

Dagashi-ya Yahagi:

Setting Up a Sweets Shop in Another World

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Author **Bunzaburou Nagano**

Illustrator **Neruzo Nemaki**



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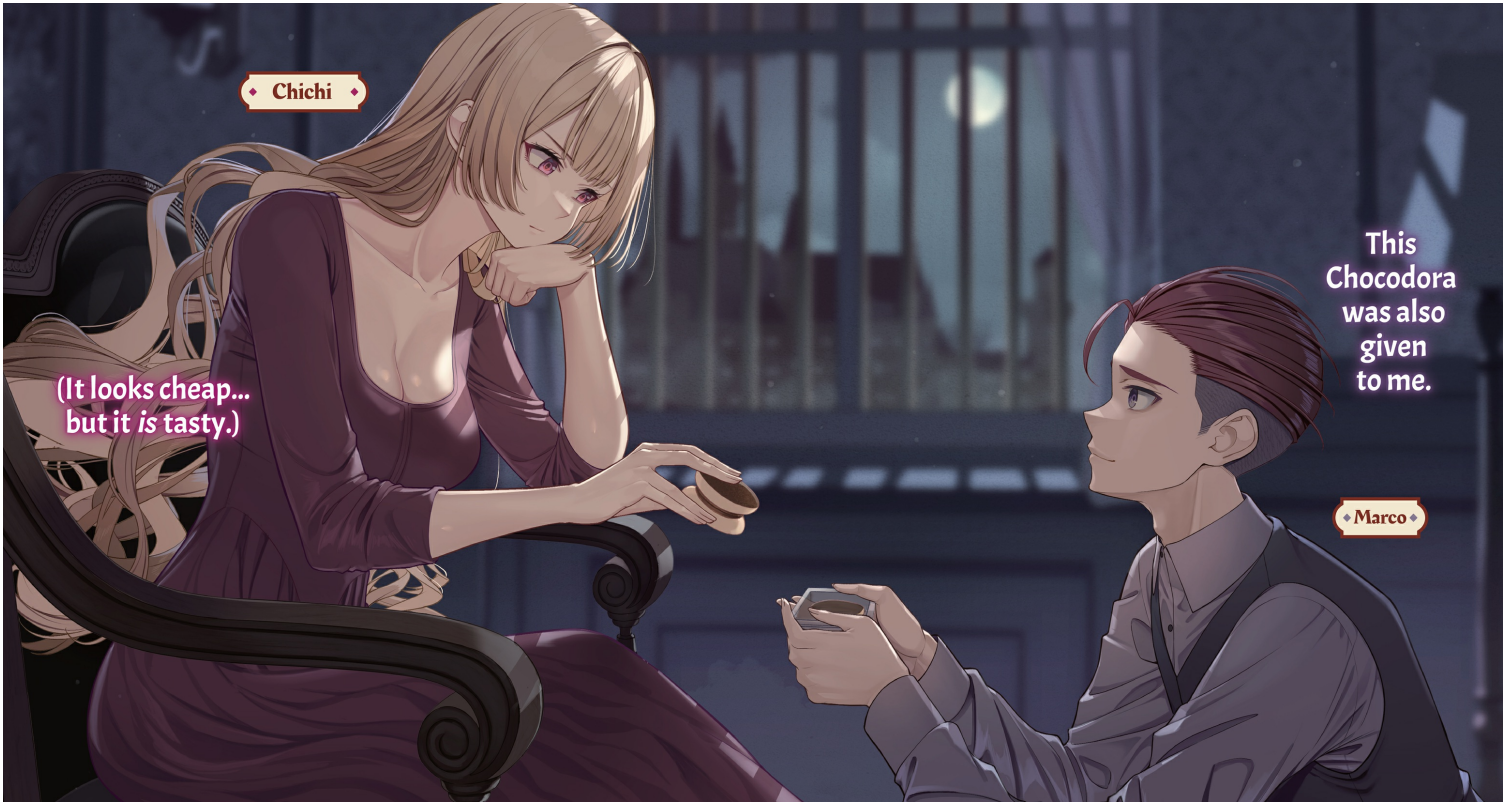
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Author Bunzaburou Nagano

Illustrator Neruzo Nemaki







◆ Chichi ◆

(It looks cheap...
but it is tasty.)

This
Chocodora
was also
given
to me.

◆ Marco ◆

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My pen won't stop...



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Character Introductions



◆ Michelle ◆

A first-rank adventurer and a witch passionate about her research. She's earnestly devoted to Yusuke, but she occasionally wreaks havoc because of her yandere nature.



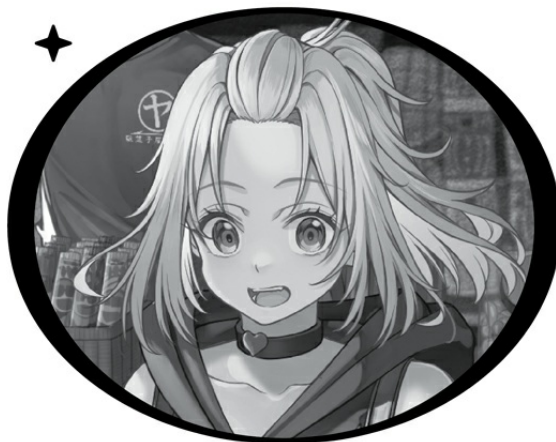
◆ Yusuke Yahagi ◆

A young man who, after obtaining the power of a dagashi-ya, was transferred to another world. He runs a dagashi-ya that caters to rookie adventurers.



◆ Mira ◆

A rookie adventurer and mage. She's Meryl's partner. She has a calm disposition, but her luck with lotteries is something else.



◆ Meryl ◆

A rookie adventurer who's in her team's vanguard. She's Mira's partner. She easily gets fired up in competitions, but her luck sucks when it comes to lotteries.

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◆ Garmr ◆

Something of a leader among the rookie adventurers. He fools around, but he dreams of becoming a first-rate adventurer.



◆ Rigal ◆

A rookie adventurer and porter. He stops by the dagashi-ya clutching the small amount of money he has.



◆ Chichi ◆

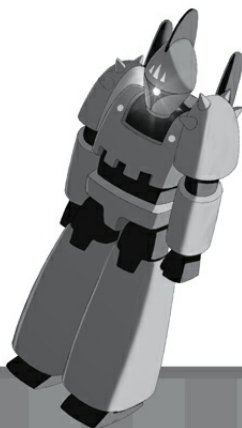
Michelle's younger twin sister. She's a self-centered, wicked woman, and after the coup d'état, she was dethroned as queen and thrown in prison.

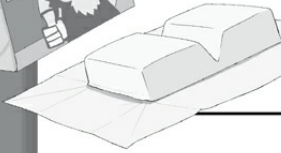
✧ Summary ✧



After obtaining the power of a dagashi-ya and transferring to a new world, Yusuke Yahagi opened up his shop in order to make a steady income. The dagashi in his lineup were somewhat familiar, but they weren't just cheap and delicious—these dagashi featured various magical effects that adventurers approved of! All at once, Yahagi started gaining a lot of regulars, such as the rookie adventurers Meryl and Mira, as well as the so-called Shinigami, the brilliant adventurer Minerva.

Yahagi leveled up by selling his products, gained the ability to open his shop as a festival street stall, and acquired an assortment of products like retro toys and game machines to add to his lineup. To top it all off, Minerva grew closer to Yahagi while his plastic model toys—Mobile Forces—were all the rage. She revealed that she was actually a wanted criminal—the witch Michelle—and confessed her love for Yahagi. Although Yahagi was hesitant, the two of them began dating.

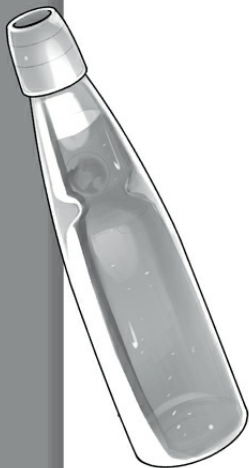




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They deepened their bond while making sure to keep their relationship under wraps. Yahagi was called upon to take business trips and the like, so he believed that his dagashi-ya business was also doing well. However, at the hastily opened Mobile Forces Tournament sponsored by the king, Queen Chichi discovered Michelle by a stroke of misfortune, and Michelle was almost captured. Yahagi stepped into the fray in order to protect her, creating an explosive situation, but thanks to the coup d'état that had been brewing in the background, it all calmed down soon enough.



Afterward, Yahagi was told that—due to his contributions as a dagashi-ya—he could make some requests. Thus, he requested that Michelle be taken off the wanted list. Now that she was formally free, Yahagi continued to run his dagashi-ya as always while she assisted him.

Meanwhile, the imprisoned Chichi swore to get her revenge on Michelle and Yahagi...



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Prologue

As a result of the revolution that had imprisoned the former king and queen, Michelle had been removed from the wanted list. Thanks to that, we were able to date openly and without reserve.

“From now on, we don’t have to worry about anyone else,” I told Michelle. “We’re always going to be together.”

“Yeah. I’m happy, ≡” she said, the bashful tears in her eyes now visible within her maskless face. For two weeks after that, she was attached to me at the hip. Of course, we were together while I was doing business as well. She had gone out of her way to make a work shirt and apron that looked similar to mine.

