

The Thing That Answers When You Finally Mean It

Chapter I — Iron Howl

Metal screamed over bone.

Not outside. Inside.

Inside the armor, breathing wasn't breathing—it was a growl, resonating through the skull like a second heart trying to overwrite the rhythm of the first. Every step tore into the ground. Every movement felt like the body wanted to stop—but the armor refused.

The first demon came from the left.

No name. No face. Just mass and teeth.

The katana flashed.

Not a wide arc, not brute force—just a fast, surgical cut. The neck opened. Blood sprayed across the armor and steamed as if it had struck heated iron.

The next came immediately. And the third.

Hundreds.

Not the end of the world. Not infinite darkness. Just a large, furious clash where both sides knew exactly why they were there.

She moved.

The movement wasn't entirely hers anymore.

Inside the Berserk armor, the world narrowed into angles, distances, strike vectors. The demons' screams became a single low static hum. The green glow of the katanas tore shadows open with every motion.

One grabbed her arm.

A bone grip.

The armor responded before pain could rise. A jaw-like iron mechanism snapped shut, crushing the attacker's limb—and at the same time her own shoulder jerked out of alignment.

She didn't stop.

The second katana cut upward. The torso split. Entrails spilled onto the ground.

The sand turned to mud with blood.

Something inside her began to laugh.

Not out loud. Not yet.

The armor tightened. Beneath its joints, a deep, hungry vibration stirred. The edges of her vision darkened, as if the world had narrowed into a tunnel with only the next target at the end.

Strike. Step. Turn. Thrust.

The katanas grew heavier—but faster. Precision didn't fade—it sharpened. Every demon fell in one or two cuts. She stopped counting.

Blood coated the black surfaces of the armor. Horn-like arcs rose along the helmet's edges like warning signs.

One of them landed a hit.

Claws scraped across the chest plate, sparks flying. The force drove her to her knees. The ground shuddered.

Around her, the swarm closed in. Hundreds of movements. Hundreds of breaths. Hundreds of hungers.

She rose slowly.

Inside the armor, something whispered:

Let go.

Her fingers tightened around the hilts.

"No."

Not a shout. A growl.

The next wave hit.

One katana pierced a stomach. The other split a spine. She spun, kicked, crushed a skull into the ground. Demon blood ran into the seams, but the armor didn't slip. It kept her moving, even as her muscles would have stopped.

Breathing grew heavier. Not because of lungs.

Because something inside wanted more.

The battlefield wasn't chaos anymore.

It was rhythm.

Strike. Strike. Strike.

Then—

A horn.

Not a demonic howl. Not a distorted sound.

Clear. Bright. Martial.

It carried from the mountain beyond the battlefield, cutting through the noise like steel through air.

Her head turned.

On the horizon, along the slope—two figures.

One stood upright, white cloak flowing, wings like shadows against the sun.

Falcon.

The other—heavy, dark, helmet shaped like a skull, sword like a broken moon.

Skull Knight.

The demons hesitated.

Only for a second.

Then the battle continued—

But it was no longer fought alone.

Chapter II — Three Vectors

The echo of the horn didn't fade. It lingered, like an unseen command even the demons understood.

The first to move was Falcon.

He didn't descend. He didn't hesitate.

He dove.

The cloak cut the air like a blade. The landing wasn't light—it was deliberate. The foot that struck the ground crushed a demon's ribcage; the next motion cut clean through two more in a single, precise sweep.

No spectacle. No proclamation.

Just movement.

Ace didn't watch for long. Her gaze snapped back to the nearest target. The katana drove through a jaw, twisted out the back of the skull.

Skull Knight descended the slope more slowly.

No rush.

But every step meant something. Demons parted before him—not from fear, but instinct. His sword wasn't fast, but when it moved, nothing remained intact.

The first was split from shoulder to hip. The second lost its head before it could scream.

Ace felt it.

The rhythm changed.

No longer a solitary fight for survival.

Three points on the field.

Three forces.

Falcon moved on the right, cutting through a winged demon and turning immediately to cover the rear. His motion was controlled—almost calm—but every strike was final.

Ace surged forward through the center. The armor shrieked, horns slicing the air. She was no longer a retreating point.

