on his monkey face, he spies at me.

“Can you see anything wrong?”

“Well, no... Ah, a lot better than before.”

“Then it's fine.”

To be honest, I'm not perfectly fine.

But thanks to Roxy, I crawled out of the abyss.

But, how do we deal with the trip home?

“Lilia, how's mother doing? A month and half in the desert, can she handle that kind of travel?”

“I'm not sure, but I'll take the responsibility of taking care of her.”

“...Please do.”

Lilia accepts the responsibility earnestly.

I should be able to help too.

As long as she has stamina for it, we can take it slowly.

“Then should we buy a carriage of some kind?”

“But we'll have to throw it away midway?”

“Not a big deal. Money is no longer a problem.”

Gisu and others seem to have returned to the Labyrinth while I was feeling sorry for myself and came back with all the treasures from the boss room.

Many adventurers fell prey to the Labyrinth in its long history.

Magical items were plentiful there.

Moreover, they even looted the scales off the Hydra, or rather, those magic stones that covered its skin.

Those are magic stones that can absorb magical energy.

According to them, selling these can bring in an enormous amount of wealth.

“We'll carry everything we can to sell at Asura Empire.”

Gisu said something like that as he takes out bags of magic stones, necklaces, rings and other accessories to show me.

Paul's dead, I fell into depression, and this guy is still thinking about money.

Thinking about that kind of pissed me off.

But if I think about the future, not going back would be stupid.

Money is important. It's not like we didn't work for it.

Gisu made the right judgement.

Besides, the me who fell depressed and did nothing has no right to complain about anything.

“We gave Senpai's share to Lilia already.”

Looks like the issue of split were discussed and decided by everyone besides me.

My share was particularly large.

Besides Paul's split, Talhand said, [This time I wasn't of much use.] and gave half of his to me.

Shera and Vera too, because how hard it must be with Paul dead, gave Lilia some of theirs.

Then, Lilia decided to give all of it to me.

In my opinion, everyone did their part, so they should just accept what's theirs.

Oh well, I'll accept it.

It's true, the future might become hard.

"Also, even though we checked the bottom floor in detail, we never could figure out what caused Zenith to end up like that."

"Is that so? Sorry for the trouble."

"No problem."

We still couldn't figure out how Zenith end up trapped in the Magic Crystal.

Either way, even if we did, it might not relate to a cure.

In any case, we can talk about a cure once we get back.

"Then, may I leave the travel preparations to Gisu and... Elinalise?"

"Okay."

"Got it."

It should be fine to leave it to those two...

3

The travel plan was very comprehensive.

The routes also very clear.

Everyone here are all experienced travelers.

But we don't want any more victims.

To avoid any mistakes, we plan out every due diligence.

We also collected all the reports about bandits and confirmed escape routes.
Even though it's a bit of roundabout, that should be fine.
I'm a little concerned about Zenith, but that was solved pretty quickly.
Gisu purchased an armadillo-like monster and carriage.
Seems like a carriage made especially for the desert.
Got to hand it to him for finding something like that.
Apparently, this armadillo is a well trained monster from eastern Begaritto.
It's a bit expensive, so I thought it'd be a waste to throw away, but some sacrifices can't be helped.
...Maybe I can teleport the armadillo back with me too.
It should be fine as long as it can get pass the stairs, right?
But what if it couldn't handle the weather and dies...?
Still, if I leave it alone in the desert, it'll die anyways.
In that case, it'll be better off if I bring it over to that side and sell to a collector instead.

Preparations done.
Let's go--

4

Travel went by smoothly.
Luckily we avoid the locations with bandits.
Even though we encountered monsters, with all the members collected here, there's no longer any danger.
2 Warriors, 2 Magicians, 1 Magic Warrior, 1 Healer.
Even with some weaker individuals, it's still a very balanced party.
Originally there ought to be a Swordsman too.
...Forget it, don't think about it anymore.
Traveling without a left hand has been more troublesome than I expected.
It doesn't hurt, but during encounters, I often unconsciously tried to use my left hand and swing empty.
A lot of things are harder without two hands.

Still, every time that happens, Roxy would come to my aid.
Since that night, Roxy would always stick by my side.
Usually she walks on my left side.
Whenever something happens, she'll immediately give me a hand.^[40]
The way she conducts herself is almost like a lover.

“...”

I'm an idiot.
Even though I tried to become sharper, as a man, I'm still slow.
But with things like this, even I can't ignore it.
Roxy, she probably, likes me--

5

“...Em, Sensei.”

One day, we're on watch duty.
Roxy and I sat shoulder to shoulder before a bonfire.
Everyone else is asleep in the shelter.
The shelter is very sturdy, but you never know.
Because of that, we always have 2 person on guard in rotation.

“What is it, Rudi?”

Roxy is so close to me.
Sitting by my side, sticking tightly next to me.
I can feel the warmth and softness of her tiny shoulders through her robes.
Just like a lover.
No, exactly like a lover.
With Roxy clinging, flitting like that, it would be nonsense to say otherwise.
Anyways, that's probably what she has in mind.

Does she know that I'm already married?
She probably doesn't.
If she does, she probably won't be so forward like this.

No, it's not Roxy's fault.

It's mine.

I was unfaithful.

I went unfaithful behind Sylphy's back.

I better come clean here too.

I'm very thankful.

I'm fine now.

I couldn't face my wife, so let's stop here.

“ ... ”

Ever since coming to this world and meeting Roxy, I have always relied on her.
She taught me magic and language.

Befriending Sylphy, in some ways, was thanks to Roxy as well.

Even though the one that cured my ED was Sylphy, what supported me for those 3 years was that precious thing that Roxy gave me.

I could never return that kindness.

Moreover, she even used her body to comfort me.

Even though it's her first time, she still put herself forward to help me.

Helped the me who fell into the abyss.

Helping a useless trash like me.

How can I just throw her away once things are over?

What kind of etiquette is that?

...No, I can't just play pretend anymore.

Help?

Etiquette?

None of that matters.

I like Roxy.

I love her.

If asked who I like better, Sylphy or her, I won't know how to answer.

The ways I like them are different.

Because I wavered.

It ended up like this.

It ended up that I like Sylphy and Roxy at the same time.

But I promised to be faithful to Sylphy.

Even though I broke that promise, a promise is a promise.

Even though I broke it, I must continue to respect it.

But, Sylphy has said, [A mistress is fine.]

But I pushed that away and promised to love her only.

I promised her!

Back then, without a doubt, Sylphy felt happiness from that.

I can't betray her.

"I'm really thankful. But, to be honest, I'm already married, and I'll soon have a child. Because of that, acting like lovers like this, well, although I'm sorry, can we stop this?"

Roxy's shoulders shivered.

Then, she murmurs,

"I already knew about your marriage. Elinalise already told me."

"Ah, is that so?"

Doing this even though she knew.

In that case, that means...

What's going on?

"Our relationship, I know. Rudi, you don't have to worry. I'm just someone who took

advantage of Rudi in his moment of weakness.”

Roxy spoke candidly without any variance.

“I know well in normal circumstances, Rudi would never touch someone as plain as me.”

“Plain? That's not true at all.”

“You don't have to comfort me. I'm very aware.”

Roxy's body is indeed a little plain.

Not a lot of curves, and very tiny too.

As for a woman's charm, she'd lose to Sylphy.

In another words, lolita-size.

But I'm the kind of guy that would say [This is perfect!]

“Please don't worry.

I have no plan of forcing myself into Rudi's life.

I just want to be Rudi's left hand during this trip...

After this trip is over, Rudi doesn't have to worry about me anymore. Please take good care of your wife.”

Roxy stared at me with some hesitation as she said that.

“I understand.”

“ ... ”

But the fact that Roxy saved me wouldn't change.

It can't be over like this.

“Please let me return the favor somehow. Is there anything I can do?”

“Favor?”

Roxy looks at me in shock.

“Yes, anything in my power, anything would do.”

Roxy's eyes sparkle.

Ahh, did I say something terrible?

Anything can be very bad.

But with all that Roxy's done for me, “anything” is perfectly reasonable.

“Eh, then, well.”

“Oh”

“...Would you listen to my explanation? Just listening is fine.”

“Oh?”

Explanation.

Explanation for what?

“Okay, I understand. Please speak.”

“ ... ”

Roxy fell silent for a while.

Then, murmuring, she begins to speak.

“I, it was love at first sight.”

“With whom?”

“Eh?”

“It couldn't be dad?”

“No, it's Rudi, when Rudi came into the Labyrinth to save me.”

Our reunion.

That time my attitude towards Roxy was too ridiculous. I couldn't help but start hurling.

To suddenly hug her, then hurl.

Why in the world would she fall for me?

I thought that'd scare her away from me instead.

"It couldn't be helped. At death's door, just when I had already given up, to be rescued by a guy in such a cool fashion, even I would be moved by something like that."

"I was cool?"

"Like how I always dreamt it."

Cool, eh?

Hearing that makes me want to giggle.

"In the Labyrinth, I was always watching you."

"Now you mention it, our sight did meet often, but you always looked away."

"That, because, looking straight at someone as cool as Rudi, isn't it really embarrassing?"

Embarrassed.

"...I know I'm no good."

Roxy spoke slowly.

"At the bar, Elinalise and I talked about it. What we do about Rudi. Elinalise and Gisu said don't worry, that you'll get back up on your own. But, when I thought about the time Rudi and I spent together at Buina village, Rudi and Paul training sword arts together, how close you two are together, I suddenly remembered when Rudi rode the horse for the first time. Back then, Rudi was very scared. Your body froze and you wouldn't move at all. Back then, I was thinking, ah, even though this kid has talents like an adult, he's still really fragile. Then, I remember again sword training, and when Rudi and Paul fought together in the Labyrinth."

"Seeing Rudy so depressed and not able to do anything, I realized that in reality, Rudi is more fragile than he looks... I think, to Rudi, Paul's existence isn't as important as everyone makes it out to be. When Paul dies, Rudi falling depressed isn't something

unsolvable either. “

“Depressed to the point where you can't pick yourself back up. No, of course, I don't think I alone can help Rudi get better. I heard Rudi has someone you love already. If it's her, then if Rudi falls depressed, she can definitely help Rudi get better again.”

“But that person isn't here. During Rudi's critical moment, she isn't here. That's why I thought, someone should definitely help Rudi. But Elinalise and Gisu refused to do anything. Lilia has Zenith's situation to take off. Then, I thought it ought to be me.”

“Even though those sound just like a bunch of excuses, I didn't plan to do that kind of thing at the start. Even though I feel Rudi respects me, I'm just a midget. Even I don't know Rudi's lover, but if she's a relative of Elinalise, she must be a beauty. I thought Rudi definitely won't look at me. Having nothing to do with that, but at least I should take the opportunity and see what comes out of it.”

“Yet in reality, Rudi suddenly grabs on to me. I never imagined that I would ever face Rudi so closely. I thought I might have a chance. I heard Elinalise and them talking about this. I thought that perhaps I can. Because it can't be helped, I like Rudi.”

At this point, Roxy starts to cry.

Watching this scene, I felt a pain in my chest.

“...It's cruel. Marriage and stuff, they knew I like Rudi, yet they only told me afterwards. It's too cruel.”

Who is she talking about here?

Not me.

It's probably Elinalise.

But I didn't report to Roxy about my marriage either.

Even though I don't have a particular reason to, I never saw an opportunity to mention it.

I'm equally responsible too.

But, imagine, if I met Sylphy again.

Saved by her, fallen for her.

Then naturally start to go after her.

Despite all that, Sylphy already has someone she liked.

I would definitely be hit hard too.

No doubt I would be hit hard.

...I want to repay Roxy.

Roxy deserves it.

“Then, Roxy Sensei.”

“What is it?”

But, what do I do?

What can I do to repay her?

If I don't betray Sylphy, can I satisfy Roxy?

“Well, at least on this trip, can I realize Sensei's wishes? Before we get home, I can be Roxy-sensei's lover, then...”

Then what?

Nothing can be done.

I know that well myself.

No matter for me, or for Roxy, there's no way to fix anything.

To Sylphy, I'm a traitor.

Just delaying the inevitable, the worst idea.

“...That's a very attractive proposal.”

Roxy said this as she tightly hugs my shoulder.

Then, she lightly taps my forehead.

“But, calm down, you don't have to say that.”

“...I understand.”

Don't have to.

As long as Roxy thinks so, then I will agree to it.

Up to now it's been like this, and from now on it'll be the same.

Is that okay, Sensei? ---

6

A month later, we arrived at the Bazaar.

I bought some glassware as gifts for Sylphy and others.

Odd shaped glass bottles, a hair clip made of red glass engraved with tribal designs;

Hopefully they won't break before I get home.

Then, I also bought some rice.

Seedlings.

Although I don't think they would grow properly, but at least I want to try.

If not, I can eat it anyways.

That night, Elinalise brought the girls out for drinks.

Something like a girls night out.

Even though at their age, none of them can properly be called girls anymore.

Only Lilia refused, using taking care of Zenith as her excuse. Everyone else went, including Roxy.

Gisu and Talhand also left together chatting about something.

I stayed in to help Lilia taking care of Zenith.

Zenith spent all day in a daze.

She can walk, can eat, can go to the restroom.

But she can't speak, and doesn't show any initiative.

Following every instruction almost like a robot.

But even like this, she would occasionally stare straight at me.

Nothing in particular, just staring.

Maybe she can feel something from her own flesh and blood.

If there's a trigger to get her memories back... ah, probably not.

At this point, if Paul was here, what would happen?

Paul, what would he do?

Will he do well?

Or would he say, no good, failed?

At night, Roxy returned by my side.

Completely wasted.

She told everything about us two to Elinalise. Now she's regretting it.

This must be hard on Elinalise too.

She said she plans to treat Roxy as family.

She wants to help Roxy with her love, but doesn't want to interfere with her granddaughter's marriage.

It must be difficult for her.

Roxy uses her tiny fists to knock on my chest, then she went back to her own bed--

7

Next day.

We arrived at the rock's ledge.

The carriage usually can't reach this place, but I used magic to forcefully transfer it on top of the ledge.

On the first day, the armadillo was wary of the smell of griffons, and refused to move.

Looking at this, we might have to leave it at the Bazaar instead.

While I was thinking that, Gisu fed it meat from a griffon we defeated, and the armadillo suddenly felt something.

From the second day forth that heavy body started to move forward full of spirit.

Looks like it's a training method that an old friend from a Magic Race taught him.

Take down his predator in front and feed it the meat, and it'll naturally feel like being part of something stronger than its natural enemies, something like that.

I ask him whether the old friend was someone lizard-faced. He replied as expected of Senpai to know this and laughed.

After a day we entered the desert.

After 3 days we passed the sandstorm.

When I used sand storm magic to stop the wind, Roxy spoke quietly with a little jealousy [Even your earth magic has reached Saint level, amazing.]

From here on the number of monsters increased, so we're particularly careful.

Despite that, this time around we have plenty of manpower, all veterans.

Even if 1, 2 people fell into danger, reinforcements would come immediately.

The Sand Garuda that came first were taken out immediately.

Afterwards the velociraptor-like bipedal lizard were taken out too.

On the way, although I thought the Sand Worms could be dangerous, but Gisu found them all.

Seems like there's a trick to it.

After he explains it, if I look carefully, on the ground there are some faint donut-shaped outlines.

Once I pay attention, they become easy to spot.

Despite that, the desert isn't exactly flat, so often times I couldn't quite tell.

This is what they call experience.

Even though Succubi came, they were taken out without a problem.

With so many girls here, we don't have a problem in battle.

Gisu and I were affected by their pheromones, but with intermediate detoxification, it wasn't a problem.

Ah, only a slight bit of instincts were exposed, coming on to Roxy.

Frighteningly, Talhand is completely immune to the pheromones.

Elinalise said, [That's natural.]