“Heh heh, we’re matching.≡”

“Y-Yeah,” I said, hesitant. It was embarrassing to wear matching couples clothing, but I could just think of it as the store’s uniform...

We’d even gone out on a lot of dates. We’d taken walks on the castle walls, gone to famous restaurants, and attended the theater. Every day, she was by my side from morning to evening, until we both went home. Apparently she was so happy to have removed her mask and to be together with me without shame that she was always within arm’s reach. Still, it was difficult to stay together at *all* times. At any rate, in this case she was going too far.

“Michelle,” I said, “I’m happy you want to be with me, but please stay outside when I’m going to the bathroom.”

“But...”

“No buts!” I interjected. “It’s embarrassing!”

“But I’m fine with it.”

But I’m not...

“Seriously,” I sighed, “give me a break.”

“Okay,” she said, finally relenting. “But don’t you go anywhere!”

Michelle seemed worried I would go somewhere, but how would I even get outside? My body wasn't thin enough to fit through the small bathroom window. Yeesh, we'd had this kind of argument so many times, I'd recently started getting constipated.

Despite Michelle's yandere nature being on full display, after about half a month, she'd of course begun fretting about that research she was neglecting. It was a good opportunity, so I decided it was time I restored our former days of normalcy.

"Don't you have to go to the dungeon depths soon?" I asked.

"Yes, but...are you okay being away from me?"

"No," I said, "but don't you think absence makes the heart grow fonder?"

"I mean..."

"If we're always together, then we'll become used to it." I tried to reason with her. "I want to be more excited to be with you, Michelle."

"Excited..." she murmured. "I think I understand that."

Hmm. One more push.

"Also, the woman I love is a witch who's passionate about her research. It's wonderful to see you giving it your all," I said, "and it makes me want to cheer you on."

Michelle made a conflicted sound as if she were still considering it, but finally she gave in. "Okay, I'll resume my research!"

So, you're an obedient yandere—a super-rare species... It made her even more endearing to me. However, something still seemed to be on her mind.

"But just because I'm not around doesn't mean you can cheat on me! Got it?"

"Of course I wouldn't," I sighed. "You should know that."

"Yeah... You can't look at other women either!"

"I can't do that!" *How am I supposed to do business otherwise...*

Though we'd had a small spat, Michelle resumed her dungeon research. It looked like I could finally open up my dagashi-ya at my normal pace.

Chapter 1: I Decide to Make a Map

Summer had ended and the season was beginning to shift toward fall. It'd been about half a year since I'd come to this land. The dungeon was as dangerous as always, but I could handle B1 now without fear. Though I wasn't exactly built for combat, even I was improving.

While I was passing through the underground passage to open my shop, I heard a shout from somewhere. The voice still had a touch of youth to it. It was likely a young adventurer.

"Are you okay, Yulin?!"

"It's just a scratch. More importantly, pay attention to the enemies on the left! They're going to surround us!"

"I'll bring them down!"

It sounded like some rookie adventurers had run into some monsters.

"Damn it! There're so many. Why are there suddenly seven of them?!"

"Stop whining and retreat!"

There were times when a bunch of monsters would suddenly appear in the dungeon. Even level B1 was no exception. From what I gathered from the rookies' conversation, they were in trouble. The name Yulin also sounded familiar. She was a girl from among the rookies who came to my shop. Her freckled face looked as young as a middle schooler's...

With Rocket Bombs and monster cards in hand, I ran toward the direction the voices had come from.

A five-person team was facing off against three moth-type monsters called Poison Moths and three of their larvae, called Poison Worms. Some copper coins and small magic crystals lay on the ground right beside them, probably from the monsters they had already defeated.

Poison Moths had a wingspan of eighty centimeters, and their scale powder was poisonous. It didn't spell instant death or anything, but if you breathed it in, your throat would burn and your body would go numb. *If I remember right, these guys are weak to fire.*

"Monster summon, activate!" I cried. "Come forth, R. Salamander!"

With my monster card, I summoned a lizard that could spout flames. It extended its long tongue as if designating its target, and like a flamethrower, it roared as it spat out flames. In the blink of an eye, the Poison Moths' wings loudly burst into flame, and the Poison Worms were also engulfed in fire, finishing up the battle. *As expected of an R card...*

"Thank you, Mister Yahagi," the rookie adventurers wheezed through coughing fits. I guessed they had breathed in the poison from the scale powder.

"It's fine. Just drink this. It can neutralize poisons." I dissolved the orange-flavored Powdered Drink Mix—which was effective against poisons—in water and had the whole team drink it. I also handed the injured Yulin a Morocco Yogurt with its wooden spoon attached. Her wound didn't look deep, so she'd probably be fine with just this.

"Aah, I feel better now," Yulin said, just as I'd expected. She breathed a sigh of relief with the wooden spoon still in her mouth. The others also appeared to no longer be afflicted by numbness.

"Really, though, a bunch of them appeared," I said. "It's rare for seven whole monsters to materialize at once."

"The truth is, we got lost, and more and more of them popped up as we were running away."

In short, because they were running around trying to escape confrontation, they wound up chased by a large number of monsters.

"It would've been nice to have a map or something. We're still not used to the dungeon."

It probably hadn't been that long since this team had started exploring the dungeon. To be honest, there had been more teams like this popping up. That was because the war had ended. A large portion of the soldiers who had been

deployed at the border had been discharged, and everybody who'd lost their jobs had become adventurers.

"A map, huh..." I echoed. "Now that you mention it, the dungeon doesn't have a map."

If there were a map of the dungeon up to B2, it would drastically increase at least the rookies' chance of survival. But it seemed this country had no interest in that, regarding adventurers only as disposable items. Ugh, I couldn't help but sigh. I really didn't want the young customers who visited my shop to wind up dying. *I may as well make a map myself, I guess.* I got most of my customers in the morning and in the evening. By setting aside some time during the quiet hours of the day, I might be able to manage it. If I charted out the structure of the dungeon and noted what kinds of monsters spawned where, they'd probably be happy.

All right, I'll think about it.

The morning congestion had died down, and I had closed up my shop as soon as the adventurers began their respective explorations. Now I was going to walk around floor B1 of the dungeon and devote myself to making a map.

"Mister Yahagi, are we going?" Rigal called out to me with an expression that told me he couldn't wait to set out. I'd be defenseless while I was mapping, so I had requested his cooperation.

"If push comes to shove, please join me in battle," I told him. "It's no point of pride, but I'm not confident in my own abilities."

"Leave it to me," Rigal said brightly. "It'll be a good chance to get a taste of real battle. I'll work as hard as I can!"

Rigal was normally a porter, so he'd said he rarely got to fight. He was especially eager today to put his newly learned Fireball ability to use. He'd been boasting about how he could finally shoot up to two in a row now.

"Garmr is going to let you join his team once you can fire three of those in a row, right?"

“Yep! Just a little more!”

He really sounded reliable.

I’d also brought a new weapon today. It was Dagashi-ya Yahagi’s newest product.

Product name: Eight-Round Pistol

Description: A pistol that fires magic bullets. Firing at people is prohibited.

Price: Five hundred rims

To work the toy pistol that had been sold in my previous life, you would put eight caps filled with gunpowder into the gun and then have your fun. When you pulled the trigger, the gunpowder would go *kapow*! To the innocent mind of a child, it had felt like the real deal. It had made a pretty loud sound, so I doubted there were many places you could play with it in the city nowadays. If you were careless, you might get reported.

Now this pistol here shot magical bullets. Its power was weaker than a Rocket Bomb’s, but it was easy to aim and you could employ it in an attack faster. Furthermore, its ability to fire eight rounds consecutively made it effective when dealing with multiple enemies. Also, unlike the pistol from my previous life, there was barely any recoil, which made it easy to shoot. The cons were that in addition to its lack of power, it disappeared once you used up all eight rounds. It was impossible to reuse. That might be why the adventurers rated it pretty low. With a price tag of 500 rims, they appeared to think their money was better spent on a bow and arrow or a sword.

“I personally think it’s convenient, though,” I said, dejected.

“Hmm,” Rigal hummed. “Five hundred rims is a little too expensive.”

That did make sense. Even if you defeated the monsters on B1 with this, there was no point when you didn’t get much money from them. If this was a product I couldn’t sell, then I should put it to good use by bringing two pistols with me as I set out to make my map. I’d have no problems dual-wielding them thanks

to the lack of recoil.

We set out from the dungeon's entrance and came across a small alleyway that I normally didn't pass through.

"Have you been here before?" I asked.

"Yes, many times." Rigal had spent a long time as a porter, so he was more knowledgeable about the ins and outs of the dungeon than those other rookies.

"What's beyond this point?"

"Well, it splits into narrow branches farther in," he said. "There aren't any strong enemies, but that's exactly why you don't earn good money there."

While we were talking, the thick fog that signaled a monster's appearance came gushing out from beyond the passageway.

"Mister Yahagi!" cried Rigal.

"Right, I know."

I readied a pistol in each hand and prepared my monster cards so I could whip them out at a moment's notice. Today, I had an R. Stone Golem card on standby that excelled at both offense and defense.

"It's here! It's a Dungeon Snail!"

A Dungeon Snail was a giant monster snail whose shell could reach a diameter as big as fifty centimeters. It was known to dissolve enemies with the strong acid mucus it emitted before eating its prey. It was a nuisance if you let it get close, but luckily, its movements were slow. You attacked it before it got close—the strategy of striking first to gain victory held true no matter what world you were in.