She was an advancing front.

Skull Knight held the left.

Heavy. Decisive.

A demon leapt over him, claws extended.

He didn't even look.

The sword moved.

The attacker split in half mid-air.

Blood fell like black rain.

Ace growled.

Another demon struck her side. This time the claws pierced the outer layer of the armor—not deep, but enough.

The armor reacted.

Pain became motion. Vision blurred. The world reddened.

Falcon was beside her in an instant. One precise cut—the attacker fell.

No words.

Ace didn't thank him. There was no need.

They moved like they had done this a hundred times before.

Skull Knight stopped for a moment.

The remaining mass of demons gathered for one final rush. Dozens now. Fragments of what had been hundreds.

Ace charged.

The katana pierced, twisted, tore. The armor screamed inside her, demanding more.

Let go.

She tightened her grip.

“No.”

The final wave broke around them.

Falcon’s blade severed a neck. Skull Knight crushed a chest. Ace snapped a spine.

Silence didn’t arrive instantly.

It seeped in.

One demon still crawled—bloody, furious.

Ace stepped on it.

The katana drove down.

Movement stopped.

The sand steamed. Blood flowed through channels that hadn’t existed moments before.

She stood in the center of the field, breathing heavy, the armor dark and alive around her.

Falcon stood a few steps away, gaze sharp, wings shadowing the fading light.

Skull Knight behind him.

No wounds. No fatigue.

Only waiting.

Ace felt the beast inside her still trembling. It wasn’t satisfied. It never was.

She turned her gaze to Skull Knight.

No question. No thanks.

Just a direct, measuring look.

He didn’t raise his sword. Didn’t shift his stance.

His voice didn't echo.

It was close.

Too close.

"Time to wake up, little Berserk."

The world cut.

No shattering. No flash.

Just—

A break.

Chapter III — Static

The air didn't taste like blood.

That was the first thing.

No iron on the tongue. No smoke in the lungs. No pressure of armor crushing the ribs.

She was sitting upright.

A room.

Dark. Silent. Real.

Breathing came too fast, too heavy for a world that wasn't moving. Her hands were still clenched, fingers curled as if gripping hilts.

No katanas.

No armor.

Just sheets tangled around her legs like a grotesque parody of a battlefield.

Three seconds.

One.

Two.

Three.

"DAMN YOU, KONRAD!!!"

It came from the spine. Not thought. Not considered.

Raw.

The room didn't answer.

No echo. No horn. No laughter from the mountain.

Just silence.

Her heart still hammered like inside the armor. Muscles tense as if the next strike was coming. A faint ache in her side—not a wound, but a memory.

Breathing slowed.

The beast's voice wasn't there anymore.

But the imprint was.

The rustle of sheets to the right.

Mai didn't startle. Didn't jump. Didn't ask what happened like someone afraid of the answer.

Her voice was low. Calm.

"Nightmares, I assume."

No sarcasm. No concern.

Just a dry observation.

Ace dragged a hand across her face. Fingers paused at her forehead, as if confirming the helmet's sharp edges were gone.

"Yeah."

One word.

Short.

She leaned forward, elbows on her knees, shoulders still tight. In the dark room, shadows were just shadows. Walls didn't move. The air didn't whisper.

But the feeling was too clear.

It wasn't a random dream.

She hadn't invented it.

The voice on the mountainside wasn't unfamiliar. Not demonic. Not distorted.

Annoyingly familiar.

Mai shifted onto her side. Her gaze lingered on Ace just a fraction longer than the moment required.

"The same one?"

Ace exhaled through her nose.

“Yeah.”

Silence.

No fear.

No panic.

Just a small, irritating certainty that somewhere—on some level—someone had pulled the curtain shut mid-act.

Ace dropped her feet to the floor. The cool surface anchored her instantly back into her body.

She stood.

The night was normal.

The world was normal.

But she knew one thing for certain:

That voice hadn't been a dream.

She lifted her gaze toward a dark corner, as if expecting to see the silhouette of heavy armor.

Nothing.

Just shadow.

“Damn you, Konrad...”

Not a shout anymore.

Just a mutter.

And somewhere—

far outside time and space—

or maybe not so far—

someone might have smiled.

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