I guess, this is what they call all muscles and no brain.

So cool.

Arrived at the ruins.

Just as planned, before we reached the ruins I blindfold everyone besides Elinalise.

Shera doesn't want to, but Vera was able to convince her.

Traveling with blindfolds.

Maybe it's all talk, but as long as they can't see the magic barrier, they won't know what happened.

The carriage couldn't fit the entrance, so we left it behind.

If it's only a week, then even Zenith can handle the trip home.

Now that we're here, a little slower is just fine.

The Armadillo fits through the entrance, so we brought it too.

Although I'm not sure whether it can survive the weather on the other side, at least it's better than leaving it as monster bait.

After taking off their blindfolds, Gisu and others look shocked when they suddenly saw the change in scenery.

From the desert, we suddenly arrive in the middle of a forest.

It must be shocking.

I told them very carefully, even if they noticed something, please don't leak it.

Anyways, just like that, we left the Begaritto Continent.

Just a bit more, and we'll be home.

CHAPTER 12

RETURN

1

The northern lands are blanketed in snow.

From the beginning of the journey, it has already been four months.

Fall, the season when the beast race is in heat, has long passed.

Only the long winter remains.

In the heart of the forest, even in the midst of dense vegetation, the snow reaches up to our waist.

“Elinalise and I will lead the way.”

I head to the front after I said so.

I'll take down anything that shows up, magic is not a problem.

Zenith doesn't show much fatigue either.

The Armadillo shivers from the cold, but it's fine if it gets warmed by magic once in a while.

Everything's fine.

2

That night.

Elinalise and my turn for night watch.

She abruptly speaks up.

“Rudeus, I have something to say.”

I can already guess what it'll be about.

It's Roxy.

I sat down in front of Elinalise.

If she reproaches me, I can immediately kneel down.

Elinalise sat down with her legs to the side.

What will she yell at me for?

Being unfaithful to Sylphy?

Or for sleeping with Roxy?

“Rudeus, you don't follow Milis, right?”

Elinalise speaks, but about neither of those things.

“...?”

I don't understand where she's going at.

But, to me, only one person is worthy of God.

That would never change.

“No.”

“Also, Sylphy doesn't believe in Milis either?”

“Erm, that should be right.”

Sylphy doesn't follow any religion.

Or rather, between the people I met, only Cliff really is a Milis follower.

Cliff would always wear the sign of Milis on his neck. Once every 7 days, he would go to the church for mass or something.

At least, Sylphy didn't wear any Milis symbol or attend service.

Maybe only Cliff does those things, so belief might be possible.

At least, I never heard about it.

“My Cliff, he's a Milis follower.”

“Yeah.”

I was just thinking about Cliff, and confirmed immediately.

“Do you know? For followers of Milis, one of the commandments are to marry only one wife.”

“Something like that.”

“To say, love that wife forever, even if it can be difficult, but that's also a form of love. That's true happiness.”

That's how it ought to be.

To love another with all one's might, and at the same time be loved, that's what happiness is.

Even so, I still drifted and fell in love with Roxy.

I like Roxy, that's without a doubt.

But, those miserable days are still vivid in my memory.

The one who cured me and brought me happiness was Sylphy.

I want to use love to repay her.

This feeling is without a doubt too.

“But that's Cliff.”

“Yes.”

“I don't agree that there is anything inherently wrong with multiple lovers.”

“Elinalise might think so, but won't that be unfaithful?”

I asked back, but Elinalise shook her head.

“If you cast Sylphy aside then it's another story, but as long as you properly love her, that isn't unfaithful.”

“But if there're two partners, then the love to each of them becomes halved.”

“It's not like you stick together all day, right? It's not halved. Although it might be less, it's not that bad.”

Isn't less precisely the problem?

Human kind, are so dull against more, but also so sensitive with less.
If Sylphy felt I haven't loved her as much as I did, then that's a serious issue.

“Think about it this way. After Paul married Lilia, was Zenith unhappy?”

Unhappy, happy?

Although I thought Paul slighted her.

But now that I think about it, there was not really any unhappiness.

That's true even now.

Or rather, as a result Lilia and Zenith became even closer friends, even happier than before.

Even though when the two wives gang up on him, he seemed a little unhappy.

But that's also a form of happiness.

But now, that kind of happiness, is no more.

“...Anyways, Elinalise, what are you trying to say.”

So I asked.

Thinking about Paul, I felt a tinge of pain.

If we keep going, it would only hurt more.

So, I decided to be blunt.

“Rudeus, marry Roxy. You like her, right?”

Having her say that kind of pisses me off.

“...Are you serious?”

“Oh, of course I am.”

“Elinalise, should you be saying this? As Sylphy's grandma, shouldn't you consider Sylphy's happiness instead?”

I don't have a right to blame Elinalise.

The unfaithful I have no right.
Breaking my vow with Sylphy, sleeping with Roxy.
No matter what the situation is, those are the facts.
Yet here I am blaming someone else for this.

“Erm, I said so. Only I can say so.”

Elinalise looked at me boastfully.

“Perhaps I can say this in a different way, but, before I was Sylphy's grandma, I had already become Roxy's close friend.”

I didn't understand her right away.
But, soon after I realized it's about the order of things.
It's only after meeting Roxy that Elinalise met Sylphy.

“Truth be told, I can't take Roxy looking like so depressed anymore. That girl obviously wants to stay by your side. She clings on to you, yet plans to step back and leave. Only because she was a step too late.”

Hearing that from her, Roxy really is very pitiful.
But, from Sylphy's perspective, Sylphy is pitiful too.

“That girl, if she separates with you, she would definitely suffer a cruel life. Who knows if a bad guy ends up taking advantage of her, treats her poorly, then finally sells her to a brothel for money, and in the end having children to unknown fathers.”

“Isn't that a bit unrealistic?”

“Of the people I met, some girls have walked that path.”

Her voice is earnest.
Is it a personal experience?

“I, even if I get blamed, want to see Roxy find happiness.”

"I also want to, but--"

"Rudeus, if it's you it's possible. You can give Roxy and Sylphy love equally. You are Paul's son, you ought to have that type of aspiration."

Can I do it?

I can do it.

Yes, I can.

Because, I love them both equally in the first place, there's no reason I can't.

But is that really okay?

Can it be that simple?

Isn't that just wishful thinking on my part?

No.

...This is the temptation of the devil.

I can't listen.

"No, only Sylphy..."

"I didn't plan to say this, but--"

Elinalise interrupted me.

Then, quietly, continues.

"At our night out, I overheard that Roxy's didn't come this month."

"...Eh?"

Her period?

No, no point pretending. It's definitely that.

Eh, but that.

"Well, we don't know for sure yet..."

No, but we did it.

If it's that, then it's possible.

Afterwards, that day, Roxy punched my chest without any power.

Was that a hint?

Elinalise spies at me for a bit, continues.

“Rudeus, if Roxy is pregnant, what would you do?”

Hearing that, Paul's image suddenly comes to my mind.

Yes, that was the Paul from when Lilia was pregnant.

The Paul that doesn't deserve any sympathy.

Completely lost at what to do, I helped him.

Paul was also someone that deserves respect.

But I can't copy the him back then.

“...I would take responsibility.”

“How?”

“Marry her.”

Marry, so I say.

Somehow I felt forced.

Even so, I can't really say it.

Besides, after saying it, I suddenly feel a weight off my shoulders.

I like Sylphy.

But, I also want to marry Roxy.

I don't want Roxy to be stolen from me, I want to make her mine.

I'm so selfish.

After telling Sylphy those words, and even having a child.

Then suddenly wanting another woman.

Unforgivable.

Considering all that, I'm basically the scum of mankind.

Until now, I always said that Paul is scum.

But, I'm also a man.

I fell for two women, and I want them both.

If I get them both, what's wrong with that?

Just like Paul.

If this led to falling apart with Sylphy and Roxy leaving me.

Then I would lose them both, just like that.

Em, that's right.

This isn't just my problem.

“...If Roxy-sensei and Sylphy would agree, then that's another matter.”

“Alright, then I'll go call Roxy over.”

“Eh?”

Elinalise stood up as she said so.

And suddenly went into a nearby tent.

How fast.

Soon after, Roxy came out alone.

Doesn't look like she has been asleep.

She looks at me nervously.

Maybe Elinalise already said something to her.

“Do you have something to tell me, Rudi?”

Roxy sat down in front of me.

As a result, I also straighten up.

What do I say.

Isn't this too fast?

I haven't thought about what to say yet.

No, no point in worrying anymore.

“Well, it's about what I said before.”

“Oh.”

“I... like Sensei. From the start I always liked Sensei. Not only like, but also respect. Although Sensei may worry that your magic may not be as strong as mine, but that doesn't matter to me. The magic that Sensei taught me saved my life many times. It's because of Sensei that I'm still alive.”

Roxy's face flushes red.

My face probably is flushing red now too.

Face-to-face like this is really embarrassing.

“That, I'm really grateful that you felt this way.”

“But, well, I already have a wife.”

“Oh, so I have heard.”

Please be my second wife.

Can I say that?

Isn't that really inappropriate?

Can't I say it any better?

What do I do?

But, I still have to say it.

No matter how I say it, the results will be the same.

I won't separate with Sylphy, and I also want to have Roxy.

Also, I need to prepare myself to talk to Sylphy afterwards.

To do something like this before Sylphy knows it.

I'm truly scum.

But, if I don't say it now.

Roxy might leave.

She's the kind of person to leave for a new journey immediately after.

If I don't keep her back beforehand, I might not have another chance.

-- That's enough.

Even if I get called scum afterwards, I don't care.

“My wife, her name is Syphiette Greyrat. Originally, she didn't have a last name, just Syphiette.”

“Oh, so I have heard.”

“Roxy, would you also change your name to Roxy Greyrat?”

Roxy looked shocked all the sudden.

Yet, soon she understood what I meant and bit her lips.

But, quickly her face returned to her usual seriousness.

“...For you to say that, I'm really grateful, but shouldn't you gain your wife's approval first?”

Of course, I need to discuss this with Sylphy.

To become family with someone she never met before.

I need to explain it to my sisters as well.

Lilia too, I need to tell her also.

“I need to gain her approval.”

“In that case--”

I was rejected.

Of course, Roxy wished that I only pick her.

Just when that thought came to me,

“Then, after you do that, please ask me again.”

In the flurry of snow, Roxy said in her usual seriousness.

[After that, ask again.]

The fact that she didn't refuse me warms my heart.

We approached Magic City Sharia.

I told Lilia about Roxy.

She looked expressionless as she usually is,

“Ah, I understand.”

That's it.

She doesn't particularly blame me.

Maybe it's because she too was in Roxy's position.

That's probably not it. Outside of Milis, this world doesn't have a one-husband one-wife tradition in the first place.

Regardless, my agreement with Roxy, to gain the approval of Lilia helped take some weight off my shoulders.

Next, once I get home and report to Sylphy the journey, I need to put my head down for Roxy.

Telling Aisha and Norn about Roxy weighs heavily on me too.

But, they need to accept this too.

Will Norn will get angry and blame me?

Will Aisha start crying and blame me?

I won't run away.

I won't regret.

“...Regret?”

Just now, I feel a sudden unease.

It's about the Hitogami's prophecy.

He said I will regret.

It's the truth, Paul's dead, Zenith became an invalid, and I lost my left hand.

We lost many things.

But, right now for some reason I don't feel any regret.

Perhaps it's all thanks to Roxy, not an ounce of regret.
It's true, I once thought, perhaps if I was stronger.
If only I learned more about sword art.
If only I was strong enough to beat the hydra.
It's true I thought about that once.
But, at the same time, the feeling of [It can't be helped] rang strong and true.
In this world, I'm not fit for battle.
I don't have Fighting Spirit, nor have an idea on how to wear it.
Swordsmanship too, without Fighting Spirit, I can't get better.
Moreover the enemy was a magic immune hydra, even if I learned King-class magic, it would be pointless.
Even though, I did think there might be something else...
But, even that doesn't leave me any regrets.
Paul is dead.
But, because of his sacrifice, I could now face my past.
Even though I troubled everyone, even though everyone was concerned, but in the end, I think I still came up on top.
Because of that, I don't regret.
Only scars remain.
Right, only scars.
My trip to the Begaritto Continent left only scars.
No regrets.
In that case, regret, would it be what happens next?
Don't tell me.
Something happened to the sisters that I left behind?
No, recalling what that Hitogami said.
He mentioned something about Pursena and Rinia.
Or maybe, it's something to do with them?
Unless it's about getting their help to solve something.
Or maybe, don't tell me.

It's the pregnant Sylphy...

Outside of these, what else can I regret?

Even with this unease, we can't travel any faster.

The weather worsened, the snow fell heavier.

Everyone's fine, but Zenith seems fatigued, so I made a saddle with Earth Magic and let her ride instead.

The Armadillo seems to be suffering from the chill and about to die any time now.

Maybe I should have left it at the desert.

No, it's too late already.

At least, before it dies it deserves a name.

Jirou.

It'll be Jirou.

Do your best, Jirou!

5 days later we reached the path we came on.

From here it takes 10 days to reach Sharia.

Considering the entire journey, this isn't really long.

But, now that we're here, this felt like the longest part of them all.

4

We arrived at Magic City Sharia.

I head straight towards home.

I can feel my pace quicken.

“Hey, Senpai, what's up? Your face is a bit pale, maybe you should use a little detox?”

Gisu looks quite worried in his banter.

But, I completely ignore him and keep moving forward.

“Oh, this is the city center right. Well, let's stay here then, so many people going over to Senpai's would just be a bother--”

I didn't bother to listen to whoever that said that behind me.

“Hey, Senpai... Rudeus!”

Without realizing it, I broke into a run.

Leaving everyone behind, I rush towards home.

I lived here for over a year, the path I always jogged on, I ran.

I completely ignored everyone around me.

Always on the edge of falling over, I ran.

It can't be helped, my balance is terrible right now.

Without a left hand, I can't run properly.

I almost tipped over before someone held me back up.

“What are you in a rush for?”

It's Elinalise.

“No, I just have a little something.”

“...What is it? You just start panicking all of a sudden. What happened?”

“Ah, no, well. I don't know why, but I felt like Sylphy is in danger.”

“Danger? For what reason?”

“None, really.”

I shake off Elinalise and start pacing ahead.

This unease, I need to clear it as soon as possible.

Home is right before my eyes.

If according to plan, then Sylphy's tummy should be big now, so she should be home.

What if she already gave birth, then wouldn't that be premature?

In that case, don't tell me---

Anything is fine.

Anything is fine, I don't just want anything bad to happen.

At my doorstep.

Even though the snow begins to pile up, but everything looks about the same as before.

There are trees and shrubs in the yard now.

Is that Aisha's doing?

It feels more gorgeous now.

I took out my key from the baggage.

Insert it into the keyhole, it rattles a bit.

The key felt cold; my hand is shaking.

It won't open; it won't turn.

“Ugh”

I put my hand on the door knock and rattle the icy door.

“Is it already open?”

Hearing that from Elinalise behind me, I grabbed the doorknob.

Pushing it aside, the door opens.

Be more careful!

I walked in as I thought so and stare right at the person behind it.

“B-brother!?”

“Aisha... is everything fine?”

“What's fine?”

Aisha stared dumbfounded from me to the Elinalise besides me.

Then, also to behind me.

I looked back, Roxy was panting there.

Anyways, I grabbed onto Aisha's shoulders.

Aisha seemed to have felt something odd on her right and stared in that direction. Her eyes widen.

In shock she stares between my hand and face.

“Eh, what happened, brother, your hand?”

“You're fine. Then Sylphy?”

“Eh? Eh... Em, Sylphy-sama, she's right here?”

Sylphy looks dumbfounded, standing right behind her.

Her tummy got bigger.

Ah, her breasts got bigger too.