I aimed only with my right pistol and pulled the trigger. It made a *fwsh* sound, akin to when you opened up a flat soda, and fired two magic bullets. However, they hit the Dungeon Snail's shell and were easily repelled.

"It's no good, Mister Yahagi. The shells of Dungeon Snails are really strong. Please aim for the head instead."

“Roger that.”

I took two steps forward and readjusted my pistol. I then hit the approaching Dungeon Snail with even more bullets. One bullet, two, three—I blew the monster’s head off, and the Dungeon Snail was finally defeated.

Pow! A large fireball leaped out from Rigal’s hand with a reverberating, thunderous roar. It was so hot, I could feel its heat even from some distance away. *So, this is a fireball!*

A second Dungeon Snail had appeared, and when the magic made impact, the flame blazed even more intensely. With an attack like that, it didn’t matter how hard their shells were—they’d end up steam cooked.

Some magic crystals and six large copper coins dropped once the two monsters had been defeated. I had used five of the magic bullets, so there were three left. Once I got used to it, I might be able to defeat Dungeon Snails in one blow, but this wasn’t really a good way to make money.

“That battle was intense, yet we only got 600 rims,” I sighed. “Rookies have it rough, huh?”

“That’s true, but it’s preferable to being a porter who only gets 1,000 rims a day,” Rigal said. Perhaps he was recalling how little he’d been earning, because he smiled wryly.

We had settled on splitting any spoils between us, so we only got 300 rims each. I once again felt how harsh adventuring was as a career.

“All right, let’s head farther in,” I said. “I wanna finish mapping this area today.”

“Understood. It’ll start getting damp beneath your feet from this point on, so it’s easy to slip. Please be careful.”

That’s gotta go on the map too.

That day, I did my best and worked on making that map until past noon. I was already off to a good start even though I had just begun. Rigal told me he’d help any time, which was reassuring. I was anxiously awaiting the day I could hand over the completed map to the rookies who patronized my shop.

Dagashi-ya Yahagi's new product was a huge hit.

Product name: Kielbasa

Description: Small, individually packaged dried sausages. Restores a small amount of stamina upon consumption.

Price: Ten rims

Meat was precious in this world. It was a luxury item that commoners could eat only two or three times a week. Thus, these sausages had apparently exploded in popularity because you could buy one for only ten rims. Not only did the rookies buy them, but there were even some veterans who had come to my shop to purchase them. They were so popular I'd even had to establish a restriction of three per person.

"Good morning, Mister Yusuke," Meryl greeted me. "Do you have Kielbasas?"

"Please give me three of them too," said Mira.

Meryl and Mira, who had entered my shop early this morning, were also completely enthralled by them.

"Good morning. You're surprisingly early today," I said, enjoying some morning conversation with them as I handed over the products.

"We were thinking of taking a little trip today," Mira told me. "It's about time for the Golden Frogs to appear."

"Golden Frogs?" I'd never heard of that monster before.

"They're monsters that appear in the fall every year," Meryl chimed in. "They drop one silver coin when you defeat them, but there's also a one-in-a-hundred chance that one will drop a gold coin. I'm definitely going to get my hands on one this year!"

"Huh, good luck," I said, although inside, I was thinking that it was probably impossible. Meryl's horrible lottery luck was famous around here. Dagashi-ya Yahagi had various products that featured lotteries, but Meryl had gotten wins

on virtually none of them. There was even a scary legend that if she did get a win, something bad was sure to happen.

Mira giggled. "Let's take it easy."

Meryl's partner, Mira, was gazing at the determined Meryl with a bright smile. *Oh yeah, Mira has absurdly good luck with lotteries.* If they were working together, Meryl's luck might get balanced out just enough to be normal.

"Mister Yusuke, is the map going well?" asked Meryl, having wasted no time opening a Kielbasa and chowing down. It looked like she was having that instead of breakfast.

"Yeah, it took me two weeks to finish mapping B1." I handed the finished map to Meryl. It was a custom-made large piece of paper, about as big as a spread-out newspaper. I was ultimately going to use printing blocks to print and distribute them, but I'd scale them down when I did.

"Oh, it's well-made," Meryl said, sounding pleasantly surprised. "It has not only the structure of the dungeon, but also what kinds of monsters there are and even info about what to look out for."

"I wanted to make sure it was something that could benefit all of you," I said.

"I think that side of you is wonderful, Mister Yusuke," said the slightly airheaded Mira. She was praising me while looking directly into my eyes, which of course made me flustered.

"You think? Well, something like this isn't anything special. After all, it's only B1 and B2."

"That's not true. I really am jealous of Miss Michelle."

"Huh?" *What's this all of a sudden?*

"Right? He earns good money and he's nice. I should've made my move sooner too."

Hey, now even Meryl's talking funny. Was I suddenly entering the golden days of my romantic life?

"If Mister Yusuke was my boyfriend, I could've had all-you-can-eat Kielbasas..." Meryl lamented.

“That’s what you want?!” I didn’t know how serious they were, but it didn’t feel bad at all, being complimented. “Do you wanna eat one more Kielbasa?”

When I said that, Meryl and Mira both suddenly brought their faces closer to mine.

“Mister Yusuke...”

“Wh-What?”

“You’re too easy.”

“Yep, exactly,” Meryl agreed.

Oh, that’s embarrassing... I’m Yusuke Yahagi, a twenty-five-year-old dagashi-ya that gets made fun of a little too often. I needed to reflect on how easily I got carried away.

“Still, this is a pretty well-made map,” she said. “Make one for B3 as well while you’re at it. It’d make our jobs easier too.”

“No way! I’d definitely die if I did that.” It’d be way too difficult with my current abilities.

“Really?” Mira asked. “I think you can do it, though...”

Meryl and Mira were severely overestimating me. But, well, if it’d make them happy then maybe I’d give it a shot... *Wait, maybe I really am too easy?* Even though I had my reservations, I started to feel like I could pull it off.

Just before evening that day, Michelle returned. Her experiment this time had gone on for five days, so she looked pretty exhausted.

“Welcome back,” I said. “How did it go?”

“Its charge went up by fourteen percent. At this rate, it’ll certainly produce some good results by winter,” she said, her eyes sparkling now that her experiment was going well.

“Then we gotta celebrate tonight. I’ll cook.”

“No way! I can’t let you do that. You’re tired too.”

“Don’t worry about it.” So I said, but all I could make was simple stuff anyway. *I think I’ll try cooking up some vegetable-filled omelets today.*

“Hey, Yusuke, after we’re done eating, let’s do *that* since it’s been a while. I’ll keep at it until you’re satisfied.”

The rookies who had been poking around the goods at my store stared at us with startled faces. *Michelle should have phrased that better.* It was no surprise her words had put people’s minds in the gutter...

“Don’t get the wrong idea,” I said. “It’s a Mobile Force practice match.”

“Oh, that’s what you mean...”

“Man...”

The adventurers once more began to peruse the goods, having lost interest. Michelle had been so glued to my side lately that the people around us were taken aback by it, but we actually hadn’t taken that final step yet.

Anyhow, since the practice helped build a good foundation for magic, any time Michelle was around, we would play together by moving around our Mobile Force units. We didn’t just fight. Recently we’d even been having fun dancing. Gufufu and Kian’s waltz was a rather nice sight to behold.

I had heard that the more your mana circulated in your body, the more you acclimated to it, and then one day you’d suddenly be able to use some new magic. I hoped that even I could one day use some magic apart from my dagashi-ya spells, but I saw no sign of that happening at the moment. Michelle told me that if I patiently kept this up, the day would definitely come when I’d be able to. Putting my faith in my girlfriend’s words, I worked hard every day to practice.

It was now well into fall, and it was getting really cold in the morning and evening. The wind in this other world was also freezing, and the wintry gusts chilled me to the core.

I coughed miserably.

I’d let my guard down and wound up with a cold. It was my fault for forgetting

to buy some warmer bedding for the fall and winter. I didn't have a very high fever, but my head hurt and my body was lethargic. As such, I'd taken a break from my shop today.

"Here, the porridge is ready," Michelle said, entering the bedroom in a maid outfit. The contrast of white apron and black clothes was dazzling. She had her hair up to make it easier to move, which I was also crazy about.

Worried by my absence from the dungeon, Michelle had come to my place. Moreover, once she'd found out I'd come down with a cold, she'd made a point of going back home to change into a maid outfit before returning. She'd seemed pretty hung up on it, in fact. *What's that about?*

"I've been wondering," I said, "why are you wearing a maid dress?"

"I want to devote myself entirely to nursing..." she said, "like a domestic servant or something? So I thought I may as well start with my appearance..."

I was really grateful. But as grateful as I was...

"Could I possibly have you cure my cold using your Healing Magic? It'd be faster that way, right?"

"No!"

"Why not?!"

"Because I want to nurse you..." she insisted. "All right, I'll check your temperature now."

With her face bright red, she pressed our foreheads together.

"That's hot!" I yelped. "You sure you don't have a fever worse than mine?"

"It's because your face is so close..."

She seemed to be feeling a different kind of tension from when we kissed.

"Okay, let's eat some porridge," she said. "After you've finished eating, I'll wipe off your sweat. Now, say, 'Aah.'"

After playing along with Michelle's nurse act for about thirty minutes, I had her cast some Healing Magic on me. She said that she had actually wanted to take care of me for half a day but changed her mind after she saw I was

suffering. After that, I went to town to buy some bedding. Michelle came along with me, of course. Our date was unplanned, but we enjoyed a fun day off.

Having taken the day off yesterday, I came to the dungeon today in high spirits. My brand-new down quilt was comfortable to use, and I had slept like a baby. My body was as fit as a fiddle. A down quilt in this world was a pretty luxurious item, but I was actually a little bit rich. *Oh, right.* I paid for my stock with mana, so my sales were almost purely profit. Thanks to that, I earned about as much as a veteran adventurer.

“Good morning, Mister Yahagi. Why didn’t you come yesterday? Miss Michelle was in a huge panic.”

My regulars Garmr and his friends were my first customers this morning.

“I came down with a cold from the seasonal changes,” I said. “You all should be careful too.”

“So, that’s what happened. You feeling better already?”

“Yeah, because Michelle used her Healing Magic on me.”

Garmr made a face that told me he was jealous. “You’re so lucky, Mister Yusuke. When we wanna get some Healing Magic cast on us, we definitely gotta cough up 3,000 rims each time.”

Yep, this was a world without health insurance—of course a patient had to foot the full cost of the bill in this other world. Apparently, almost no commoner would even bother seeing a healer for a cold.

“By the way, Mister Yahagi, do you have any snacks that can recover you from a state of slumber?”

“A state of slumber?”

“It’s about time for the Golden Frogs to appear,” he explained, “so we were thinking of going there too.”

“So, you guys are also aiming to get rich quick.”

“Yep.”

There was a one-in-a-hundred chance that a Golden Frog would drop a gold coin.

“But what does that have to do with your sleep?” I asked, still confused.

“If you inhale a Golden Frog’s burp, you’ll fall into a stupor.”

A frog’s burp, huh...? It sounded smelly, so it was definitely not something you wanted to inhale. I took some small bags of shredded pickled squid from the corner of the shelf.

Product name: Sacchan Squid

Description: Shredded pickled squid. When you put it in your mouth, you’ll wake up no matter how deeply you’re asleep.

Price: Fifty rims

Opinions on the taste would probably be divided, but the sour flavor was what made this tasty. Those who liked it would find them irresistible. There were also veteran adventurers who said it was good to eat as a snack alongside some alcohol. Garmr and his friends bought one packet of the Sacchan Squid and headed off to take down the Golden Frogs.

Right after they left, Michelle took their place. She normally wore mage robes, but today she was dressed very lightly, in a long black skirt and only a single short-sleeved white blouse. Her outfit was really out of season. What was she thinking?

“Hey now, if you dress that lightly, you’re going to wind up catching a cold like I did. Well, I’m sure you’d be able to cure it with magic, but aren’t you freezing?”

“I am, but I honestly want to catch a cold...”

“Excuse me?” *Are you an elementary school student trying to get out of school?*

“Yesterday I got to enjoy caring for you,” she said, “but this time I want to get

a taste of what it's like to be cared for... I want to be fed, spoken kindly to, have my sweat wiped off, get help changing clothes..."

I placed my hand on her forehead. Yeah, she didn't have a fever, which meant she wasn't delirious—so she was just expressing her distorted desires with a totally clear mind.

"If you're gonna sleep talk, at least be actually asleep," I said.

"I'm not sleep talking!"

"Nope, you are sleep talking." I handed Michelle the small bag of Sacchan Squid that I had near me. "Eat this and wake up, please."

Seriously, staying healthy came before anything else.

The Adventurer Meryl's Diary: Entry 1

It's finally that time of year! The autumn season that I've been waiting and waiting for is here! We've started the Golden Frog hunt. I don't like frogs, but I make an exception only for Golden Frogs. I mean, there's a one-in-a-hundred chance that they'll drop a gold coin.

I know, I know. I'm an unlucky woman. I rarely ever win even at the Ten-Rim Gum lottery, so I bet it won't drop anything even if I defeat it. It pisses me off, but I've decided to have Mira take them down instead. Among Dagashi-ya Yahagi's regulars, Mira's lottery luck is top-notch. She even won at something just yesterday. I put 300 rims into those Scratch Cards, but all I won was a ten-rim redeemable coupon. Boo-hoo-hoo...

When I think about it calmly, I've been suffering some heavy losses. Well, it's fine since what I'm paying for is the thrill, but I really do want to win more often. Seriously, how much have I been funding Mister Yusuke?

But if I get that gold coin, then even that worry of mine can be laid to rest. My primary intention is to put it in savings, but I'd also want to use it for fun things after working so hard to get my hands on it. As a beautiful woman adventurer who seeks wondrous thrills, it's fine if I throw 1,000 rims at those Scratch Cards, right? I'll scratch away until I'm satisfied!

I'll be going after a large number of those Golden Frogs, so I really have to prepare for it. They excel at instantaneous response times. Their signature move is a ramming attack of leapfrog. If you're hit directly, it's strong enough to blow you away. You have to be able to parry the attack with a shield, so a certain level of technique is required. As part of the vanguard, saying that whether we see victory or defeat rests on my shoulders would not be an exaggeration. I'll tie the shield with a leather strap to really reinforce it. It would be nice if I had a spiked shield so I could try to make them defeat themselves. I consulted old man Sanaga about it, but he said it'd cost 70,000 rims if I wanted a spiked shield I could properly use. With my current savings, that'd hurt my wallet way too

much. Maybe I have to hold back on those Scratch Cards? But that's my life's enrichment!

If you inhale too much of the Golden Frogs' burps, you fall into a stupor. If it's only a little bit, then you get off with just some dizziness and nausea, but I really don't want that. I inhaled quite a lot of it last year and wound up losing my entire lunch. I don't want to experience that ever again.

It seems that the snack Sacchan Squid is effective at curing stupors, but I don't like sour things. I want to avoid eating it if possible. I've started thinking that it'd be nice if we had at least one more person on offense. But you know, it's hard to find more team members. A lot of problems pop up, like their strength not matching ours or our personalities clashing. If they're a man, then there'd also be some other dangers...

People are always looking at Mira with perverted gazes, so it makes me worry. Even I... Hmm? No, actually I don't think that's true. I don't feel like people like Garmr even look at me as a woman... Gah! That pisses me off in its own way!

Isn't there someone capable out there? Oh yeah, Mister Yusuke has been wandering around the dungeon recently. I hear that he's making a map for the rookies. I also heard he's improving his skills while he's at it. It'd be nice if Mister Yusuke could join our team. If he did...then we could eat as many dagashi as we wanted! We'd even be able to replenish convenient toys such as Rocket Bombs, so I think it'd make it so much easier to take down monsters. He has a good head on his shoulders, so I don't think he'd betray his friends either. Mira and I could rest easy if it were him. Should I seriously ask him? But I'm guessing Miss Michelle wouldn't allow it. She has become so clingy lately, it puts people off a bit. In that case, then who else...

Oh, there's that boy who helps Mister Yusuke. If I remember right, he's a porter... Rigal, was it? I heard he's able to attack using Fireball now, but I wonder how strong he is? He seems to also have a good personality, and since he's younger, he may obediently do whatever we say. He has a cute face which is another huge plus. Hmm... I'll think about it.

Chapter 2: I Can Use Magic!

It happened suddenly. While Michelle and I were playing with the Mobile Forces after dinner, a shock like being struck by lightning ran through my body. *My mana is sparking?!*

“What’s the matter, Yusuke? Are you not feeling well or something?”

As if I were experiencing sleep paralysis, I couldn’t move my body. Michelle was peering at my face with worry.

“No, that’s not it,” I said. “I...may be able to use magic now.” It was similar to the feeling of unexpectedly understanding a philosophical problem that you’d long been unable to comprehend. Or maybe it was like I’d reached enlightenment? At any rate, it seemed I could now use magic.

“That was really sudden.”

“No, there were signs.”

“Like what?”

“Recently, my perception has gotten really sharp. I know what’s in my products’ lotteries. I can kinda see which Scratch Cards are wins. I can also kinda see which snacks are losses too.”

If Meryl caught wind of this, she’d definitely get jealous.

“If you were a customer,” she said, “that would be handy, but it’s an ability that doesn’t really do anything for you as the dagashi-ya shopkeeper.”

“That’s not all. I can sense your presence now.”

“Huh?”

“Michelle, you were just in the laundry room, right?”

When I pointed that out, Michelle waved her hands around in a suspicious manner. “Wh-Why do you know that?! And after I went in secret so I could smell the shirt you just took off...”

That's what you were doing...?

"I can't tell what you're doing, but I can kind of sense when you're nearby now."

"H-Huh..."

There was no harm if all she'd done was smell my shirt. I wouldn't press any further.

"Also, the magic I can use now is called Clairvoyance." It seemed this Clairvoyance was a form of magic by which I could tell what was going on at a certain location even when I was far away from there, as if I were watching a live video feed. The fact that it wasn't some kind of battle magic was very like me.

"Clairvoyance?!" Michelle exclaimed. "That's a legendary rare form of magic! It seems you really are adept at special forms of magic."

There were various classifications of magic such as offensive, defensive, support, and creation magic, but I'd heard that things like my "store close, store open" magic—and now my new Clairvoyance—fell under the "special magic" category. Those that could use these abilities were exceedingly rare, and just like the name implied, they were special forms of magic.