If I remember correctly, it should be 7-8 months by now.

She'll start lactating soon.

No, either way is fine.

“Rudi... W-what's wrong?”

“Sylphy, it's fine? Did anything happen?”

“Eh? Em, everyone's doing well, because Aisha was trying hard too.”

Sylphy is okay.

Ah, it's obvious just looking at her.

“Then everyone else, Norn? Cliff and Zanoba and people, they're all alright?”

“Eh? Alright? Nothing at all happened?”

“Nobody is sick or injured?”

“Em, em, nothing particularly...”

Sylphy looks dumbstruck.

I'm completely lost at what I'm trying to say.

Ah, I see.

Me.

I finally get it, nothing at all happened.

“B-brother...?”

Coming back to my senses, Aisha's face suddenly looked higher.

She sure grew.

No, I collapsed.

“Right.”

All my strength left me.

In the end, that regret, is Paul's death.

Also, that about my past parents.

I was overthinking it.

“Aa...”

Realizing this, I finally let out a breath.

“Thank goodness.”

Right then, Sylphy slowly walks up to me, placing her hand on my shoulder.

I feel the warmth from her hand slowly spreading from my shoulders.

Quickly she kneeled down, slowly spread her hand over my back.

I wrapped my arms around her back.

Thinking on one hand, that without my left I couldn't hug her tight, I hug her tightly with my other.

I can smell Sylphy's fragrance.

“Rudi... welcome home.”

Paul, Zenith.

And also Roxy.

They are a lot that I must talk about.

I also need to go welcome in the friends that have been waiting in the plaza.

Because I rushed back here alone.

I was just anxious.

Nothing happened, just take my time.

But first, there's something I need to say.

“I'm back.”

I am back.

CHAPTER 13

REPORT

1

Things were a little bit flustered.

First off, Aisha ran to the school to retrieve Norn.

Was she being considerate because of the situation with Roxy? Or was it difficult to stay? Or was it because I called back Gisu?

It seems that Elinalise's original plan had been to return to Cliff at once, but she was enduring it for now.

Until they returned here, from Sylphy, I asked her about what happened here while I was away.

Sylphy, understanding that I prioritized hearing about what happened here beforehand, didn't complain, and began explaining.

First of all, the condition of Sylphy.

Everything seems to be progressing favorably.

According to what the doctor said, the matter of the baby being born was proceeding as well as can be expected.

It seems all of my companions have been keeping well, also.

When some minor incident occurred at the school the other day, Nanahoshi appeared suddenly and settled the matter.

Doing something for someone of this world, did she finally change her way of thinking a little?

Aisha and Norn managed to get along fine without any injuries or illnesses.

Aisha it seems, has rapidly been expanding her interest in gardening,

It seems she has begun cultivating a new type of plant in her room.

Should I take the time to have her show me?

At school, it seems Norn's existence has become something like that of an idol.

There is even something like a Fan club that exists too.

Norn is rather cute after all.

Even Zanoba, Cliff, Rinia, and Pursena would sometimes drop by the house to check on the state of things.

It seems Ariel had mumbled some complaints about me not stopping by and offering greetings.

Ah, that's right; I seemed to have forgotten to do that.

I will apologize the next time I see her.

I should try not to increase my debts to her any further.

At any rate, just from what I've heard, everyone seems to be doing fine.

And when time allows, I will fill the others in on what happened as well.

However, it seems there have been no sightings of Badigadi.

Well, it's not like anything will happen to an immortal guy like him anyway.

So what has happened in this last half-year?

My cute as ever Sylphy put a finger to her chin, and gives it some thought.

"Really, nothing and nobody of incident, huh?"

"That's right. Nothing at all happened that Rudi needs to be concerned with."

"I see."

"Rather than that, let's talk about you, Rudi. What happened with you?"

"Ah. I'll tell you. However, it will have to be after everyone has gathered. There are certain reasons for this."

"...Okay. Ah, I'm so glad you came back."

So, in the place we were chatting, Roxy has returned.

I invite Gisu and company into the living room:

Gisu, Talhand, Lilia, Vera, Shera, Elinalise, and Roxy.

With Sylphy and I, does that make nine people?

Even with so many people in the room, it is wide enough to accommodate many more.

“Oh, is that Senpai's wife? Hehe, she's a cute one, isn't she? You are a lucky man, Senpai.”

“That is also my grandchild!”

“Well, it seems that even this lewd bitch's defective swellings can occasionally become a shining jewel.”

“What did you say!?”

I give a sidelong glance to the back-and-forth going on between Elinalise and Gisu, and then the two of them greet Sylphy properly.

Sylphy sits up straight, and returns the greetings in a formal manner.

“Nice to meet you, I am called Roxy... Migurdia.”

“Roxy you say? Then you are the Shisho who Rudi is always in high praise of?”

“Yes, well sort of... I don't know if I'm quite the person all of Rudi's prideful bragging has made me out to be.”

“How do you do? I always hear stories about you from Rudi, I am Sylphiette, it is my honor to finally meet you.”

“L-, likewise...”

Roxy somehow made things very awkward.

Even though I had a talk with her about this kind of thing just the other day, of course it would still turn out like this.

However, that conversation is long gone.

“It's been a while, Sylphiette-sama.”

“Lilia-san, how long it's been!”

Towards Sylphy, Lilia respectfully straightens herself, and deeply bows.

Sylphy seemed happy with the reunion, and her smile spread wide across her face. However, soon that smile became strained.

“Umm, the way you just addressed me as Sylphiette-sama... could I have you call me Sylphy like you did back then?”

“I cannot. It is because you have become the wife of Rudeus-sama, so it is not possible to do it like before.”

“Is, is that so...”

Sylphy felt a sense of obligation.

Maybe it was because Sylphy had been taught how to manage all of the household affairs from Lilia.

Putting it in the right context, Lilia was something like Sylphy's Shisho.

Much like how Roxy was for me.

In that way, it's only natural one gives them their due respect.

“Then, Auntie Zenith, it's been a while since I've seen you as well.”

Finally,

Sylphy had spoken to Zenith.

“...Umm... Auntie Zenith?”

“...”

Zenith just seemed to space out at the repeated calls of Sylphy.

“Umm...”

Sylphy saw all of the troubled faces of the gathered.

I wonder if she was not having pleasant thoughts about being married to me, her face seemed to say it after all.

“Sylphy. The thing with Father and Mother is... well, when Norn returns I'll explain it

all.”

“Ah, that reminds me, I haven't seen Paul-san yet...”

After I mentioned him, Sylphy began looking around for Paul.

But partway looking, she seems to understand something seeing all the somber faces.

And she closes her mouth and keeps silent.

It was silent until Norn came back.

Everyone that was gathered here had reached this implicit understanding.

2

After a short time had passed, Aisha and Norn had returned.

The both of them had run out of breath hurrying back.

“Br, brother. It's been a long journey for you, thank you for all your hard work!”

Norn, while still breathing raggedly, bows her head low.

And, as she saw my hand, her face seems to be startled.

“Brother, your hand, are you sure you are all right?”

“Don't you worry, I'm fine. Although it makes a number of things inconvenient for me, I'm at least not feeling any pain from it.”

Compared to what I have to talk about after this; my left hand is a rather trivial matter.

“If, if you say so.”

Norn while still breathing heavily, surveys the room restlessly, she mutters a “Huh?” while she sits down in one of the chairs.

Aisha following suit, comes over by me, and asks me one thing.

“...Onii-sama, before you begin your talk, wouldn't it be better if I served everyone tea first?”

“That's a good idea. I'll leave it to you, since explaining everything may take some time.”

“Ah, sorry. That's really something I should have done, isn't it? ... I'll lend you a hand.”

“No, I'll be fine without troubling the Missus.”

After asking it of her, Aisha begins to move immediately.

Tea for everyone is prepared, everyone's luggage is moved together into a single place, jackets wet with snow are placed on hangers, everyone is given house-slippers to replace their travelling shoes, and the wet shoot is dried near the side of the fireplace.

For no apparent reason, I could only watch her movements attentively.

But then, it isn't only just I who is watching.

She is also under the watchful gaze of Lilia.

If I stop to think about it: it is always Lilia hard at work like this, back at the scene of the Labyrinth search.

That girl, while everyone else fell into silence, is unable to do anything.

It is a rare moment.

“Aisha.”

Taking the right moment when the work of Aisha could be put on hold, Lilia calls out to her daughter.

“Yes, what is the matter, Mother?”

“It seems that you have been taking care not to trouble Rudeus-sama, and have been working here properly.”

“Yes.”

“Even though you happen to be related to Rudeus-sama by blood, do not forget that he is the benefactor of your life, as well. From here on out, don't lose focus, and always accomplish your duty properly as the household's maid.”

“Yes. Mother.”

Aisha's reply was strong, and Lilia's was professional.

It was not the conversation of a parent and child.

Thinking further on it, this is probably because they haven't met in such a long time. Even though, I still think it would be good for the both of them to have a heartwarming conversation.

Well, it might be that right now, Lilia might just be acting prudent.

Because from this point on, I have to explain a difficult thing:

“Now that everyone is here, I will begin the talk.”

Though I am feeling reluctant, I have no other choice but to talk.

Because of the fact that Paul isn't here to do it.

“Umm, brother, Father isn't here yet...”

Norn chimes in while sounding insecure.

I wonder how angry she will be.

She begged me to help dad, and I told her to leave it to me.

And then to hear it from me that her father has died.

I wonder, will you blame me?

If you need to blame, then it is fine if you blame me.

Because I couldn't fulfill the wish of Norn.

I look around to everyone, and then I spoke,

“Father... Paul Grayrat has passed away.”

“Ehh...?”

Norn raises a short voice of bewilderment.

Sylphy's face tries to conceal a painful expression.

Aisha's eyes open wide, and she clenches her fist tightly.

“These are his heirlooms to the family.”

As I say so, I placed, one-by-one, on the table the remaining equipment that once belonged to Paul.

Sword, Tantou, Armor, and the Funerary Urn.

There, were the four articles of the dearly departed.

“...W, why!?”

Norn stands up, and draws close to me.

“Even though you went there! Why is it that father had to die!?”

“I'm sorry... I just wasn't strong enough.”

“But, brother...!”

Norn, as it is, keeps pressing me, she is about to grab me by the lapels.

However, her momentum seems to stall.

“.....”

My lost left hand is reflected in her eyes.

Between my left hand, the Heirlooms on the table, and my face, Norn's glance comes and goes.

Almost instantly, Norn's eyes begin to gather many tears.

Although I feel guilty, I continue speaking,

“Alright, from here on, I will explain in detail what happened.”

“...*sob*... O-kay.”

From behind, Aisha places a hand on Norn's shoulder.

“Now now, Norn-nee.”

“I'm fine, I get it already...!”

Norn shakes off Aisha's hand, and returns to her seat.

Aisha has remained standing idly by, but soon returns at once behind Sylphy.

“Now then, where should I begin explaining it from first—”

I gave a summary explanation for each of the events that happened.

Traveling together with Elinalise to Lapan, and then meeting Paul there again.

Relying on the information about the whereabouts of Zenith; capturing the Teleport Labyrinth with Paul and company.

Having a smooth ride up until the end; then having a hard fight with the Guardian. Me losing my hand and Paul losing his life.

Though we rescued Zenith, she had become an invalid.

On the way out, Gisu handled the supplements, and slowly, one at a time, got us able to talk again.

Finally, Norn has heard it.

“Then, it's like neither Father nor Mother were saved at all?”

“I'm afraid so.”

With those words, I nod slowly.

It seems like Norn's hair would stand on end.

However, she did not explode.

While she bit down on her lower lip, she keeps staring at my left hand.

“Did brother really try his best?”

“I believe I gave all that I had to it.”

“Then, even if Brother gave it his best, and it still ended up this bad, it wouldn't have mattered who went...”

Norn tries to say something that would help her regain her composure.

However, just as quickly tears come back into her eyes.

“But, at any rate... Father's death, not serving any real purpose... *sob*... Wa...”

WAAaaaaaaaah”

She crumbles then, and large tears begin spilling out like rain, it couldn't be stopped any longer.

She cries.

Norn cries.

She cries loudly.

It is a cry that pierces deeply into the heart.

It is a voice crying out for anyone to give her some relief to her pain.

Norn cries magnificently.

Crying, and crying.

Crying with “waah-waah.”

She cries, at the thing that all the others up until now could not grieve over.

We all listen to it, Norn's heartbreaking cry.

It takes a short while.

But Norn finally stops crying.

Her eyes are swollen red, and her throat makes a *hic hic* sound.

But then, she turns towards me, and her eyes hold, but a single determination in them.

“Brother...”

“What is it?”

“That is, Papa's sword, I... *hic*, is it alright... that I can have it...?”

What Norn was pointing at is Paul's beloved sword.

The sword Paul already had at the time I was born.

Paul has owned this sword for a very long time.

And was always carried on his body.

“Ah. That's right. You must take care of it. However you must not go using it recklessly.”

“...?”

“Just because you have a sword, you should not make the mistake of thinking that merely having it makes you strong.”

That, was it around the time of my fifth birthday?

When Paul gave a sword to me, and said the same thing?

“Under... stood.”

After telling Norn such a thing, she holds the sword in her arms tightly to her chest.

I believe she is a strong child.

In a situation like this, it wouldn't be strange if she shuts herself away in a room and just cries.

She properly faced Paul's death.

Unlike I, who made the grave mistake of not being able to properly crawl back up again without having to receive Roxy's rescuing.

Truly, she is such a strong child.

As far as the other Heirlooms, they will be distributed in the family.

Aisha chose the Tantou, and I was left with the Armor.

I will make a grave later for the urn, with the intention to bury it there.

Though, by the time I finish thinking about that intention, Zenith casually moves to the table, and picks up the armor.

“...Mother?”

“.....”

Even if I call out to her, Zenith says nothing.

As usual, she just continues on as an invalid.

However, the movement she makes is as if she understood what kind of scene had just unfolded before her.

Is it a coincidence?

No, the part of Zenith, that is the nucleus of Zenith, may still be intact inside of her.

At any rate, even though it became such a state that I had no memento for myself, I'm fine with it.

Because there are so many other things that only I had received from Paul.

3

“Now then, the next part is the matter concerning Mother.”

I explain the condition of Zenith once again.

How there was a loss of memory, and how most of the stuff that makes her Zenith is gone.

“Can she be healed?”

I shake my head at the question Sylphy poses.

“I don't know.”

For now, my intention is to have a doctor of healing techniques take a look at the situation with Zenith.

Although I have not heard of a Healing magic that can cure memory loss, as of yet, And, even if I thought about it, I wouldn't even know where to begin looking for the origin.

Loss of memory from being confined in a magic crystal.

Could it be something a bit like an oxygen deficiency disease? ^[41]

Since it's not something I could describe, I also think that makes the possibility of it being healed low, as well.

In this world, if you suffer damage to the brain, there is no medical technology to cure you.

At the very least, it's not something applying Advanced grade healing magic can cure.

In the case of mangas, the usual method is to have them receive a sudden shock to be cured, but I would rather avoid coming to test that method out with Zenith.

However, will curing it really be a blessing?

Paul died trying to save Zenith.

And Zenith might come to blame herself.

And if that's the case, if her memory doesn't return, she might possibly be happy.

...No, there shouldn't be any reasoning like that.

There should be efforts to recover her memories.

“At any rate, it is necessary to find treatment and nursing for Mother.”

Nursing.

Supposing for a moment that in my former life my parents did not die, and instead became old and bedridden.

Would it have been arranged that I am the one to provide the nursing care?

“It is my wish to have Mother live together in this house with us.”

From the outset, so as to not disturb my daily life; Lilia had proposed that a separate room be rented.

Because there was the gold earned from the conquered Teleport Labyrinth, I could live comfortably for at least 10 more years in this town.