Clairvoyance seemed like a really convenient ability, but it also came with some big problems.

"I can sense that the amount of mana that Clairvoyance requires is extraordinarily high. My limit is probably five minutes a day."

"Mana exhaustion is pretty rough, and it'd be a heavy burden on your body no matter what," she said. "You need to gradually get your body accustomed to it."

In the case of automobiles and motorcycles, there was a method to driving them in order to break them in gradually. If you stomped on the gas pedal suddenly while your car was still brand-new, it'd damage the engine. This was probably like that.

"I'll test it out little by little. I'm going to try using it right now, so keep an eye

on me.”

“What are you going to look at?”

“Let’s see...” I could immediately see any place or person I already knew, but that wasn’t all my Clairvoyance could do. What was amazing about it was that I could use keywords to browse and find matches, as if I were using a search engine. There were also ways to use it like a maps app, and I could even jump out of my body in something like astral projection to look at outside scenery.

My mana had its limits, so I could only use my live feed for about five minutes right now, but at its maximum, I could move the viewpoint camera faster than the speed of sound. It had a pretty wide scope. Considering just how powerful this magic was, I could understand why Michelle said it would take a heavy toll on my body.

“I guess I’ll start by wandering around outside,” I said.

Once I activated my magic, I really did feel like I was having an out-of-body experience. My camera drifted toward the top of the room so that I was looking down at our heads. I had no tangible substance, which meant I could pass through humans and walls without any issues, so I soared high into the wide open sky.

“This is amazing. Thanks to the moonlight, I can even see as far as the edge of the capital!” I got closer to the soldiers patrolling atop the castle walls, but there was absolutely no sign that they’d noticed me looking at them. It appeared they didn’t even feel my presence when I passed through their bodies. “Where to next?”

“Be careful. You’ll exhaust your mana without realizing it.”

“Got it.” I could faintly hear Michelle’s voice. It was strange that she felt both far away yet close by at once. Now that I thought about it, it was starting to get a little hard to breathe, but it was only about as bad as if I had been jogging a bit, so I could probably keep going. I became like a gust of wind and flew about the world free as a bird. I tried to wander around the nighttime capital in this way, but after a while, my chest started to hurt. I would reach my limit soon. I guessed it had been three minutes or so. It wasn’t good to push myself, so I returned my consciousness to my body.

I had seemed to be really far away, yet it took only an instant to return. When I came to, I was on Michelle's lap and my upper body was being cradled.

"Huh? A lap pillow?"

"I was protecting your body while your consciousness was away!" she said.

"Really? Well...thanks." As grateful as I was, I felt like my hair had become disheveled somehow. Two buttons on my shirt were also undone. "Did you do something?"

"I-I was examining..."

"Examining what?"

"How you're shaped..."

Seeing that Michelle was bright red down to her neck, I couldn't bring myself to ask which part of my body's shape she was talking about. *Well, touching me a little is fine.*

I pulled away from Michelle and slowly stood up.

"How are you feeling? Do you feel sick?"

"I'm a little dizzy," I said. "Some light nausea too..."

Though its burden on my body was heavy, I understood very well that I'd acquired a crazy ability.

It was a morning so cold that it turned your breath white. We were finally well into fall.

"Mister Yusuke, gimme some Curry Rice Crackers," said Meryl, shivering as she and Mira entered the store. Eating Curry Rice Crackers warmed the body, so they were selling well among adventurers this morning. I'd also eaten them to warm myself up right after I'd come to this new world.

"I'd like some Sacchan Squid, please." Mira purchased the Sacchan Squid that was effective against stupors. She was probably going to go hunting for the Golden Frogs again.

"Well? Did you get any gold coins?"

“Not yet. We’ve only been able to take down twenty-two frogs since the season started.”

There was a one-in-a-hundred chance for a gold coin to drop. At only twenty-two frogs, they still had a long way to go. *Let’s see... I guess I’ll try out my Clairvoyance a little.* It was also a good opportunity to use the search function. Additionally, these two were my oldest regulars as well as my precious friends. I’d do this for them just this once.

I put in the keywords “Golden Frog” and “dungeon B3” and activated my Clairvoyance magic. “Whoa, there they are...”

“Hey, what’s with that distant gaze?! Your face is looking scary, Mister Yusuke.”

I could hear Meryl’s voice, but I ignored it and continued searching. I then found a location that had five Golden Frogs.

“Hey.”

“Oh, you’re back,” she said. “You looked like a shrine maiden in a trance just now. Are you okay?”

So that’s how I look when I’m using my Clairvoyance.

“More importantly,” I said, “do you know that place with the statue of the wolf head? With three red flags nearby?”

“That’s the idol of Ripley,” Mira answered.

“If you go straight along the passageway on the right side, there’s another narrow passageway to the right,” I said. “It’s just big enough for one person.”

“I know it.”

“There are five Golden Frogs beyond that, in a blind alley.”

“What?” Mira and Meryl were astonished by my sudden announcement.

“Whether or not you believe me is up to you. However, I think it’s worth checking out if you’re going down to B3 anyway.”

Meryl and Mira looked at each other, deliberating. Before long, Meryl timidly asked, “Why do you know that, Mister Yusuke?”

“It’s just kind of like fortune-telling.”

I didn’t think it’d be good if word of my Clairvoyance spread, so I half-assed a lie. I mean, it’d suck if people thought I was using this ability to sneak a peek at the women’s section of the hot spring, right? To be honest, Michelle had also given me a warning yesterday. She’d said she’d curse me if I used my Clairvoyance to look at other women’s naked bodies, even though there was no way I’d do that. I seriously wouldn’t! *Yeah, I’m definitely not gonna! Curses are scary, so...*

I had thought of using this power for my mapmaking, but it didn’t go well. Doing it while I was taking notes made five minutes pass by in the blink of an eye. Also, since I had pushed myself to my limit, my chest had begun to hurt, and I’d collapsed from heart palpitations and dizziness. It seemed it was better to proceed on foot after all. For the time being, I’d do my best with Rigal.

The first flurry of snow whirled about the capital. Real winter weather was on its way. The hot spring became more popular because of the cold, and it got particularly crowded in the evenings. Everyone wanted to warm themselves up before going home. Thanks to that, I was earning more, and I’d once again leveled up. That caused some new products to be added to my shelves. There were several new ones, but this was what stood out the most:

Product name: Stick Chocolate

Description: A stick with colorful chocolate beads inside.

When used as a magic item, it boosts magical power by thirty percent one time. However, it also increases the amount of mana consumption so caution is required. Disappears after use.

Price: Thirty rims

It was a small stick about twelve centimeters long. The handle was curved like

an umbrella. The inside was filled with normal colorful chocolate beads, but this snack was the type where the container was the magic item instead. It was selling well among mages. Even Rigal, who was adept at Fireball, came to buy them.

“Once I finish eating it, I’ll carry it around like a protective charm,” he said. “It’s relatively cheap, and I’m glad that it increases your magical strength.”

“Does increasing it by 1.3 times really make that much of a difference?” I asked.

“By nature, magic’s offensive abilities are already strong, so a number like 1.3 isn’t insignificant.”

In other words, the bigger the original number, the more the effectiveness would jump up. If the original number was ten and you multiplied it by 1.3, then you would only get thirteen, but if the original number was a thousand, then that would give you one thousand three hundred. It was no wonder that it was selling well among veteran adventurers. I’d been wondering about all those scowling sorcerers who had bought several of my Stick Chocolates... *So that’s how it is.*

I was also nearing the end of my mapping of B2. Rigal was really helping me out a ton, so I gifted him five Stick Chocolates.

Once I was done with the day’s business, I headed toward my own home together with Michelle, as usual. Now that we were aboveground, the wind buffeted us, cold enough to pierce my skin, and the dead leaves dancing around the town made it look even more dreary. The snow that had fallen this morning hadn’t yet melted, so a light dusting of it still covered the road.

“I want to walk huddled together on days like this,” Michelle said, gazing at my face with upturned eyes. I was also cold and wanted to stick close together; even so, I’d worry about others looking at us, so I couldn’t.

“That’d be a little embarrassing...” It was fine to hold hands, but in Michelle’s case, she’d absolutely latch onto my arm.

“Aw... In that case, how about I use Flash Magic to temporarily make it so no

one can see? You won't be embarrassed anymore, right?"

Sometimes great mages lacked common sense.

"You can't do something that'd bother others like that. I won't be able to do business in the dungeon anymore."

"I guess we really can't then..."

I felt bad at how dejected she looked, but I also found it endearing.

As soon as I returned to my room, I switched on the magic heater, which was a magical tool that made use of Fire Magic. In place of electronic home appliances, this world had many tools like this that functioned using magic crystals.

"Strange," I muttered, puzzled. "I thought I set a timer on the heater before I headed out this morning..."

"It's okay," Michelle said. "More importantly, come here."

The two of us shivered side by side, holding our hands over the stove. Huddling close together to warm ourselves up somehow made me feel warm inside too.

A mage of Michelle's caliber could instantly heat up this room if she felt like it. But I knew she was purposefully not doing so, and I wasn't insensitive enough to point that out.

"It's really cold. Would you like to come a bit closer?" When I spread out my winter cloak to wrap it around Michelle's shoulder and draw her in closer, she leaned slightly into me.

"So warm... Hee hee hee..."

"What's up?"

"It smells like you."

It didn't stink, right? I had just gone to the hot spring on the way home. She had her face buried in my chest, so it probably wasn't unpleasant to her. If anything, she looked happy.

Come to think of it, she had secretly gone off to sniff my shirt before... She probably had a thing for smells. The two of us pressed close as we waited for the room to warm up.

Once the room reached a comfortable temperature, Michelle began making her special stew.

"I'll help," I said.

"How about you calculate your profits and finalize your map first?" she replied. "I'll be fine by myself today."

The B2 part of the map was just about finished. It'd soon be ready to print.

"Then, since I'm leaving the cooking to you, I'll be the one to clean up."

I spread out the unfinished map in the living room. As soon as I completed it, I planned to hand out copies to the rookies free of charge. It'd make their activities go a little more smoothly if they had a map of the dungeon up to floor B2. As I read my notes on the places I'd checked out today, I dug into my memories and copied them to the map.

"Huh? What was this place like again...?" Glaring at my notes, I went to add more information about the dungeon's characteristics, but the words were too blurry to read the details. The water that'd been dripping from the ceiling was probably the culprit. But this was a problem. *There was a big sunken area here or something, I think...* Features like that were exactly what I wanted to note down, but I just couldn't remember.

Right! At times like these, I could just use my Clairvoyance to look into it! *Let me actually sit down in a chair so I can safely separate my consciousness from my body...*

"Huh? Something's stuck in here."

As I tried to sit down, an angular object bumped my thigh from inside my pocket. When I took it out, I found a Stick Chocolate that my shop sold. I had totally forgotten that I'd meant to give it to Michelle.

Hmm...Stick Chocolate... What would happen if I used this? It had various

effects. For offensive magic, it increased its power by thirty percent, and it even lengthened the duration of Magical Blessings, while enhancing the abilities themselves. *By any chance, could it enhance my Clairvoyance?*

“I guess I’ll try it...”

I held the stick in my right hand and lightly waved it around as I activated my magic: “Clairvoyance!”

Overcome by the sensation of magic gushing freely from my body, my consciousness floated up into the air. I hadn’t even made a choice yet, but I was already having the out-of-body experience.

“Huh?” I said in disappointment. “But I wanted to see what was going on in the dungeon...”

Even my consciousness was wavering as if I were intoxicated, and I couldn’t focus my thoughts. Then something from deep inside my head posed me a question.

“Will you move forward? Or will you go back?”

Who was this? At any rate, I felt like it would be a bad idea to move forward.

All right, I’ll go back, I thought to myself, and at that very moment, time began to go backward.

“What is this?!”

Still suspended above my room, I was watching a fast rewind of my apartment’s goings-on. Michelle and I exited backward and the room became empty. Before long, noon returned, then became morning, and Michelle and I entered the house backward. This was definitely footage from this morning.

“Can’t I pause this?” The moment I thought that, the footage suddenly stopped. *Whoa, it stopped right when I was giving her a goodbye kiss before I headed out...* It was too embarrassing seeing that myself.

Can I just play it? Once I thought that, the video played normally this time. There was even audio.

Huh? What’s Michelle doing? She was turning off the heater’s timer while I was shrugging on my cloak. She’d done something that elaborate just so she

could huddle together with me? Man, I didn't know if she was adorable or hopeless...

"Ngh!" I suddenly felt pain in my chest. This was bad. Was this a reaction from using too much mana?!

"Yusuke! Yusuke!"

I could hear Michelle's voice. Oh no... How was I supposed to go back?

My consciousness came to an end like a video switching off, and everything went dark.

My lips were pried apart and a lukewarm liquid was poured into my mouth. Feeling that sensation, I slightly opened my eyes. Michelle's face was close to mine.

"Are you awake, Yusuke?" she asked.

"Huh? What was I...?"

"You don't remember? You exhausted your mana and collapsed. What on earth did you do?"

If I remember right, I activated my Clairvoyance while using the stick and saw a video of the past... I guess I exhausted my mana all at once with that.

"Here, drink a bit more of this magic potion," Michelle said, putting a teaspoon of said potion in my mouth. "Well? Have you calmed down? Can you remember what happened?"

"I saw it..."

"Huh? Saw what?"

"I saw you tampering with the timer on the heater..."

"That?!" She was flustered that her own deeds had been exposed. As she curled up on herself, her face bright red, I told her the truth.

"So," I said after I had finished explaining, "when I used this stick, I could see the past."

“Clairvoyance...” she murmured. “It’s some incredible magic.”

“That’s true,” I agreed, “but I don’t feel like I can handle it the way I am right now. Just a second ago, a sharp pain coursed through my heart as if something had grabbed it.”

“Yusuke, that’s pretty serious. Clairvoyance is a magic that severely depletes mana to begin with, so using a magic item to forcibly draw out even more power from it is tantamount to suicide. Your heart could’ve stopped!” Michelle scolded me with tears in her eyes.

“I’m sorry. I won’t use it so recklessly anymore, so don’t worry.”

“If you died, Yusuke, I...”

The sight of Michelle wailing panged my heart. No one in my life had ever cared about me like this before. I didn’t want to make her sad anymore.

“I promise you, I definitely won’t.”

“You better not.”

“Michelle, give me your pinky.”

“What are you going to do?”

“A good luck charm for promises.”

“We can’t!” she gasped. “The Pinky Swear is a rather strong contractual curse. You could lose your life if you carelessly enter one!”

“What?!” I’d just wanted to do a little pinky swear... *In this world, it’s a terrifying form of magic?*

“Let’s...set that aside for the day we exchange our wedding vows,” Michelle murmured. “That’s when I’ll make it so you absolutely can never leave me...”

I remained silent. Gripped by fear, I pretended I hadn’t heard anything and refrained from replying.

I decided to seal away the Stick Chocolate-enhanced version of my Clairvoyance. Of course I didn’t want to die yet. It was just that there was one thing I was curious about: I wanted to know what that voice I’d heard in my

head was.

“Will you move forward? Or will you go back?”

I’d chosen to go back. I had done so because I’d wanted to return to my original state, but as a consequence I’d seen a video of the past. So that meant if I had chosen to move forward, I’d have seen a video of the future, right?

I wanted to try it—that was how I really felt—but to be frank, it was way too terrifying. This was just baseless conjecture, but I felt that the burden of taking a peek into the future would be way heavier on my body than looking at the past had been.

I had a myriad of things I was curious about, like how my relationship with Michelle would turn out down the road. Still, I really should give up on using my Clairvoyance to see the future, for a variety of reasons. I got the feeling I truly would die if I overdid it.

I had finished the map of B1 and B2, so I had a craftsman print out copies, and I distributed them to the rookies.

“Can we really just have this?”

“Is it true that it’s free? I feel bad...”

Free services apparently didn’t exist in this world, so all of the rookies were equally grateful and apologetic. But each person who came to get a map would also buy my products, so my profits were actually going up.

“Well, I’ll keep B1 and B2 free. In exchange, you all should buy my maps when you go to floors B3 and below. I haven’t finished them yet, though.”

This was also an investment in the future. The more adventurers whose lives were prolonged by these maps, the more my products would sell, and even my maps of the deepest floors might do well. If that happened, then my life would become even more peachy keen. I could someday retire in peace. With that in mind, I was finally about to start on B3. I’d already arranged some new collaborators for that purpose.

“I’ll leave things to you, Meryl, Mira.” I had wanted a formal handshake, but

their reactions had been ambiguous. Their faces showed slight trepidation.

“Well, we’re fine with it, but...” Meryl said hesitantly, “won’t Miss Michelle get mad if you team up with us?”

“Right?” Mira agreed. “She might’ve been fine with little Rigal, but I’m afraid that we’ll incur her wrath...”

Yeah, she had called them hussies before... *I did have her give them a proper apology later, though.*

“Oh right, she also suspected that I was gay,” Rigal piped up.

“Really?!” I’d had no idea.

“Oh, but don’t worry,” he said. “I told her about my determination to act as Mister Yusuke’s guard because of how good he’s been to me. Then she actually praised me instead. She even said she’d entrust him to me and gave me a protective talisman.”

“Isn’t that a supervaluable defensive talisman?!” Meryl exclaimed, enviously looking at Rigal’s charm. As an item handmade by a great mage like Michelle, it apparently had some serious value.

I had commissioned these three to guard me in preparation for the making of B3’s map. I had only been requesting Rigal’s assistance up until now, but I was uneasy trying B3 with only the two of us. Since this would be a group effort, I thought it’d be best to get some trusted friends, so I’d requested my two longest-term regulars for the job. The base rate was 4,000 rims per guard. We’d decided that any money and magic crystals that dropped would be evenly split among us.

“Why don’t you go exploring together with Miss Michelle?” Mira asked. “Do you not want her restricting you or something?”

She was kind of right, but that wasn’t the main reason.

“I don’t want to bother Michelle,” I said. “She has research to do.”

Since it was Michelle we were talking about, she’d throw aside her own research to help me if I asked, but I didn’t want that. The only one who could develop a magic orb that could amass high volumes of mana was the witch

Michelle. I wanted her to put her talents toward that instead.

“I’ll tell Michelle myself that I’m having you two help me,” I said. “If I give her a proper explanation, she’ll understand. Probably.”

“Probably?!” Meryl cried. “It’s really going to be okay, right? I don’t want to be cursed like the old king!”