However, I vetoed that proposal.

I could not allow such a thing after all.

After all that, Paul who died would never forgive me if I did that.

“Though I will be leaving the majority of the care to Lilia-san, everyone here should be able to help with any minor inconveniences.”

“I understand. I will also try my best too.”

Sylphy also acknowledged it, and pleasantly agrees to it as well.

Nobody seems to have any objection to it.

Even if they did, I am not going to let an objection stand in the way.

Even Paul's last feeling on this matter before dying was about protecting Zenith.

What was the real meaning behind those words? Even now, I still haven't a clue.

Since Paul died, I have to be the one to protect Zenith now.

Well, even though I say nursing, it's not exactly like Zenith has Alzheimer's.

Rather it's more like she has become an empty shell.

And with Lilia providing constant supervision, everything should be fine.

However, for that to work there is a certain necessary arrangement that needs to be taken care of first.

“Umm, then that means, that mother will also be living here, as well?”

Aisha seems to lament over that question.

It is a voice of someone perplexed or anxious.

“Yes. Aisha. It seems for some time I will be in the care of Rudeus-sama.”

Is Lilia something like an obstruction for Aisha, after all?

Because Lilia is an education-minded mother.

The Aisha released from under Lilia, seemingly spending every day happily away.

But, if Aisha started to become dissatisfied from now on, it might not be good.

I suppose, if I suddenly start speaking of such things, of course, Aisha couldn't help becoming perfectly angry with me.

“Such things like allotment of work will have to be done won't they...?”

“That's something we can discuss later. I intend to do work that mainly centers around caring for Zenith, however, I will also take care of any work that may pile up as well.”

“...Understood.”

Aisha did not voice dissatisfaction.

Maybe she is weak when it comes to her mother?

A hard voice and a gloomy expression,

Seeing that appearance on Aisha, the one who intervenes is Norn.

“Aisha-nee.”

Norn places her hand on Aisha's shoulder and whispers away.

“It's us, you don't have to hold it back any more, you know?”

Aisha, hearing those words, took turns looking at me, Lilia, and Norn.

Lilia also watches me again, as well.

I have no idea what is being requested of me.

However, I nod anyway, for the time being.

Then, Aisha suddenly stands up and throws her arms around Lilia.

“M, Mom...! You are uninjured, and safe, thank goodness!”

Aisha's face is buried in the stomach of Lilia while she cries.

“I'm home, Aisha...”

Lilia, with a gentle-looking expression strokes the head of her daughter.

I see.

Of course, it's like that.

Of course, Aisha would have a complicated heart as well.

For her, Lilia is mother.

Of course, it goes without saying there are the feelings that pray for the peace of Paul and Zenith as well.

However, the feeling that prayed for the safety of Lilia should of course be stronger

too.

And Lilia had actually managed to come back safely.

Of course, it's a situation where one shouldn't remain obediently composed.

Please forgive this guy who ever doubted such a thing.

4

Afterwards, we spoke of minor details, and conclude the return report.

There is then the financial allocation, at the behest of Gisu.

An enormous fortune extends to all hands involved.

However, even this was not enough to cheer the faces of everyone up.

“Now then, that is, we should probably be sounding out a hotel to stay at for now.”

At the same time the report had ended, Gisu stands up.

Everyone else also seems to reel into it, Vera, Shera, and Talhand all stood up.

I try to detain them in a hurry.

“Just for today, wouldn't it be fine if everyone stayed?”

“Eh, Senpai? There's things you need to do that outsiders would make troublesome, plus I'm a bit insensitive when it comes to these kinds of things...”

With the words Gisu offered as the natural course of action, the three of them each grab their luggage,

They put on the shoes and jackets that had not finished drying as well.

“.....”

After all, I at least determined to see them off from the entrance way.

To the four people who I tried to detain when they tried to make their exit, I call out to them,

“Everyone. For a long time, my father has received your assistance, I am truly thankful for all you have done for him.”

I bowed especially deeply towards Vera and Shera.

Those two had been helping Paul since they were in Milishion.

Though, I did not have too many conversations with them, they had played an important support role when it came to the Teleport Labyrinth.

The distinguished shadows. ^[42]

“It's nothing. Rather, we are sorry, that we weren't able to be of more use.”

“When you find the place for Captain Paul's grave, please tell me later on.”

The answer from those two was short.

For those girls, I wonder what kind of a person was Paul to them.

Even after the search group was disbanded, they followed him to Begaritto.

Maybe it was some kind of special relationship.

However, even if there was something about Paul that endeared him to them, that doesn't apply to me.

“From here on out, what are your plans?”

“When winter ends, we'll return to Asura Kingdom. There are people from the search group who helped us out back then, we need to pay back.”

“Is that so, well then take care of yourselves!”

“Right, Rudeus-san also, even if things seem difficult from now on, take care of yourself.”

To them, once more, I bow my head deeply, while they disappear into the snow.

The search group.

Now, I remember, the story of Zenith's family assisting Paul's activities with a bit of financial support.

That Zenith is safe... cannot be said, however, I should probably report on how things have become.

But, even if I send so many letters, I have no idea when or if they will properly reach her family.

While I think this, Gisu taps my shoulder.

“See you then, Senpai.”

“Gisu-san, Talhand-san.”

“What is it? Ah, here comes that annoying face.”

“...You two, what are your plans from here on out?”

When I said it, Gisu scratches his head for a bit.

“We intend to head to Asura as well. We have Begaritto money, and the money from the magic items that we want to exchange.”

“Do you plan to exchange it all?”

“Pretty much, though I have a few plans to use some of it on myself.”

I also have some magic items remaining on hand.

Though I want to do some inquiries on the effects these items happen to have.

One of them is a dagger that is such a match I could substitute it for Paul's Tantou.

Though for the time being, unless I find a good use for it, I plan to put it into the basement's storehouse.

If I happen upon a time when I need to sell it for money, it will be fine to sell it off then.

Even some of the items with the more ridiculous effects, can be exchanged for a large fortune.

However, the stone that absorbs magic, that is a different matter.

If possible, I want to study it in detail when I have the time.

So that should I fight against a similar opponent, I can try and discover a method on how to deal with it, instead of finding myself once again unable to do anything.

Though, it's possible that I might not learn anything at all from it; it's better that I try, than do nothing at all.

“If Senpai wants, I can take some of your items to Asura? If I sell them there, I can fetch a much higher profit, if that suits you?”

In Asura Kingdom, the prices of items are high, and the money of Asura Kingdom can pretty much be spent anywhere on Central Continent.

If you want to sell an item, doing so in Asura is the best idea.

“So, is it your plan then on the way back to run away after squandering all that money on gambling?”

“Oh, wai, no, what? Do you really think I'd take Senpai's money and run?”

Gisu tries to deflect, but his eyes are swimming around suspiciously.

If he took an item from me, he might really have intended to use the proceeds to go gambling.

Well, it's fine, even if that's how he is, I am indebted to Gisu.

After all, without this guy, there was no way we would have been able to traverse the Teleport Labyrinth.

“I'm kidding.”

“Well, I live the life of a gambler after all, huh?”

Gisu said so, raised the sides of his mouth, and laughs in a nihilistic way.

“Then, after that?”

“Return to adventuring. Besides, there is still so much more we want to do.”

“I see.”

“Well, I'll be around here until winter is over, wasting away my free time drinking sake. You haven't forgotten your promise, to introduce me to a nice female monkey, now, have you? My Senpai in marriage and children would certainly holds some easy access to some fine merchandise like that, right? Heh heh heh.”

Yeah, certainly Gisu isn't planning on leaving, just yet.

However, one thing I know about this man named Gisu, is that when it is time for him to leave, he won't give his regards.

He's the kind of guy who just has to up and disappear.

So, I must finish giving gratitude properly now, before the chance escapes me.

"Gisu-san..."

"Senpai. Your tone's been strange for a while now y'know? How about you just say, [Oi, newbie] like you usually do?"

"...Why do you seem to be fixed on that whole newbie thing?"

When I said that, Gisu laughed hard.

"It's a Jinx!"

Jinx.

That word, given so inadequately as a reason, made my heart fall with a thump.

Well, because he says it's the jinx, it can't be helped.

"At any rate, to the both of you, for everything you have helped with up until now, I thank you very much."

"It's fine like this. Then, stay healthy, Senpai."

When I bow deeply, Gisu begins to walk, waving his hand as he does.

"Hmm, you know, there's no way to thank your friends properly. Paul wasn't one for saying it. You don't need to express your gratitude like that with us... is all."

Talhand said that while shaking his heavy body trying to walk alongside Gisu.

I watch the backs of those two until they disappear from my view.

"All men want to have times when they can act cool, don't they?"

Suddenly when I noticed, Elinalise had appeared next to me.

While I was paying my parting respects, it seems Sylphy had some kind of conversation with her.

I wonder what it was about?

If it was about a certain topic, I had told her before that I already intended to talk about everything properly with Sylphy.

Because of Elinalise's meddling with that situation, she might have been laying the groundwork for it just now.

Honestly, even though I'm grateful for her concerns, I am feeling a bit reluctant.

“Well then, I am heading over to Cliff's place. I'm way past my limit already.”

Elinalise said something suggestive, and pats her abdominal region.

It seems I've given her a fair share of hardships as well.

With the going and coming back, she had relations with about three people that I am at least aware of.

The usual thing as always, though she laughs it off and says not to mind it, it was not something I could laugh away.

“Even you Elinalise-san, I'm deeply grateful for all your kindness towards me.”

Elinalise gave me a bitter look when I said that.

“...As for what happened to Paul, please forgive me for that as well.”

“No, that belongs to me.”

My mistake, my carelessness.

Even though I thought I said as much, Elinalise continues speaking.

“But my role in that party, was to keep moving about so something like that didn't happen. It was because of my mistakes that Paul died.”

There was no way she could have done such a thing.

Every one of us in that place fought desperately.

Evading the Hydra's trump cards, one after another, in what was a relatively little distance, then the Hydra suddenly behaving in such a desperate way, with no kind of

planning.

At least Elinalise wasn't the only one blaming herself over being the cause of Paul's death.

"I will never blame you! Nor anyone else!"

"Fine then, but you can't go blaming yourself either then."

"...I won't."

"Then, I'm off!"

Elinalise says that, and promptly runs off into the snow.

Her own return report will start after this.

"...Whew."

I heave a long sigh.

My white breath fades away into the snow.

Now then.

Now then, with the matter of the Teleport Incident, it seems I have finally come to the long end of it all.

All the family I had lost, I had found again.

In the world, while there may be others who have not yet been found, I no longer feel any obligation to look for them anymore.

It was concluded.

It was long, and painful.

And the final result left a bitter taste.

However, it is the next developments from here,

Instead of looking behind me; it is now time for me to be facing forward.

There are things in this world that I want to do that I have still not done after all.

I must have a point to fix my eyes on.

“Rudi. Has everybody already returned?”

I look around, and see Roxy standing behind me.

“I wanted to talk with them a little, too...”

“They are still in this town, it'll be easy to meet with them when you have some free time.”

“That's true.”

Roxy doesn't begin walking away in the snow.

She alone will be staying in this house.

Though it is dependent on the upcoming discussion as to whether she becomes a resident of a nearby hotel, or this house.

“Well then, Roxy.”

“Yeah, Rudeus.”

“Shall we go inside...?”

I return into the house.

Accompanying me is Roxy, small in stature.

CHAPTER 14

HELL

1

Five people remained in the room. They were Sylphy, Norn, Aisha, Roxy and I. Also, Jirou, the armadillo, was happily sleeping in front of the fireplace, but it should be fine if I don't count him.

Lilia and Zenith are in the bath. Before they went in, Lilia asked me [Will you be okay?] to which I nodded. I want to end this discussion without Lilia's help.

Norn hasn't returned to her room and stays here, with us. But as expected, it was tough on her as she is still sniffing. Since she was attached to Paul, it should be tougher on her than other people.

"Now then, there's one last topic."

When I say this, the three of them straighten up in their chairs.

I exchange looks with Roxy. Without saying anything, Roxy moves to my side.

"..."

Seeing Sylphy's swollen belly, I hesitate about the next topic. However, I have a responsibility. One day, Roxy will become like this too. If for instance Sylphy says no, then Roxy might have to deliver a child by herself. That's what the two of us have agreed on for now. Of course, I plan on giving her money and support though.

"I was thinking of accepting Roxy here, as my second wife."

"...Eh?"

The one who raises a bewildered voice isn't Sylphy, but Norn. Standing up, her gaze alternates between Roxy and I. As for Sylphy, she is staring blankly.

“W-, what is this!?”

“I plan on explaining from start to finish.”

I explain what happened on the Begaritto continent.

About how Paul died and how depressed I was.

About how, seeing this, Roxy saved me.

About how it seemed that I was in love with Roxy.

About how I respected her, and wanted her to become a member of our family.

“Though I had no intention of betraying Sylphy, in the end, I broke my promise. I'm sorry.”

I kneeled down. Though there was a carpet spread across the floor, northern winters are cold, so the floor was cold. I pressed my head deeply against the floor.

“Eh-, wai-, Rudi!?”

I could hear Sylphy's flustered voice.

“I still love you, Sylphy. But, I might have gotten Roxy pregnant. I have to take responsibility.”

“Ah, okay.”

The more words I pile up, the cheaper they sound to me. However, they're my true thoughts.

When I look at Sylphy, I find that she has a troubled face. Her mind might be in chaos. It's understandable. A person said that they loved you, and that they would come back without fail. When they do come back, they are in tatters. They've lost their family and their left hand. But because of the fact that at least their life is intact, you are thinking that it is something to be happy about; when suddenly they say something about making some other woman their wife.

Were it me, I'd shout, and shout, and condemn them.

But, I'll speak. Even if it's unreasonable, I'll speak words to force my way through.

“Sylphy. Please forgive me, and allow it.”

“There's no way you could be forgiven, right!?”

It was Norn. The one who shouted wasn't Sylphy, but Norn. She powers over to me and grabs my collar.

“Are you going to say you know what kind of feelings Sylphy-nee had when she was waiting for you, Nii-san!?”

“...”

“Every day, [I wonder if Rudi is okay], [I want to see Rudi], [I wonder if Rudi's eaten dinner yet] she'd say. Do you know how lonely Sylphy-nee's voice and expressions were!?”

I don't. Though I don't, I can imagine it. Sylphy's face as she waited for me. Sylphy's lonely voice. Sylphy's form as she idled on a chair, swinging her legs about.

“I thought that it couldn't be helped if Otou-san couldn't be saved! Since it was that difficult a fight and you'd even lost your hand, I thought it couldn't be helped! That's why I thought it'd be barking up the wrong tree if I blamed you, Nii-san, but you actually had the leisure to sleep with another woman and make her yours!?”

“That's not it. I didn't have that sort of leisure. It's because things were like that, that Roxy ignored her own feelings and helped me.”

“Were Sylphy-nee there, she'd definitely have helped you!”

That's probably absolutely true. Sylphy has helped me. The one who cured my ED was Sylphy.

However, Roxy has also helped me. She liked me, and despite her knowing that I had someone I loved, she was prepared to throw away her own feelings to help me.

“Norn, even you should understand, right? The feelings you have when you lock yourself in your room, when you have no way out, when you feel that you can't do anything. How could you ignore the person who saved you from that?”

“I understand! I'm thankful to you, Nii-san! But, this and that are different matters! If you take two wives, Milis-sama won't forgive you!”

Aah. I see. Norn was an adherent of Milis, huh? No, it probably doesn't have to do with

her faith, huh. I've done something wrong. I try to ignore reason, and force my way through.

“In the first place, why a small kid like this!? Isn't she about the same age as me!?”

Norn glares at Roxy. Expressionless as usual, Roxy looks at Norn. Roxy is a little taller, but the difference in height probably isn't even 10 centimeters. Receiving Norn's gaze without expression, Roxy simply says,

“...I might be small, but I'm still an adult.”

I don't know what to say. You could almost see into Roxy's heart by listening to that trembling voice.

But depending on how you took it, those words could probably be interpreted as impudence. Norn is enraged.

“If you're an adult, then shouldn't you know some shame!?”

“...”

“Don't you think anything of butting into our family like this!?”

“Norn, you've said too much. The one who proposed making her my second wife was I. Roxy hasn't done anything wrong. Roxy had wanted to back away.”

I refuted Norn in a strong tone. However, Norn continues to condemn Roxy without looking at me.

“Please be quiet, Nii-san! In the first place, if she was going to back away, why didn't she stick to it? In the end, she just took advantage of your words, Nii-san!”

I have a thought to hit Norn. However, it goes without saying that I'm not qualified to do such a thing. If I hit Norn here, I'll probably become worthless in the true meaning of the word.

“...”

At Norn's shout, Roxy stays quiet for a while. With her usual expressionless face, she's

hanging her head and looking at the floor. In the end, she finally raises her head and bows to Norn.

“You're right. I'm being shameless. I'm sorry.”

Saying this, Roxy gets up and slowly moves. Picking up the luggage she left in the corner of the room and putting on her hat, she quickly leaves. I can't stop her. I understand why they're opposed. I didn't think that they would humor me and easily accept it. But even so, I thought that I'd be able to persuade them somehow.

But I was naive. I consider the current situation. Roxy was relentlessly attacked with words. She probably feels like she's on a bed of nails.

Her life might continue to be this way from now on. Thinking about it, she didn't want to stay here.

Were it me, I'd run away from somewhere like this.

I can't stop her.

I can't hold her back.

But I can't let Roxy leave here with ill feelings.

I don't want that.

I have to pay her back.

I didn't bring her here to make her feel this way.

I brought her here because I wanted her to be happy.

Or could it be something else?

No, think.

What should I do?

What should I do to make Norn accept it?

I can't think of anything.

Roxy is leaving.

I have to stop her at least.

Right, even if I hit Norn and she hates me-

“Wait!”

I hear a voice behind me.

“Roxy-san, please wait!”

It is Sylphy. She has stood up, trots over to Roxy, and grabs her hand. Roxy turns around, and large tears are gathered in her eyes.

“Why are you stopping her, Sylphy-nee! Isn't it fine just to let her go!?”

“Norn-chan. Could you be quiet for a little bit?”

“Eh?”

“Just now you said too much, you know. From the beginning, I never said a word about refusing, after all.”

At Sylphy's words, Norn becomes speechless and freezes.

“Please sit down.”

Paying a backward glance to the frozen Norn, Sylphy sits Roxy down on the sofa. Roxy doesn't resist and did as she is told. Sylphy too, takes a seat next to Roxy.

“Though things have gotten a little chaotic... You saved Rudi, right, Roxy-san?”

Asked that, Roxy meekly nods.

“...Yes. But I had ulterior motives, so I don't plan on using it as an excuse.”

“Mn. Rudi is cool, isn't he? On the contrary, had you said that you didn't have ulterior motives, I wouldn't have believed you.”

“...”

“Were I in your shoes, Roxy-san, I think I really would've done the same thing.”

Sylphy makes a gentle expression, smiling at Roxy. Roxy's face is stiff. Whilst smiling, Sylphy continues.

“...You know, honestly speaking, I thought that it was just a matter of time.”

“Umm, sorry, what was?”

“Rudi bringing back another woman.”

Me, bringing back another woman was just a matter of time...

...Mn?

...Huh?

Could it be, that they didn't believe in me?

“I mean, look, Rudi is perverted, right? That's why I thought that once he couldn't do it with me; he'd definitely do it with someone else. It was like that for me too; since Rudi is sincere, after doing it he'd probably try to take them in as his wife. I didn't think I'd be able to monopolize Rudi forever, you know.”

I want to speak up. But, it really is as she said. I'm not qualified to say anything.

“Though, honestly speaking, I thought that when he did bring someone back, it'd be someone like Rinia, or Pursena, or maybe Nanahoshi-san.”

“Besides the name Nanahoshi-san, I haven't heard the other names.”

“They're Rudi's friends from school. All of them are sexy with big chests.”

Nanahoshi isn't particularly sexy, though. No, that kind of thing isn't important right now.

“Honestly, because the story of your journey was so harsh, and Paul-san died as well, so I was a little bewildered, but... I understood.”

“About what?”

“Because you had always been looking at Rudi anxiously since coming to our house, I was wondering what was wrong. At first, I thought it was because you were nervous about telling us about Paul-san's death, but... it was actually 'that' after all.”

“...”

“Roxy-san, your eyes are those of a maiden in love, after all.”

A maiden in love. Being told that, Roxy's face is dyed bright red.

“Excuse me. I've shown you something unpleasant...”

Her face still red, Roxy bows her head. From the perspective of a wife, a woman looking at her husband lovingly would probably be an eyesore. That line of thinking is something you can vividly understand. However, Sylphy shakes her head.

“It wasn't unpleasant, you know.”

“...However.”

“I wonder how I should say it...”

Sylphy tilts her head in thought for a little, and then quickly goes, 'Mn,' and nods.

“You know, I've heard about you from Rudi before, Roxy-san.”

“What about?”

“Just that 'Roxy' was a magician that he respected. Before the Teleport incident, and then after we got married as well, he said the same thing.”

“...That's um, I'm humbled.”

“That's why I was a little jealous as well. Whenever Rudi spoke about you, he looked like he really~ longed for you.”

“...”

“I one-sidedly thought of Roxy Migurdia as an amazing enough magician that someone like me would never be able to compare with her.”

“...”

“But when I actually saw you, when I thought of you as just a normal girl who was in love with Rudeus, my jealousy vanished.”

Saying that, Sylphy takes off Roxy's hat and strokes her head. Looking up at Sylphy, Roxy doesn't resist, and lets herself be pat. Sylphy then speaks.

“Though Norn-chan said what she did, I'll welcome you.”

Roxy's face was in shock. My jaw drops in shock as well. Not even in my dreams did I think Sylphy would so easily accept it.

“Sylphiette... -san.”

“Just 'Sylphy' is fine. Let's get along. Umm, Roxy-... chan?”

“Um, I technically turn 50 this year, so adding -chan is...”

“Ah, so that's how it is. You're my elder... Sorry. Come to think of it, that's right. I'd heard about this from Rudi, but actually seeing it, you know...?”

“I'm small, after all.”

“I'm not big either, you know?”

Roxy and Sylphy's gazes meet, and the two of them laugh.

“Let's support Rudi together, Roxy.”

“Thank you very much, Sylphy.”



Saying this, the two shake hands. It is a handshake filled with an odd sense of solidarity.

Seeing this, I let out a sigh of relief. It seems things will be fine. I unconsciously let my feelings show. However, seeing me, Norn's eyebrows knit together in a frown.

“If Sylphy-nee says so, then I don't have anything left to say either.”

It seems that Norn still can't accept it. Her mouth upturned in a \frown , she's glaring at us with an unhappy expression. We might be scorned by her again. However, Sylphy softly pacifies her.

“Norn-chan. Rudi isn't a follower of Milis, so please forgive him.”

“But...”

“Even Paul-san had two wives, you know?”

“...That was certainly the case, but...”

“Norn-chan. Will you say this to Lilia-san, as well?”

Norn looks like she gasped, and looks at Aisha, who was sitting by her side. Aisha has been sitting there silently the whole time, with a prim and proper expression.

“Ah-... Sorry, Aisha.”

“It's fine, it's fine. I know that Norn-nee often says things without thinking.”

“...What's with that way of speaking!?”

“I mean, look. Even just now, you said something like that, right? Despite what Sylphy-nee said, you just forced your own thoughts on us, didn't you, Norn-nee?”

“Wha-!”

Norn violently stands up. Seeing her clenched fists, I scold Aisha.

“Aisha, you've said too much.”

“But Onii-chan.”

“I can understand what Norn wants to say. Honestly, despite what Sylphy said, it's an abnormal situation. If it's not considerate of others' feelings, I'm guilty of that too. You

mustn't criticise Norn."

"Well, if you're going to say that much, Onii-chan..."

"..."

Norn is making a complicated expression. Like she didn't know what to do, at all. It was that kind of expression.

"...I'm going to sleep."

She quickly makes to leave the living room. However, as though she suddenly remembers something, she stops her feet and turns to me. She half-mutters.

"Um, Onii-san..."

"What is it?"

"Next time, could you teach me the sword?"

For a moment, I didn't understand what she is saying.

The sword. Does she mean that she wants to use Paul's sword?

I get the feeling that if she learns half-assed self-defense; on the contrary, she'll only end up ruining her body. But this is that kind of world. It'd probably be better to know swordsmanship. Even if it were only a small strength, it'd be better than nothing, after all. The problem would be whether I'd be of use as a teacher.

"Are you fine with me?"

"Though I still can't really accept what you've done, I don't hate you, Onii-san."

"...Yeah."

What I had meant was [Are you fine with someone who just half-assed the sword], but..... Well, if I'm told that she doesn't hate me, then I'm not going to refuse.

"Alright. I'll make room after school or sometime."

"Please do."

Saying this, Norn returns to her room.

“ ... ”

At any rate, I guess the result was all right, huh? In the end, I couldn't do a thing, huh. I was saved by Sylphy's magnanimity.

“You know, Onii-chan,” starts Aisha, “Right now you look incredibly pathetic, you know?”

Without replying, I agree.

2

After that, the three of us are planning and discussing what we would do from now on. The turns we'll take sleeping together, for example, or times when we could fawn on each other. It might have been because we were frankly speaking about things like that too, but Aisha decides to take her exit.

“Well then, Roxy-san. From tomorrow onwards, please take care of me.”

“Yes. Please look after me as well.”

Despite grumbling, Aisha looks a little happy. I wonder why. ^[44]

Well, whatever. It's Sylphy, Roxy, and I as well. The three of us now start our discussion. You might be wondering what the hell we're talking about when Paul's died. However, it's exactly because of that, that we want a cheerful topic.

“Basically, please have Rudi treat Sylphy as the main wife, and just spare me some time whenever you're free. I'm fine with it like that.”

“That's no good. We have to be treated equally.”

“However...”

“The number of wives might still increase, so why don't we be confident?”

Might still increase. You can feel Sylphy's lack of trust in my nether regions with those words.

However, this time I swear on it. I swear only to love Sylphy and Roxy. This time, definitely.

“Honestly, I feel really sorry about intruding like this, so I'll be holding back until the child is born.”

“I see... We did say that it'd only be a month until it's born, but I'll be monopolizing Rudi until then. Is that okay?”

“I'm fine with it. Well then, let's make it so that I won't officially become his wife until a month from now.”

“...”

Despite this situation, I ended up thinking something like 'it's a shame I'll be celibate this month'; I'm probably a worthless person, huh. But when I think that after this month when Sylphy gives birth, I'll get to sleep with the two of them as much as I want... Just what is this? My 'son'^[45] starts to stand up.

“...”

“...”

Or, so I was thinking, but the moment I give in to my delusions, the two of them turn their gazes to me.

“Umm, Rudi. When you really can't bear with it anymore, say so, okay? I'll deal with it somehow.”

“No, I'll take care of it on my own, somehow.”

No matter how bad I may be, in this kind of situation I'm not going to cheat even more. I'll have them feel that the one known as Rudeus Greyrat won't make mistakes due to his sexual stirrings. The reason I went along with Roxy was because, in addition to the situation being what it was, it was Roxy. Regarding falling in love with them, as long as no more Roxy-Class women appear, there won't be a problem.

I definitely won't cheat anymore.

Definitely, definitely not.

“Ah, but weren't you pregnant as well, Roxy? In that case, after a month you won't be able to do it anymore, right? What should we do?”

At Sylphy's words, Roxy made an apologetic face.

“Um, if it's about what Rudi said earlier, I think it was a lie Rudi came up with. There wasn't a chance for me to say anything, but I'm not pregnant.”

“...Eh-?”

She's not pregnant. Then, saying that 'it' didn't come...

“...Ahh.”

Elinalise led me along, huh?

That bitch.

Shit.

It feels like I've been dancing in the palm of her hand.

“What's wrong, Rudi?”

“Ah, that wasn't a lie; I just misunderstood.”

“I see.”

Roxy scratches her red cheeks and speaks to me.

“But in the future, let's try our best.”

“Ah, yes. Let's.”

Words like 'happy family planning' come to mind and I can't help but grin. Ahh, it'll be great from now on.

“Rudi's a pervert, isn't he?”

“Yeah. Rudi's a pervert, Sylphy.”

“I wonder what kind of things the perverted Rudi is going to make us do.”

While we had such a conversation, we laughed.

Like that, I managed to gain my second wife.

3

After that, Lilia and Zenith had finished their bath, and after Lilia prepared our rooms for us, they went to sleep.

As we decided earlier, I sleep together with Sylphy. I let Sylphy use my arm as a pillow, and Sylphy decides to go to sleep facing me.

We weren't asleep yet. Our gazes met, and we stare in silence.

"It's about what we spoke about earlier, but..."

The one who speaks first was Sylphy.

"When you said that you had something important to say, and Roxy was sitting next to you, I ended up imagining something really sad."

"What?"

"I thought that you might say that you didn't love me, so you were going to leave me."

"I wouldn't say something like that."

What kind of trash would?

"Mn. I know."

Sylphy shifted about. I could feel her with the tip of my missing wrist. She was stroking me.

"But I really am anxious after all. It feels like you're going to leave my side."

I wonder if she's feeling a sense of foreboding. But thinking about it, I really was in danger this time. I might have even died.

"Did I make you anxious?"

"Mn."

“There, there.”

I stroke Sylphy's head with my right arm. Sylphy narrows her eyes and lets me pat her. If you look more carefully, she's actually grown out her hair at some point. Her beautiful, white hair. She might be able to tie it up in a ponytail, soon.

“You let your hair grow, huh.”

“After all, you said you liked long hair, right, Rudi?”

“Mn.”

She's so cute... Even though she has been waiting for me, all this time, on the other hand, I...

“Sorry, Sylphy. I've betrayed you.”

“It's okay. I like that part of you.”

“But were it the other way around, I'm sure I'd cry and scream disgracefully, shouting abuses at you like [You must feel great, betraying me, huh!] you know?”

“Mmhuhu... I won't do something like that. I don't see anyone but you, after all.”

Saying that, Sylphy brings her face to mine and kisses me on the cheek. Love overflows from within my chest. Though she was probably anxious, though she probably wanted to cry out, she didn't voice a single complaint, and accepted it. I'll love her until I die.

“Sylphy.”

“Ehehe.”

I return Sylphy's kiss on her soft and squishy cheek.

“...”

At this point, I'd usually charge into the actual thing, but today I'll stop here. There's no way I'd force the pregnant Sylphy to do anything unreasonable after all.

Suddenly, I felt a stroking sensation at my abdomen.

“Ahh, don't, Sylphy. If you touch me there, I won't be able to hold back. Well, I do have interest in pregnancy play, but...”

“Ah, don't, Rudi. It'll harm our child, so...”

“Mn?”

“Eh?”

When I look down, I find that next to Sylphy's pregnant belly is an even bigger mountain. I try pulling back the blanket. When I did, there was...

“Jirou...”

From under the bed, the huge armadillo has stuck his head right between Sylphy and I. I wonder when he did so. I really didn't notice at all.

“Sticking his head into people's crotches. What a perverted guy, huh?”

“He's like you, huh?”

“No, I... It can't be helped. Shall we sleep together, tonight?”

“Mn. Let's.”

I get up and grab another blanket, and make a bed for Jirou. Jirou sprawls himself on top of it and slowly shuts his eyes. Though he looks like an armadillo, he feels like a large dog.