Michelle might get a little sulky, but I thought she’d understand if I gave her a proper explanation. She was really possessive, but she wouldn’t curse Meryl and Mira or anything. *Probably...*

I had once again leveled up, which prompted a new ability of mine to blossom. Up until now, I’d received things like more new products, game machines, and even a refrigerator of all things, but this level-up was different. To my amazement, a single-family house that doubled as a store appeared. It was an old-fashioned wooden house, and “Dagashi-ya Yahagi” was unabashedly written in jet black on a white sign made of galvanized iron.

“What is this?” Even Michelle, who was known as a great mage, was surprised to see a new shop suddenly appear in front of Hot Spring Yahagi. This must be pretty amazing then, right?

“I leveled up.”

“I know your magic is categorized as special, but this is *too* special!” She was almost exasperated, but it wasn’t like I could help the fact that I’d acquired this ability.

Now, as long as I had a plot of land, I wouldn’t have to go into debt to get a house of my own—though I didn’t know if housing loans were even a thing in this world.

“Let’s go inside,” I said as, with a clattering sound, I slid open the sliding door and entered the store.

“This store has a rather interesting atmosphere,” Michelle marveled, gazing around her with curiosity. On the first floor, the area near the entrance was the store, and many familiar products were displayed on the shelves. Things like

lotteries and Super Orbs hung from card stock on the walls, and toys were also densely packed in stacks. It perfectly captured the vibe of your classic dagashiya. “What’s going on there?”

In the back part of the store, the floor was raised to create a tatami room. It came prefurnished with various items, such as a low table and small cupboards.

“This is a living space. Whoops, take off your shoes when you come up.”

“My shoes?”

“Yeah. It’s a custom in my homeland to take off your shoes in living spaces.”

“Huh. Why do you do that?”

“It’s to keep it clean inside the house.”

I had told Michelle that I was from another world. As expected of a citizen of a world with magic, she’d very easily swallowed the truth. She’d said there were actually even records of people who’d been summoned to this world by magic.

“Oh, there’s a kitchen here too.” When I opened the paper sliding door attached to the tatami room, there was a corridor with a small kitchen on the other side. It was a pretty tight space, but it held a stove with just two burners, a small sink with running water, and a small kitchen counter too. There was a full array of cooking utensils, so I figured you could make some simple meals here.

Farther down the corridor was a bath and even a toilet, and then some stairs that led to the second floor. Incidentally, the dungeon didn’t have a high ceiling. Even if this was a shabby, run-down house, the height of the roof exceeded the height of the dungeon space. I climbed the stairs wondering how on earth that worked to find that the second floor appeared to be buried inside the dungeon ceiling.

“It seems I can summon my store even if I’m underground,” I noted.

“Do you think you could even bring out your store inside the dungeon walls?”

“I probably could.”

Basically, even if there was something in the way, I could defy the laws of physics to summon my store. Incidentally, when I closed up my shop early that

evening, the dungeon ceiling that my store should've been lodged in returned to normal like nothing had happened.

There were two rooms on the second floor, one with a six-tatami-mat floor and one with eight. The eight-tatami-mat room came with a closet that even had a futon inside.

"It looks like no matter what troubles we stumble into, we'll always have a place to live at least."

"Yeah, it even has a kitchen and a bath. That bath looks too small for two people to fit in, though..."

She was assuming we'd go in together?! *I think there'd be a variety of problems with that...*

"Hello?" I heard a customer's voice call from out front. It sounded like they were bewildered by the new store. That made sense. You'd definitely be surprised if a house like this suddenly appeared in a dungeon.

"Coming!" I jogged down to the store and saw about four customers peeking in. "Welcome. Please come in."

"Good morning. What's with this?"

"This is going to be Dagashi-ya Yahagi from now on," I informed them. "I hope for your continued support."

Everyone was timid as they entered my shop, but they immediately grew accustomed to it and happily reached for the products on the shelves.

"Oh, there're more new products."

This was the snack that the adventurer picked up:

Product name: Lettuce Tarou

Description: A bite-size snack with an enjoyable crunchy texture. Salad flavor. Temporarily increases agility upon consumption.

Price: Thirty rims

I had loved this snack since forever. The texture was nice, and it was just the right size to snack on. It also paired well with alcohol like beer and lemon sours.

“Does this snack have lettuce in it?” the adventurer asked, tilting their head.

“No, it doesn’t.”

“Does it taste like salad?”

The adventurers of this other world got really hung up on these sorts of details.

“Well...it’s hard to explain. I guess it has a slightly salty taste?”

“They could’ve just written that it was salt flavored.”

“I understand the sentiment, but it’s something you just shouldn’t question.”

“Huh...”

After all was said and done, that adventurer bought the Lettuce Tarou.

“Whoa, what is this?!” Meryl exclaimed, bursting into the store with Mira.

“Good morning,” I said, spreading out my arms to welcome them. “Welcome to my new store.”

“Oh wow, your magic is as hard to understand as always, Mister Yusuke.”

“It really does defy common sense,” Mira chimed in, surprised. “How on earth could you summon a house?”

If you asked me, the existence of magic itself was well outside the realm of common sense.

“Oh, there’s a room in the back. Can I see?” Meryl asked, itching for a peek into the tatami room.

“The second floor is the married couple’s bedroom, so don’t enter,” Michelle warned her.

Since when?! Strangely enough, while there *was* only a single futon set, for some reason there were two pillows... Magic truly was mysterious.

Mira's sharp eye was the first to notice one new product I'd started selling this morning.

"What is this paper bag, Mister Yusuke?" she asked, holding up a piece of paper that looked like a long, thin envelope. "It has a picture of a device that looks like a bird."

"You've got a good eye if you noticed that," I smiled. "This is the very item that Dagashi-ya Yahagi can recommend with the most confidence right now."

Product name: Assembled Glider

Description: An easy-to-assemble airplane that you throw.

It has a propeller enchanted with Flight Magic, and it flies to whatever person or place you call to mind. If you write a message on the wings, it'll act as a letter.

Price: Three hundred rims

This was actually a crazy product. It was among the most expensive products Dagashi-ya Yahagi sold, but its price was exceptionally cheaper than the cost of delivering a normal letter.

Even this world had a mail service in place. The duty of providing that service was mostly shouldered by temples. Priests traveled among various temples, so they'd deliver the letters along the way. Fees could range from roughly 500 to 3,000 rims, and the farther the distance, the more expensive it was. On top of that, it took quite a lot of time for letters to reach their recipients. There were also times the letter didn't reach them at all (pretty frequently, in fact).

"This Assembled Glider is amazing," I told her. "Just by thinking of the person you want to send it to and throwing it in the air, you can send it to them without fail."

"So, if I throw this while thinking about my mother, it'll fly to her?" she asked.

"Exactly. When you do so, the propeller will use a small amount of your mana, but it's not significant. It can also hit speeds exceeding one hundred kilometers

per hour, so it'll reach her in the blink of an eye."

"That is amazing..." she said. "But my mom can't read. Even if this suddenly appeared, she probably wouldn't know it was a letter from me. In the worst-case scenario, she may get creeped out and burn it..."

The literacy rates in this world weren't that high. Mira seemed kind of sad.

"You're not from the capital, Mira?"

"I come from a village called Arum that's three days away from the capital."

We'd been acquainted for almost half a year now, yet I'd had absolutely no idea.

"I wonder how my mom is doing," she said, sounding wistful. "I want to let her know I'm doing well." She gazed up at the dungeon ceiling as though her thoughts were fixed on the unseen sky. After all, that sky was what connected her to her hometown.

"Is there anyone in your village who can read?"

"The mayor and the priest can, I suppose."

"Then you can just think about the mayor and throw this glider. How about you write that this is a letter from you and to please send it on to your mother?"

"I hadn't thought of that!" she exclaimed. "Mister Yusuke, please give me one Assembled Glider."

"Thanks for your continued patronage!"

The glider had a wingspan of twenty centimeters. Mira used the pen I lent her to squeeze everything she wanted to say into the letter to her mother.

"I finished."

"All right. Now you need to think of the mayor and throw it into the air. Don't worry. It'll fly even from inside the dungeon."

"Okay." She closed her eyes and lost herself in thought. I was sure she was remembering her home village and the mayor's face. The propeller, having absorbed her mana to activate its Flight Magic, started spinning, scattering

phosphorescent light. “Please deliver this to the mayor!”

The glider left her hand, trailing faint traces of light, and took off. It flew along the ceiling, passing through people and objects. Mira was a kind girl, so I could guess she worried about her mother every day. Even once we couldn’t see the glider anymore, she continued to peer into the air as if in prayer.

“Don’t worry,” I reassured her. “I’m sure it’ll reach your mother.”

“You’re right. Yeah... It *is* one of Dagashi-ya Yahagi’s products,” Mira said with some tears in her eyes.

Michelle returned from the dungeon depths once early evening came around. She too seemed to take an interest in the Assembled Glider.

“This is another amazing product,” she said. “Maybe it’ll sell out immediately like the Mobile Forces did.”

“I’m not so sure about that.” It was hard to say that it was selling as well as I had hoped. That was possibly due in large part to many adventurers being unable to write. Would it sell a little better if I served as a scribe? That might not be a half-bad idea. Also, Baron Ethel would probably buy these in bulk if he knew about them, so I intended to keep quiet about them to him. I didn’t want to be a dagashi-ya that catered to the state. I wanted to be a dagashi-ya that was beloved by the rookies. “Oh right, I have something to ask of you, Michelle.”