It seems I'll have to prepare a small room for him before long, huh. Raising him in the house is fine, but taking care of his feces is troublesome, after all. Wait, I wonder if I can train him like a dog, as well. Well, I guess I'll have another talk with our family.

“Alright. Guess it's time to sleep.”

I was about to slip in on Sylphy's right, but stopped. I get in bed on Sylphy's left and grasp her hand with mine. Sylphy strongly grasps, squeezing back. ^[46]

“Goodnight, Sylphy.”

“Mn. Have a good rest, Rudi.”

After that, I slept like a log.

CHAPTER 15

IN FRONT OF THE GRAVESTONE

1

Several days have passed since Roxy became my wife.

I still feel uneasy that some kind of disaster may happen, but it's gradually faded recently.

Zenith has taken up residence in one of the large rooms in this house as well.

It was the room in which the old residents died, so I said to Lilia that it might be best not to do it.

However, Zenith was quite pleased and didn't want to separate from it, so it can't be helped.

Seeing that, Lilia also said there was probably nothing to worry about.

Well, I'm sure having a large room is better than a small room for Zenith after all.

I'm not all that familiar with recuperation and nursing, but spacious should be better than confined.

Naturally, we've also brought Zenith to a doctor.

Through Ariel's referral, to an excellent physician known throughout Ranoa Kingdom. However, it seems he has no knowledge about cases like this, the treatment method is unknown as well, so we had to give up. ^[47]

As I thought, it seems the medical techniques in this world doesn't depend very strongly on past records.

Maybe it's because there's healing magic, but the treatment methods in this world are a bit deviated.

Even so, we were able to receive some guidance to rehabilitate people who have lost their memories.

We don't know if she'll get better or not, but it should be better than doing nothing.

...If I have a chance, it might also be good to try searching for a magic tool for recovering lost memories.

Of course, I don't know if such a thing even exists or not.

Looking at it over the long term, we might have no choice other than to go for treatment.

We don't know either what Zenith's home in the Holy Kingdom of Milis might say.

In regards to Zenith, there's still some uneasiness remaining.

2

Sylphy's progress is going well.

Recently, the child in her stomach has started to kick, so she's pleasantly allowed me to touch her stomach.

In addition, I tried groping her breasts that had swelled up from the influence of the pregnancy and she got pretty angry.

It seems it hurts to touch them strongly.

I hadn't intended to touch them all that strongly, but it seems she was surprised because I

suddenly did it.

If I'm going to touch them, then gently, she requested.

It was a way of requesting that made me want to push her down just like that.

Thinking about it, before, I've lost to this seduction of Sylphy's numerous times and pushed her down.

However, she's pregnant right now.

I can't afford to expose my desires.

Even though I say that, I still want to touch things I want to touch.

I thoroughly accepted her invitation to gently touch them.

After all, it seems there's change to your body while pregnant.

It wasn't a chest of Sylphy's that I used to grope.

I'm the one that changed it. Thinking like that, I somehow felt a kind of unspeakable happiness.

I wonder if this is the so-called feeling of domination.

Yeah, Sylphy belongs to me.

However, as I thought, not having my left hand is inconvenient.

I miss those time when I could grope her breasts with both hands.

Something that I had two of has been reduced to one after all, so the feeling of satisfaction has been halved.

I wonder if it's a bit more until milk comes out.

If I say I want to try tasting them a bit, I wonder if she'll get angry.

I wonder if she'll scorn me.

I wonder about asking just once to try it.

It might be best not to do it though.

However, just once...

"Rudi, you really likes my breasts, don't you?"

"Yeah, Sylphy's breasts are small, but number one in the world."

"Number one in the world, you say... Even though you put your hands on another girl?"

"S,S,So, Sorry please forgive me."

"Eh~, I'm not angry."

While having such a sweet conversation, my relationship with Sylphy is also going favorably.

If this were Japan in my previous life, I'm sure it would have been considerably stiff.

This is a different world and Sylphy is understanding.

Whether I take two or three wives to marry as well, it's fine just as long as I love them equally.

If you were to ask about my other wife Roxy, she's taken up one of the small rooms on the second floor.

It's one of the smallest rooms on the second floor.

I did say it would be fine to take a larger room, but it seems she likes small rooms.

I don't hate small rooms either.

Because scents build up.

Roxy became a teacher at the Magic University.

One time, I introduced her while to reporting my return, but I'll save this story for later.

3

One month later.

A day with strong snow.

Sylphy went into labor.

There were no particular problems, it was a normal delivery.

It was neither a breech nor premature birth.

If there was a problem, it would just be the snow being too high, so calling the doctor wouldn't make it in time.

If it were my previous life, I'm sure that would be something to panic over, but fortunately, there is Lilia in my house.

For her who has an abundance of experience as a midwife, even without me asking anything, she moved quickly with Aisha following her orders.

While teaching Aisha the process, Lilia carefully said one thing at a time.

Just in case, if anything comes up, Roxy and I are on standby at the side.

There's a big difference between being able to use healing magic and not being able to use it in an emergency after all. ^[48]

Even though I say that, I was completely spacing out at the time.

Something like healing magic was nowhere near entering my mind.

I was doing my best just tightly holding Sylphy's hand as she was suffering.

“Seeing Rudeus-sama right now, it reminds me of the lady... the time of Norn-sama's delivery.”

After hearing Lilia saying those words, I remembered the past.

Norn's was a breech birth, both the mother and child were in a dangerous condition.

Paul was useless and just got all nervous on his own.

That time, I moved calmly, but right now, I'm in this state.

That I was able to handle things well as a child is the same whether it be in this world or my previous one.

“However, please rest easy, Rudeus-sama. Sylphy-sama is fine. There's nothing to worry about at all.”

While saying that Lilia, indifferently continued her work.

That handling was enough to be charmed by.

Even after being told it was fine, my trembling wouldn't settle.

Holding onto Sylphy's hand, calling out “hihhiffu”, and wiping the sweat from her forehead were all I could manage to do.

Sylphy was making a painful face, but after looking at me in a fluster, she giggled a bit and smiled.

“Umm... It would be better for Rudi to relax a bit more.”

Aisha suddenly whistled out those words.

Lilia hit Aisha's head with a [peshiri]. ^[49]

Seeing that, Sylphy lightly smiled.

“Nn!!?”

The instant the place loosened up, the wave came.

“Sylphiette-sama. Okay, please take a deep breath.”

“Nn...!”

I quietly watched over as Sylphy gave her best.

The only things coming out from my mouth were just words of encouragement.

I did have the feelings that I needed to do something, but I couldn't do anything.

In rhythm with Lilia's voice heaving, Sylphy made a painful face.

It was born.

The baby who was safely born into this world raised an energetic first cry.

It's a girl.

With the same color of hair as mine; it's a cute girl.

She was held in Lilia's arms and then passed over to Sylphy.

Sylphy embraced the baby and breathed a sigh of relief.

“Thank goodness... her hair, isn't green.”

Hearing those words that Sylphy whispered out, I caressed her head.

Sylphy's beautiful white hair.

It used to be emerald green hair.

“...I guess so.”

Even if the child was born with emerald green hair I had no intention of blaming Sylphy.

Obviously. For me, the emerald green of this world is one of my favorite colors after all.

Green is Sylphy's and also Rujierd's color.

Even Roxy's hair color, in some light, it reflects as if it shines emerald green.

I like the color green.

If they're going to discriminate against emerald green, even if the enemy is the world,
I'll show
you.

“Good work, Sylphy.”

“Yeah.”

But, even if I have those sorts of intentions, this world isn't the same.

Emerald green hair is just that much of a taboo.

A daughter born with the same hair color as mine.

We have no choice other than to thank God for this good fortune.

My God is in the corner of the room tightly grasping her staff making a pale face
though.

“Here, Rudi hold her as well.”

“Yeah.”

Holding a baby.

The high body temperature and crying voice that's noisy.

Small hands, small head, small lips, small nose...

It's all overflowing with life.

When I think that this is my child, I can feel something rising up from within my chest.

My child that Sylphy gave birth to.

“...”

Tears were coming out.

Paul has already died.

However, my child was born.

Paul allowed me to keep living.

If it weren't for him, I wouldn't be able to hold my child.

In exchange for that, Paul isn't able to hold his wives, daughters, or even grandchildren.

I wonder if Paul would regret not being able to be in this place.

Or maybe he would laugh proudly and boast that it's thanks to him.

In any case, I have no choice other than to go on living.

For the sake of this child as well, I can't die.

Sylphy as well, my family as well, I have no choice other than to protect them.

I'll go on living in this world.

I'll go on living.

We took the first letters of Sylphy and my name to name our daughter Lucy. ^[50]

It's Lucy Greyrat.

Aisha laughed that it was simple and Lilia hit her head.

Nevertheless, I'm glad that it was a girl.

If... it had been a boy, I might have ended up naming it Paul after all.

4

After that, I was driven out of the room by Lilia.

Since it seems there're various things to do, I was told to wait.

For now, I move and sit down on the sofa.

I didn't do much, but I'm suddenly exhausted.

Roxy sat down next to me.

She let out a sigh while making an exhausted face as well.

Roxy did even less than me.

No matter how you look at it, I'm sure it's mental fatigue.

"It's my first time seeing the moment a person is born. It's amazing, isn't it?"

"I... wonder how many times. I guess this would be about the third time. Though, when it's my own child, it's awfully tiring."

I'm sure Sylphy is even more tired.

It won't be good if I don't thank her with all my might later.

"I wonder if I was born like that as well."

"Well, I'm sure that's the case for everyone."

Though I don't know about things in regards to the Migurudo race.

As long as they're in the shape of a person, I'm sure there's no large differences.

"...I will be able to give birth like that as well, won't I?"

When I took a look at Roxy, she was looking up at me with a somewhat blushing face.

I took my shoes off and sat in seiza on top of the sofa.

"Yes. I feel that I will be in your care for that time."

Sylphy's child has been born.

In other words, that sort of lifestyle with Roxy will begin.

Honestly, I'm looking forward to it.

Even though my child with Sylphy was only just born. I sure am a no good person.

Although, I don't hate that part of myself.

I think Paul might have had those sort of feelings as well and I can't hate it.

I'm looking forward to it from now on.

Thinking that, I smile and Roxy's face turns bright red as she holds her own body.

"Rudi, you're making an extremely perverted face."

"I was born with this face."

Right. It's been so since the time I was born.

I've been like this since the time I was born.

"..."

Ah, that's right.

Before I start that sort of lifestyle together with Roxy.

There's someone whom I have to report that I've made a child to first.

5

Next day.

I proceeded alone towards Paul's grave.

Paul's grave was towards the outskirts.

It's a graveyard on an elevated hill for nobles.

Paul might find it unpleasant being together with the likes of nobles.

But the maintenance is better than general use graveyard. He'll have to endure it.

I stand in the snow in front of the round Ranoa style gravestone.

I don't know what Paul's religion was.

I think he didn't believe in something like God as well.

Even if we were to mistake something like his sect, he was the type of man who wouldn't be bothered by it after all, I'm sure he would forgive us.

Although in reality, I'm sure it would have been better to make his grave in Asura Kingdom around the Buina Village area.

This land has no relation or connection with Paul.

But if I were to make it in a place too far away from my house, we wouldn't be able to visit the grave.

I've told Gisu and the others about this place as well.

Everyone already came to visit at one point.

That time, each and every one gathered things that Paul likes.

Like alcohol and daggers.

Gisu and Talhand started a grand drinking bout in front of his grave, the grave keeper got angry.

I held the alcohol bottle I bought on the way under my arm and cleaned Paul's grave.

Removing the snow on top of the gravestone, polishing it with the cloth I brought along.

It wasn't a difficult operation at all.

The road on the way here was shut off because of the snow, but the snow around the grave itself was removed to some extent by the grave keeper.

After cleaning and leaving the alcohol bottle in front of the grave, I pray with one hand.

I thought about buying some flowers as an offering, but they weren't selling any.

In this Northern region, trying to get your hands on some flowers in winter is difficult, I'm sure.

Well, he wasn't a man who had a hobby of admiring flowers.

"Paul... Tou-san. Yesterday, my child was born. It's a girl. Since it's Sylphy's child, I'm sure she'll become a beauty."

I sat in front of the grave and reported it to Paul like this.

"I wanted to show her to Tou-san as well."

If Paul were to see Lucy, I'm sure he would have jumped around in high spirits until Zenith chided him.

It's a celebration, saying something like that and drinking alcohol together with me,

getting completely drunk, sexually harassing Lilia, and making Zenith shocked.

Such a scene vividly floated in front of my eyes.

Though it's only a story if Paul were safely able to keep on living and Zenith hadn't lost her memories.

“Roxy-sensei has become my wife. I have two wives. The same as Tou-san. I would have liked it if you had taught me how to be ready for times like this.”

Thinking about it, that time.

In that labyrinth.

I wonder if it was that sort of thing that Paul wanted to talk to me about.

Knowing that Roxy liked me.

And that I liked Roxy as well.

I wonder if he wanted to teach me how to be ready for having two wives.

“Different from Tou-san, it's not like I suddenly have two daughters, but I think eventually Roxy will get pregnant and give birth to my child as well. That's still far in the future, but it would be nice if I can raise them to be as energetic as Norn and Aisha.”

I have no intention of saying bad things about Lilia's education, but I'd like to raise my children impartially to the end.

Without any kind of weird distortions like being half Magic race and such.

“It seems Sylphy thinks that there will be even more wives from here on out in the future though. I don't have such intention, but they do say things that happen twice happen three times. That might end up becoming the case...”

I wonder if Paul ever considered marrying Ghyslaine or Elinalize or Vera.

It seems like he had a relationship of the flesh with Ghyslaine after all, I think he would consider it at least once.

Well, Paul thought about things in that area even looser than me, it might be that he never even gave it any thought.

“It might also be better for me not to overthink about things too much.”

After facing the gravestone and asking that, I felt like I could see Paul's teasing smile.
It was just the smile and I couldn't hear Paul's words.

But I'm sure it's not like Paul didn't think about it either.

I feel that he was always agonizing over it.

Something like fellows that are able to live without thinking in this world, there shouldn't be many of them.

“...Tou-san. I'm a no good son. I have something like memories of my previous life. I couldn't properly love Tou-san.”

I stood up while saying that.

Holding the alcohol bottle in my hand, I took the first sip.

After savoring the burn in my throat from the strong drink, I poured it over the grave.

“But now, I intend to be a proper son.”

Drowning yourself in alcohol and making mistakes like Paul, alcohol might not be all that good of a thing.

But I'm sure it's fine today.

At any rate, it's celebrations for the birth after all.

“My own child has been born, becoming a parent. Finally, I understood it. That I was still nothing but a child. That I was just a brat pretending to be an adult with memories of my previous life.”

Drinking, pouring, drinking, pouring.

The alcohol bottle quickly went empty.

“Though I feel that I need to quickly become an adult, I'm sure I won't be able to become one until I make a lot more mistakes. But it was the same for Tou-san, so I'll give my best as well.”

I closed the alcohol bottle with the lid and placed it in front of the grave.

“Then, I'll come again. I'll be bringing along everyone next time.”

Saying that, I faced away from Paul's grave.

A variety of things have come to a close.

Painful things have happened and happy things have happened as well.

But it's not the end.

I'll still go on living in this world.

I'll go on living.

In order to not regret it no matter when I die.

Seriously. ^[51]



SIDE STORY

IS THE MAD DOG'S SWORD HEAVY, OR SHARP?

1

The western edge of the Northern Lands.

The Holy Land of Swords.

This land had seen battle before.

This place that was presently the headquarters of the Sword God Style had seen for a time the prominence of the Water God Style. It was only 100 years ago. The Water God of a certain generation had dueled the Sword God and taken this land from him. That Water God himself had been defeated by another Sword God and the Holy Land returned to the hands of the Sword God Style. However, since then, this place had become the place where the strongest swordsman of the generation would stay and teach the sword.

To be taught by the strongest swordsman. If possible, defeat the strongest swordsman and thus become the strongest yourself. To swordsmen who harbored these kind of wishes, this was a place that they would wish to visit at least once.

Right now, two unusual people arrived at this land.

One of them was a person who was older than 60. An old woman. Though she wore a difficult expression, she was someone whose whole appearance could bestow upon others a sense of ease. Though she was currently dressed as a traveler, were her clothes different, she wouldn't look out of place sitting in a soft chair, knitting or embroidering something.

There was just one thing that departed from that image; hanging at her hip was a single short sword. Moreover, if you looked carefully you'd realize that she didn't have a single opening. If you were a skilled swordsman, you could tell with a glance that no matter where you thrust your sword, it wouldn't meet its target.

To tell you the truth, she was the Water God <Reyda Liia> after all. Mastering the Water God Secret Art <Sword of Deprivation>, she was one of those who could be called the 'strongest swordsman of the generation'.

The one who was accompanying Reyda was a young woman. She was 20 years old, give or take, and her looks resembled Reyda. She was wearing traveler's clothing like Reyda, and she too had a sword at her hip.

"Oshishou-sama. Is this the Holy Land of Swords?"

"That's exactly right. It's the den of beasts that you kept saying you wanted to go to."

"I'm nervous."

"It'll be fine as long as you trust in your sword. As long as it isn't the Sword God you're up against, you're plenty a match for this place."

"Yes, Oshishou-sama."

While conversing, the two of them entered the Holy Land of Swords. Though it was called the Holy Land of Swords, at first glance it looked just like any other town. It had an inn, it had a weapons shop, and it had an adventurer's guild. There were adventurers, merchants, and they were all walking around busily.

However, if there was one thing strange about it, it was that all of the townsfolk were swordsmen of the Sword God Style. Even the townsgirls here and there with their slim arms were more skilled than most burly adventurers.

"Shall we find an inn first?"

"There's no need; it'll be fine if we just stay at Gull-boy's place."

Saying this, Reyda left the town centre and continued walking further into the town. The further they walked, the fewer the adventurers and merchants became, and the more they would see people in thin clothing wielding wooden swords in dojos by the roadside. The girl that followed behind Reyda turned her head this way and that, regarding the sights as rather novel, and she felt that the people standing in the snow in cold-looking outfits were a fresh sight.

"Oshishou-sama. Though these people are cold, they're wearing very light clothing, aren't they?"

"Those of the Sword God Style that can't move quickly are good-for-nothings after all. Even if it's cold, they can't wear heavy things on their bodies."

"They're the opposite of us who wear thick clothes even when it's hot. It's interesting,

isn't it?"

"It's not."

Without sparing a glance at the roadside dojos, Reyda walked straight ahead. After passing a certain point, whether it was the dojos, the houses, or the young people in light clothing, all of them had disappeared. All that remained was a single path that continued to cut through the snowy landscape like a valley. At the end of it was a house and a large dojo encircled by a wall.

This was the true body of the Holy Land of Swords. It was the great dojo that served as the headquarters of the Sword God Style.

Just as Reyda and her follower reached the entrance of the great dojo, a woman came out of it. Her long hair was tied behind her, and she bore a dignified expression. She had a bucket in her hand and looked as though she may have been going to fetch water. When she noticed the two of them, she immediately threw away the bucket and moved her hand to the sword at her waist in vigilance.

"Do you need something of us?"

After looking at the woman carefully, Reyda's difficult expression lessened a little.

"Ohh, Nina? You've gotten big, huh."

"...?"

At Reyda's words, the woman made a doubtful expression.

"Ahh, don't you remember? There's no helping it I suppose. The last time we met, you were tiny after all."

Though Reyda looked like she was seeing something nostalgic, the woman, Nina Farion, had no recollection of her. All she understood was that the old woman in front of her was no ordinary person. And that the woman next to her was as strong as, or perhaps even stronger than, Nina was.

“Today I've been called here by your boss. Guide us to him, would you?”

“Boss?”

“Gull Farion.”

Nina hesitated at those words. There were many who sought out the Sword God, Gull Farion. However, the majority of them were a conceited lot who didn't know their places and sought to take the Sword God title themselves. Nina and the other disciples had the duty of turning them away.

“It may be impolite, but may I ask for your name?”

“It's Reyda. Reyda Liia. You understand just which Reyda Liia I am, right?”

“-! I understand. Please come this way.”

However, the moment Nina heard her name; she bowed once to her and brought her inside.

In this world, there was only one who could boldly declare themselves as Reyda Liia. They were the top of the Water God Style; only the Water God called herself Reyda Liia.

Though Nina had considered for a moment the possibility that it was someone lying about their name, she could sense something bottomless from this old woman and extinguished that thought. Even if this woman was an imposter, she was someone of great skill.

They were guided by Nina and entered the place of the Sword God Style. Typical of snowy countries, the genkan there had a height difference. There, they shook off the snow, and then continued walking. The floor was wooden and squeaky. Reyda walked ahead whilst looking at Nina, and suddenly commented,

“Though you're young, you're quite obedient and keen, aren't you? Have you become a Sword King yet?”

“No, I'm still not there yet.”

“I see. You're being humble despite probably being the strongest amongst the youngsters here, right?”

“Though I might be the fastest, I'm not the strongest.”

“Ohhh? That's a good attitude. Good enough that I wouldn't think you were a youngster of the Sword God Style.”

While making such conversation, the three of them arrived at the <Space of the Present>.^[52] There sat a single man. As though meditating, his eyes were shut.

Reyda felt like a sword had been thrust at her throat. As one of the heads of the Three Great Sword Styles, the <Water God>, even in her old age she boasted the same strength that she did in her prime. However, only this man's sword was unblockable for her.

For this man was the Sword God, Gull Farion.

“I've brought Reyda Liia-sama.”

“You've come.”

Gull Farion opened his eyes a little and looked at Reyda. Though he glanced at the girl next to her, he immediately lost interest and looked away.

“You've travelled a very long way to come here. Such a long journey must have been tough on your old bones.”

“It really was. But you bowed your head to me, so I came out of curiosity. Down we go...”

Reyda walked over to the Sword God and sat in front of him. Though she had said 'down we go', her movements were smooth like flowing water. A little distance behind her sat Nina, who seemed to be waiting, and the woman Reyda had brought along.

“So, who and what did you want me to teach? Is it fine if I teach this girl?”

Reyda gestured to Nina with her chin and asked the Sword God.

“Well, she seems like a docile girl. Though she might be suited for the Sword God Style, it's not as if she wouldn't be able to use the Water God techniques.”

She had read the letter from the Sword God and came to this land.

<I want you to teach one of my disciples> Normally Reyda would've torn up and thrown away such a letter. However, because the letter was from Sword God Gull Farion who hated relying on others, her interest was perked. However, were it only for such a reason, she wouldn't have come all the way from the Asuran capital.

“However, I have a condition.”

“What?”

“Just as you wish for your own disciples to grow, I wish for you to show my disciple the Sword God Style. There's no need to teach her, so just that much is fine.”

Reyda was sad over the fact that her disciple had grown arrogant. Amongst those learning swordsmanship in the Kingdom of Asura, there were many who were learning the Water God Style, however, few developed any ability. The girl Reyda had brought with her today was one of those few, and because there was no one equal to her amongst her fellow disciples, she had gotten a little carried away. Though she took her training seriously, because she had neither goal nor rival, Reyda had sensed that in this past year her disciple hadn't grown at all.

Reyda had brought her disciple here so that she would be brought down a notch, and because of that, begin to make great growth again. Even if the youngsters of the Sword God Style weren't strong enough to humble her disciple, just battling the Sword God Gull Farion would be cause for great gains in EXP. After all, for those of the Water God Style, the stronger the training partner was, the larger the results of their training.

Moreover, Reyda thought that Gull Farion was thinking the same thing when he called her here. His disciple would cross swords with the Water God Style, and tasting the Water God counters with their own body, they'd be able to grow, she thought.

“That's fine. It's a cheap price to pay.”

“Huhun.^[53] In that case, shall we have our disciples fight a bout?”

Reyda took the initiative and spoke those words. The aim behind those words was to have Nina take her disciple down a notch. Though it would also be fine to have the Sword God fight her, Reyda thought that being humbled by someone of the same generation would be more frustrating.

“That's fine. Nina, call Eris here.”

“...Understood.”

Seeing that exchange, Reyda went [Oh?] and tilted her head. Since meeting her at the entrance earlier, Reyda had thought that Nina would be the one she'd be training.

“Um, Shisho.”

“What is it? Hurry up and bring her here.”

“That is, would it be possible if I participated as well? I'm interested in how far the Water God goes, so...”

“Hah? I was gunna have you do that from the start.”

The Sword God Gull Farion nodded at her request like it was a bother.

“Thank you very much! I'll immediately bring Eris here.”

Hearing his response, for just an instant a happy expression appeared on Nina's face, and then she bowed. She then left the dojo.

2

The moment she saw that girl, Reyda's skin broke out in goose bumps.

It was almost like the feeling of encountering a monster on the roadside. She almost reflexively moved her hand to her sword. That she didn't do such an unsightly thing was for no reason other than the fact that her own disciple had moved first. The disciple openly displayed her vigilance by moving her hand to her sword, a movement unfitting of a Water God Style exponent, who was supposed to always remain composed.

“Eris. This granny is the person who'll be teaching you about the Water God Style from now on.”

“...I'll be in your care.”

Eris didn't hide the displeasure on her face, but she bowed.

(She's like a wild beast, huh...)

Reyda could sense violent emotions like that of a hungry beast, sleeping in the depths

of Eris's eyes. Even if she taught a person with such emotions the defensive Water God Style, they wouldn't be able to learn it. A person like that wouldn't have knocked on the doors of the Water God Style in the first place.

"I'm sorry, but Gull-boy, this lass isn't suitable for the Water God Style you know. It'd be a waste of time."

"I already understand something like that."

Sword God Gull Farion nodded exaggeratedly.

"In that case, what is it that I'm supposed to teach?"

"I don't want you to teach her anything. It's fine as long as you give her an opponent of the Water God Style."

From their exchange, Reyda had grasped Sword God Gull Farion's objective. In other words, he wanted the girl called Eris to practice and learn <ways of coping with the Water God Style>. However, Reyda couldn't understand why he wanted this. Certainly, it wouldn't be a loss to gain experience in dealing with those of the Sword God Style. However, there was no need to call her all the way out here for such a thing. As long as it was a talented disciple of the Sword God Style, it wouldn't be that hard for them to let loose a slash at a speed faster than the reaction time of an average Water God Stylist.

Rather than learning the techniques of the Water God Style, for a North God Stylist it would probably be a better countermeasure to simply hone their own techniques. After all, unlike the Water God Style that couldn't be learned properly without a fitting opponent, the Sword God Style was a style that focused on taking the initiative and speedily grasping victory, regardless of the opponent.

To gain experience in fighting the Water God Style specifically suggests that he plans at some point to have her fight someone of the Water God Style, thought Reyda. And there was only one Water God Stylist who the Sword God didn't think could be won against without going to such lengths.

"What, are you planning on having this beast assassinate me or something?"

"Goodness, no. What use would there be in killing an old lady who would croak on her own?"

“In that case, tell me what you're thinking. Why do you need me to teach her the Water God Style? Just who on earth is she planning to fight?”

At these words, the Sword God made a broad and vicious grin.

“Eris over there wants to defeat the Dragon God Orsted.”

“Goodness... Orsted?”

Reyda's face showed great agitation. She too, knew very well of that personage. She too knew of his strength and that, for some reason, he could use the techniques of the Water God Style.

“The Dragon God? That's quite a grandiose attitude you're taking. Do you think she can do it?”

“I think she can. Eris does too.”

“I see, I see. That's fine then. Self-confidence is more important than anything.”

She didn't know if he was lying or telling the truth. Saying that they wanted to take down the <Dragon God>, second of Seven Major World Powers, could be seen as nothing but a joke. However, the Sword God had a confident expression, and Eris was making a face like it was natural, and together they had a strange persuasiveness to them.

Additionally, Reyda thought nothing except that it'd be interesting if they did it for real.

“But you know, Sword God. I haven't the faintest intention of teaching someone with no talent. First have her fight a bout with my student, and if she's strong enough to overwhelm her, then I don't mind teaching her this or that.”

It was killing two birds with one stone. No, it was killing three birds, she thought. Her student would have her arrogance crushed, and gain experience in fighting with the Sword God Style. If she somehow won, then it'd just have been participating in something funny and amusing. At such prospects, her heart leaps. Though Reyda was of the Water God Style, she was first and foremost a swordswoman.

“That's how it is, Isolte. Have a round with her.”

The Water God's disciple. The woman called Isolte stood up.

"I was listening to your conversation. I am the <Water King> Isolte Cruel. Pleased to make your acquaintance."

At that, Nina and Eris did as well. They faced Isolte.

"I'm the <Sword Saint> Nina Farion. I'll be in your care."

"...Eris Greyrat."

[Three women make a market.] Though there was a saying like that, it didn't fit these three, and each one of took a wooden sword from the corner of the dojo.

"Since Shisho says so, I'll abide, but... I don't think that someone of the Saint rank would be able to overpower me."

With her hand to her mouth, Isolte mumbled as if only Reyda could hear her.

"...That's true. Please go easy on me," said Nina.

"Hmph..."

Eris snorted.

Isolte's cheap provocations easily stirred up the Sword God Style genius who was easily fired up.

3

One hour later, Eris was collapsed in the dead centre of the dojo.

"Haa... Haa..."

Her eyes opened, and her breathing was wild. She had been completely beaten down by Isolte. Eris's sword hadn't touched Isolte even once.

Eris's sword boasted a speed that was in the top 10 even in this dojo. Because of her solo practice swings, her swings boasted speed and strength that approached

Ghyslaine's, and because of the rhythm particular to her, it was difficult evading even one of her strikes. Furthermore, once the techniques of the North God Style were added in, Eris's strength far surpassed any ordinary Sword Saint.

However, Isolte had completely parried all of Eris's strikes, and met her with counters. Only 30 minutes into the match, were they using real swords, the number of times Eris would have died approached three digits.

“ ... ”

Next to Eris lay Isolte. After Eris's defeat, the one who overwhelmed the triumphant Isolte was Nina.

[In the end, a savage style with only speed and power like the Sword God Style can never break through the techniques of the refined Water God Style.]

Nina easily crushed Isolte's conceited thoughts.

Nina's strike flew at Isolte without mercy, and as if sucked in, struck her in the temple. The result was that Isolte was thoroughly defeated. It only took one strike.

“The result was pretty interesting, huh.”

The one who said that was the one sitting at the head seat of the dojo, Sword God Gull Farion.

“ ... ”

Nina gave a deep bow to the Sword God. He had said that it was an interesting result. He had probably not thought that she would win, even until the end. Though Nina had some discouraging thoughts like that, having been given the type of setting that allowed her to show her growth, Nina was happy as well. Nina too, enjoyed the feelings of victory.

“The result wasn't interesting or anything else.”

The one who said this was Reyda. To her, this conclusion was natural. A beast that didn't even try to conceal its bloodlust was like a sitting duck to the Water God Style. Eris was certainly strong. She had potential. As a bundle of fighting spirit, she was like

a heaven sent child when it came to battles, but even so, she couldn't defeat the Water God Style.

As for the fight between Nina and Isolte, the result of this too, was obvious to Reyda. Even at that age, with that much ability, Nina wasn't conceited. It was probably that because of that Eris girl that Nina had no room to become conceited. The result of training without being conceited was that she was able to defeat Isolte, who on the contrary trained with conceit.

Comparing Nina's slashes to Eris's, they weren't especially fast. On the contrary, they were just a tiny bit slower. When it came to the heaviness of their strikes, Eris's ability to overwhelm was probably higher.

However, Nina's strike was a strike that wasn't fuelled by her emotions. There was no bloodlust at all; without even preparing her emotions, a single strike. Let alone bloodlust, Isolte couldn't even sense any intent to strike.

“However, the results were satisfactory, weren't they? How about it? Do you want to learn Water God techniques from me?”

Being asked that, Nina showed that she was thinking about it for a little, but in the end, she shook her head.

“No, I intend to master the Sword God Style.”

“I see, I see. That's fine.”

Reyda laughed with interest.

“Gull-boy. How about this? For a while we'll have these three train with each other, and have them improve themselves together.”

“Yeah. She probably has nothing to say, losing to someone like a Water King.”

“Our kid as well might become hardworking again if she has a target right above her.”

The result of the discussion between the Sword God and Water God was as follows:

Eris would train until she could defeat Isolte. Isolte would train until she could defeat Nina. As they had the same goal in mind, and would point out each other's weak points, some growth could probably be expected. It was that kind of conclusion.

“...Nina, are you fine with this?”

“I'm fine with it.”

Nina nodded. Certainly, she had only gotten involved this time out of curiosity. Bettering herself with the best disciple of the Sword God Style would probably be a plus for her as well. Nina had won. However, Nina didn't feel that Isolte or Eris were below her. Furthermore, she understood the benefits of competing firsthand; had Eris not been here these past few years, she probably couldn't have won against Isolte, she thought.

“Alright. I guess that's how we'll be doing it. In the morning follow your own teacher as usual, and then once the sun starts to fall, the three of you gather and train together.”

“Yes.”

“...Got it.”

Nina nodded silently, and Eris as well answered as well while still prone. Though Isolte lay unconscious, Reyda had no intention of voicing any complaints.

Like this, Eris's Anti-Water God Style training began.

4

One month later.

A strange three way deadlock had formed.

Eris beat Nina.

Nina beat Isolte.

Isolte beat Eris.

While each of them would still do their own training, each day they would face each other a number of times, exchanging their opinions. Isolte immediately pinpointed Eris's weakness.

“You let out too much killing intent, Eris-san. We of the Water God Style can read killing intent, so if we know an attack is coming, we can prepare our stance.”

“Even if you tell me that, I don't get it. Just what am I supposed to do?”

Eris obediently listened to Isolte's words. Though she was as self-centered and violent as she seemed, Eris was a person who coveted ways to strengthen herself.

“Let's see... Though you let out almost no killing intent before you strike, Nina-san, how do you do it?”

“Even if you ask me how... Since you'll win as long as your sword is the faster one, there's no need for stuff like bloodlust, right?”

On the contrary, it was a mystery to Nina why Eris was at all times, spilling bloodlust everywhere.

[If there's no enemy, what's the point getting so worked up? Wouldn't it be better to be relaxed normally?]

Nina's thoughts were along these lines.

“I don't get it.” spoke Eris.

“Let's see. Then how about making it a daily habit to get in the bath, wash your body, eat properly, and to think about that beloved guy that you mentioned while lying in a warm futon before sleeping properly?”

“What the heck. Rudeus has nothing to do with it, right?”

“Yeah... Geez, the last one was a joke. Anyway, just do the above. You stink, and you look ill, and it's really unsightly.”

“...Got it.”

Eris herself didn't want to stretch herself so much that she would snap. The more she trained, the more she understood that the Dragon God Orsted in her memories held ludicrous power. Isolte who was just in front of her used the same techniques as Orsted did. However, those were techniques far, far greater and more precise than Isolte's. The outsider Orsted surpassed the Water King in these techniques.

“Hahhh, why can't I win against such a person? I'll lose my confidence.”

Nina let out a huge sigh. At the advice of the Sword God, Gull Farion, she spent every day continuing a rational training programme. She rationally trained her body, rationally ate meals, and spent each day rationally. Despite all this, she couldn't win

against the clearly irrational Eris.

“...Because I make it so that it's like you move after.”

“Eh?”

Nina hadn't thought that Eris would ever say anything to her. Eris was self-centered and someone who normally wouldn't care about anyone else's problems after all.

“It was something that Ruijerd taught me. If you use stuff like your gaze, you can make people move before you like they move after you.”

“Ruijerd... Who's that?”

“He's my teacher.”

Nina tilted her head at Eris's words. She didn't really understand what Eris was saying. What Eris normally used was a high-level technique that Ruijerd taught her. As the crystallization of something that hardened combat veterans would subconsciously do, it was one of the techniques of the warriors of the Supard Race.

“In other words, you intentionally provoke your opponent's attacks, Eris-san?”

“That's right.”

“...”

At Isolte's explanation, Nina understood Eris's words as well. Though she understood, as expected it didn't make it any less suspicious sounding, and Nina stared at Eris in suspicion. She hadn't thought that this woman, who looked exactly like she was born and bred in the mountains, would be able to use such a high-level technique.

On the contrary, Isolte understood that this was exactly what Eris was doing. The school known as the Water God Style was one that was primarily seated in counters. Its techniques as well were founded around the basis of making the opponent move first.

“I see. Do you do this as well when you have me as an opponent?”

“I do, but you don't move, do you?”

“I've undergone training for that after all... Next time, try not to do that, or let out

killing intent and the result might be a little different for all we know.”

“...I'll give it a try.”

Whilst frowning, Eris nodded. Though she said she would try it, she didn't know how she was supposed to control her killing intent. After all, it wasn't something conscious that she could take control of. Of course, this was something she had been told by others many times already. However, Ruijerd had taught Eris ways to use that overflowing bloodlust instead, so it wasn't something that she wanted to hear.

[Though normally it'd be a demerit, as long as you're far enough above others, then there's no need to forcibly keep it in check.]

It was along this line of thinking.

“What should I do? Hey, Isolte-san, what do you do?”

“...For you, Nina-san, let's see, in the Water God Style we have training where you're deprived of your sight and are made to determine the real attack but... since I've heard that it's a battle technique that Magic Races often use, the Sword God Style should have its own way of coping with it as well, I think. How about asking your Oshishou-sama about it?”

Isolte had both excellence and cleverness. Amongst the swordsmen of the Water God Style, there were many diligent and persevering people.

“Phew, it won't go very well... Oh, the sun's about to set, isn't it?”

With those words, Nina ended the study session.

“Well then, until tomorrow, huh?... Somehow, it's been fun lately, so it can't be helped that we do this for so long. It's my first time having discussions with people of my level and age, after all.” Isolte said, cheerfully.

“That's true. It's the same for me, Isolte-san.”

Nina agreed. Though Eris was normally silent, once she spoke to her, she found that Eris's knowledge on combat was broad and varied. Her knowledge wasn't limited just to the North God techniques that she had recently been learning, but also included the techniques of the Magic Race. Though she had given Nina the impression of being an

incomprehensible monkey woman, Nina was now reevaluating her true worth. It wasn't that she was using uncivilized techniques, but just techniques of a different school, Nina thought.

“...Hmph.”

Eris was the same as always. Normally, even if she participated in study sessions at the word of the Sword God, she didn't voice her own opinions.

What Eris recalled at those times was the distant past: the times when she studied swordsmanship together with Rudeus. In those days, she had done this kind of thing as well with Rudeus, they discussed this and that, and various ideas popped up as well. It was something that Rudeus did. Though it was for this kind of simple and easily understood reason, to Eris it was an extremely important reason, and made her communicate with others.

“Well then, I'll be going and training with Shisho now.”

“Thank you for today as well, Isolte-san.”

“Not at all, Nina-san. I feel the same way. It's the truth that I'm steadily getting stronger as well.”

Where the road separated into paths leading to the dorms and the guest area, Nina and Isolte spoke their farewells with smiles. Eris continued walking briskly towards the dormitories.

“Thank you as well, Eris-san.”

“...I'll get a hit in tomorrow.”

“I'll look forward to it.”

“Hmph.”

Without glancing back, Eris continued to walk. Nina bowed once to Isolte and then caught up to Eris.

“Eris, it's fine if you keep training after this but, once you're done, at least take a bath!”

Was it the usual Eris, she would've turned a deaf ear to these words. Nina as well

thought that it was a waste of breath, but stinky things stank, so she had no choice but to continue saying this every day. However, Eris was different today. While making a slightly unhappy expression, she turned her head and stared intensely at Nina.

“What you said earlier, was it for real?”

“Earlier? What did I say?”

“That if every day I get in the bath, wash my body, eat properly, and think about Rudeus while lying in a warm futon before sleeping properly, I'll be able to get rid of my bloodlust.”

“Uu...”

Nina's words were caught in her throat. Those were just random words she had spouted out to get Eris to do as she wanted. However, there was no mistake that [mushin] could be born from relaxing. That's why she carried through with this idea.

“T-, that's right. In general, if you're as smelly as you are now, that guy you mentioned definitely won't turn your way, you know.”

“No, he would, you know. Rudeus would always hug my sweat-drenched shirts after all.”

“That's...”

While recalling Rudeus who she had only ever seen once, Nina imagined him burying his face in a girl's sweaty shirt.

[He's just a pervert.]

However, seeing that Eris's expression was quickly becoming displeased, Nina didn't say this.

“Anyway, I've heard that if you're too dirty, even men will start to hate you.”

“Well, Rudeus really didn't slack off on cleaning, huh.”

“T-, that's right! That's why you should make sure to always keep your body clean.”

Eris started to think. What she recalled was Rudeus. Though she had thought not to think about him, she lost focus and ended up remembering him. Once she remembered him, her mouth started to spread into a happy smile.

Then, Eris noticed. That when she was like this, she probably didn't have any bloodlust. So then, she nodded at Nina.

“I get it. I'll go have a bath then.”

“Yeah, I knew you'd say that. I get it already, so I'll just give up on tr-... What did you just say?”

Eris didn't respond to that question and returned to her room.

With a confused expression, Nina stood stock-still.

It took another year from that point for Eris to be able to fight at least on par with Water King Isolte.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. 朱凶蜘蛛 not too sure on this one.If it's all one name or what not... [Evil Spider Tarantula Death Lord]
2. litodebiru, I'm not sure what it was going for with the iito part.
3. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roguelike>
4. koshi o sue te? sit and wait? fixed?
5. this line is Paul, occasionally he refers to himself as dad when talking to Rudi kind of hard line to tell who was saying it even in the Japanese
6. These things can be considered, layer, level, or floor, I was undecided between floor and level so I went with floor but the definition is rougher than that.
7. Cutlass? Being a pirate suits Paul.
8. Wow. No clue. TLC --Skuizaan note: Sabuibo is goosebumps, so the second and third sentences of this quote better translate to: "Will you knock it off? It gives me goosebumps when you start sounding like my mother."
9. Ohm or Worm? 王蟲
10. dadi ga kuru da. RL KOOL
11. He's using wapu in Engrish not teni (teleport/transfer) that he usually uses here
12. Not something he said: God is not dead or I can feel the presence of God.
13. Mana Calamity.
14. A translator needs to pull the original lune here, I can't tell if this is meant to be a thought or an action - I.E. Thinking a out stealing pantsu or actually doing it again.
15. Not sure who is making the self-mocking smile Roxy or Rudeus here since the line is Rudeus monologue about Roxy's actions ED: From the context she was embarrassed and also feels stupid for not acting appropriately naturally due to the situation. Like herself.
16. Not sure how to word this, but it's basically how he's the ruler/in the spot light
17. ED: What is "rotten"? I feel it should be "Even if it's ill-mannered..." instead. Not sure though...

18. ワー○ウインド it seems to have some kind of censor not sure on the reference.
--Skuizaan TLC: Whirlwind Formation from Romancing Saga 3 (SFC)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEkCIL7Mn_c#t=95
19. What emotion is this? It's the description of "puppy dog eyes" which indicates
timidness/submissiveness.
20. ジャ○ラとかサ○エ not sure if that's two references or one or what they are...
21. 芋虫スナイパー Hornworm sniper seems to be a Japanese term for FPS
camper or someone who snipes you the moment you spawn.
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camping_\(gaming\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camping_(gaming))
22. The author actually uses the term Sairium AKA Cyalume in this line,
<http://livedoor.blogimg.jp/makotcollection/imgs/9/6/962be9a8.jpg>
23. 八つ裂き光輪, Yatsuzagi Kourin seems to be
http://ultra.wikia.com/wiki/File:Ultra_Slash_on_Ginga_.jpg
24. Guess what's crawling above you along the roof
<http://www.thewatcherfiles.com/images/alien3.jpg> I imagine its a mix of that
and <http://lotr.wikia.com/wiki/Gollum>
25. Pick the most frightening ones' eggs: Alien, Badigadi, Cockroach
26. the way these are worded is almost comical, some kind of reference to baka to
test? I can't read the character 扱 though it seems to be multiple choice it also
has the character for ni or two in front.
27. What??
28. keta no kuri agari, I'm not 100% sure what he was referring to here for her
tripping up on, the order or something, digits, or maybe multiplication. ED:
Seems like multiplication tables- let's assume that, as it's learned before
division, anyways.
29. For a variety of reasons I've decided to leave that word as it is Inu = dog, you
can look it up if you want.
30. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ikky%C5%AB-san> ? not sure on the reference.
31. Follow the two-dimensional magic circle road.
32. ji?bojoboyatteiru characters are messed up so not sure 100% on this line. Lost
in though, spacing out, or taking care of business most likely
33. 莊嚴 shougon, I'm not sure if there's a good English term for this google the
Japanese characters or just think of a giant temple like hall.

34. Take your pick:
http://static.tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pub/images/ImprisonedZelda_4758.jpg or
http://images3.wikia.nocookie.net/_cb20100722133703/valkyrieprofile/images/thumb/0/02/Silmeria_VP_Lenneth.jpg/569px-Silmeria_VP_Lenneth.jpg
35. I'm terrible with these chants, not to mention I can't read a character in actual skill name, someone go find this ability in previous chapters and copy/paste it. Frost Nova, perhaps? It's better than "Ice Frost Attack" so I'll use it, if it's a different attack, someone correct it.
36. I blame Paul for this one, for selling you off to nobles at the bright young age of 7. ED-you left out the part where he was beaten before being sold.
37. I wasn't sure what word would work here, but I believe annihilation of the continent here refers to splitting of Central and Demon Continents from the original whole.
38. Romancing SaGa 2 battle formation.
39. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tant%C5%8D>
40. How appropriate XD
41. Anoxia.
42. The behind the scenes assistants.
43. The title of this chapter is 修羅場(shuraba), literally 'a place of Asura'. What it means is a bloody battlefield, or a scene of carnage, a place of violence and mayhem... and is also commonly used to refer to chaotic romantic confrontations (think: your two ex-girlfriends meeting your current wife, and your current girlfriend). We don't have a word with such an implicit meaning (it's almost like synecdoche), so I went with 'Hell'.
44. Note: Aisha goes 'buuu'. You know, how anime people "grumble" as such? Yeah.
45. Note: euphemism for 'dick' in JP
46. Amputee problems :'(I love this down to earth aspect
47. saji o nagerare ta? that sounds like spoon was thrown at us to me, some kind of proverb maybe for being forced to give up, not sure.
48. TLC might be good here
49. Seriously there's like 10-15 sound effects which I have almost no clue how to translate in this 10 lines, I don't even care anymore. Now let's listen to legendary cat-dogs howl [Mwhaaayananan~]
50. Rudeus - RU, Sylphy - SHI = Rushi or roughly Lucy it makes more sense in

Japanese.

- 51. Honki de.
- 52. The formal name for the meeting room
- 53. Note: I'm hoping that you guys know this by now, but this 'huhun' sound that I translate so often is like a chuckling sound. Like, 'hm-hmph'. The way people normally chuckle/manly-giggle.



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