“What is it? D-Do you want to use me as a lap pillow? Or do you want us to hug for a hundred minutes?”

I hadn’t said a single word about that. “No, it’s not that. I want you to send a letter to me using the Assembled Glider. I want to know how it reaches people.”

“A letter to you...”

“I’ll try it too, so, please.”

“Really?!” she gasped. “Oh no, a love letter from Yusuke...”

“It’s not a love letter,” I said, slightly exasperated. “It’s just a normal one. Please don’t expect a sugary sweet letter or something. It’s too embarrassing...”

Michelle looked a little disappointed, but she was interested in the prospect of exchanging letters itself, so we decided we'd launch our letters tonight.

Once I got home, I immediately wrote Michelle a letter on a glider.

Michelle,

Thanks for making us yet another delicious dinner today. I just told you this a second ago, but the pumpkin soup was incredible. I've never eaten such a good pumpkin dish before.

It's going to be particularly cold tonight, so make sure you're bundled up when you sleep. Let's see each other at the dungeon again tomorrow.

I'm not good at putting my feelings into words, but thanks for getting along with me. It's embarrassing to formally write it down, but I love you.

Yusuke

Was this okay? Even exchanging small messages like this was a whole ordeal in this other world. I opened the window and threw the glider. Under the starry night sky, the propeller hightailed it to Michelle's house at rapid speed, emitting a blue light as it went.

Ten minutes later, I heard a knocking sound at the window. When I opened the curtains, there was a glider from Michelle suspended in the air. I was surprised that this glider could also hover. The propeller stopped moving once I reached out and grabbed its wing.

Oh? There's something stuck on the glider. A piece of paper that had been neatly rolled up was fixed in place. What's going on here?

Yusuke,

When I started writing this message, I realized the wings of this glider would be too small to convey my feelings. To solve this, I performed some extreme modifications on the glider to increase its load capacity. I've written down my feelings in the attached letter, so please look at that instead.

She'd already performed some extreme modifications on it... I didn't know whether to say I was impressed or what... "Let's see, what did she write?"

Yusuke, I love you. I love you so much. I love you so
much I could die. I love you. I can't be away from you
anymore. I love you so much it hurts to breathe. My heart
hurts. My chest hurts. I want to see you as soon as
possible. I want to use magic to make it morning. I want to
move the sun. I don't want to let you go. I want you to be
by my side forever. I want to keep touching you. I want you
to touch me. I want you. I love you so much I'm going to go
crazy... I love you I love you I love you I love you I love
you I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you
I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you I
love you I love you I love you I love you I love you I love
you I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you
I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you I
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you I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you

I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you I
love you I love you I love you I love you I love you I love
you I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you
I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you I
love you I love you I love you I love you I love

It contained words written so small that they hurt my eyes, all narrowly packed together.

Now that I'd acquired Rigal, Meryl, and Mira's help, I finally set out to make the map of B3. Down here, it was a completely different world than the previous floors. No matter how you cut it, there were tons of monsters, and each and every one of them was way stronger than those we'd encountered before.

"Whoa! Three of them suddenly appeared!" I exclaimed.

When we came down from B2, we were greeted by some Dungeon Lizards near the staircase. The horned, Komodo-dragon-esque creatures approached us at high speed. I rapidly fired my Eight-Round Pistol, but all of my bullets missed. Was it really this difficult to hit a moving target?

"Step back, Mister Yusuke!" Meryl used her shield to intercept the Dungeon Lizard's charge. Rigal promptly took out the enemy on the left side with a Fireball, and Mira used her Ice Needles to defeat the one on the right.

"Damn it. Take this!" I chased down the lizard that Meryl had stunned and finally fired two bullets into its head. Getting close enough to shoot at point-blank range so that I didn't miss had been scary, but we'd somehow managed our first battle.

"When it comes down to it, you have guts, Mister Yusuke. I wouldn't have guessed that this was your first time on B3." Mira praised me, but I had mixed feelings. I was aware that my body hadn't immediately reacted in the moment. Even the slightest hesitation could lead to death down here. If I acted like that every time, eventually my corpse would litter the dungeon.

“Is B3 crawling with monsters like these?” I asked.

“Hmm. I think Dungeon Lizards are monsters of average strength.”

“Their movements really are wildly different from the ones on the upper floors,” I said. “No wonder it’s said that for rookies, the real deal starts on B3.”

I had once again felt how harsh the trade of an adventurer truly was. All you got for risking your life fighting a Dungeon Lizard was a measly 3,000 rims. If you divided that evenly among four people, that left you with less than 1,000 each.

“It’d be nice if we could just make loads of money in a snap. I wish a Slime would drop a gold coin...” Meryl said, starting up her idle complaints, but it was understandable. Even Mira let out a small sigh.

“If only we could find a treasure chest,” she lamented.

“A treasure chest?”

“Yes, they appear sometimes—about once every three months.”

According to Mira, treasure chests were phenomena that appeared on dungeon floors B3 and below.

“If you found one, would it be enough to let you fool around for the rest of your life or something?”

“No way.” Meryl waved her hand with a bitter smile. “The treasure chests get bigger the deeper down you go. The value of the treasure you can get increases accordingly. But I heard that the treasure chests on B3 are about this big.” Meryl used her hands to form the shape of a box. It was small enough to place on the palm of your hand.

“That small?” I asked.

“Yeah,” Meryl nodded. “There’s only stuff like ten silver coins or a single jewel inside. That said, 100,000 rims *does* sound pretty nice.”

If you got 100,000 rims and split it among four people, each person would still get 25,000 rims. With an amount like that, their lives should get a lot easier. Even Rigal might be able to purchase one of those wands that mages used. They were all working so hard. What was wrong with a special bonus every once in a

while?

“Hang tight for a second.” I faced the wall and activated my Clairvoyance. I wasn’t going to look into the future or anything, so the burden on my body shouldn’t be so heavy. I had my worries, but my desire to see that treasure chest with my own eyes was strong too. *If it’s only for a little bit...*

I inputted the words “treasure chest” and set the search location to B3.

“Don’t tell me you need the toilet, Mister Yusuke,” I heard Mira’s voice say in the background, but I couldn’t deny her assumption just now. Maybe it was because I still wasn’t used to using the search function, but if I talked or something in the middle of it, it’d cancel the magic.

Search results immediately appeared, and my camera instantly shifted, showing me a metal treasure chest on the ground. It was pretty small, just like Meryl had said, even smaller than the boxes the Mobile Forces came in. It contained...a mere eight silver coins. It was a lot lamer than what Meryl had described. I checked the outside of the room, took note of the features that could help identify the place, and then returned my consciousness to my body right away.

“What’s the matter, Mister Yusuke?” Rigal touched my shoulder at the same moment I returned to my body. My heart was thumping a bit, but it seemed fine.

“It’s nothing. I was just thinking a little,” I said, acting calm, as if nothing had happened. But Meryl squinted at me doubtfully.

“Aren’t you breathing a little hard?”

“N-No.” This was why it was tough to use my Clairvoyance.

“You’ve been spacing out a lot recently,” she said, sounding suspicious. “And you start breathing hard when you do...”

Aw, she’s worried about me...

“Are you imagining something perverted?”

“I don’t have that luxury in this dungeon!” I shouted. I never would’ve guessed that was how I was seen. I was searching for the treasure chest for

everyone! *Whatever, checking out that room takes priority right now.* “By the way, do you know that place where there’re a bunch of small Goblin statues lined up?”

“Those are the One-Hundred-Ogre Statues,” Mira replied. “It’s not that far from where we are.”

“You know the way there, Mira?”

“Yes. I’ve been there many times.” Mira was the reliable sort, so she wasn’t likely to be mistaken.

Meryl heard our conversation and tilted her head. “But there’s nothing there. Monsters rarely show up, so I think it’s pointless to go.”

“Don’t say that. Today, I’m in the mood to map out the area around there. Here, I’ll give you some treasure, so please liven up!”

Product name: Jewel Candy

Description: Candy that’s shaped and colored like a jewel.

There are three varieties - Ruby, sapphire, and emerald. Each type features a sophisticated flavor - strawberry, Blue Hawaii, and muscat.

Restores willpower after consumption and makes you feel positive.

Price: Thirty rims

“Aw, I got my hopes up for nothing. They’re not real jewels...” Meryl grumbled, sounding somewhat disappointed, but Mira happily held the candy up to the light.

“But they’re pretty like real jewels,” said Mira. “It’s almost a waste to eat them.”

“Mister Yusuke gave them to us,” Rigal chimed in. “Even these are treasures to me.”

The multicolored candies held in each of their hands sparkled in the light of the dungeon lamps. *Hang on, everyone. I'll show you all the real deal right away! Even if the contents are kinda lame...*

The Adventurer Meryl's Diary: Entry 2

Mister Yusuke's intuition has gotten sharper recently. He's way more than just a good fortune teller. It's like he's some legendary prophet. When we went to the hunting ground Mister Yusuke told us about today, there really were Golden Frogs there! My expectations were low, so it was a huge surprise! Not a single one of those five frogs dropped a gold coin when we defeated them, but it is a fact that we got good money out of it. Thanks to that, we had a pretty grand dinner today.

Mister Yusuke told me to keep this a secret. I'm gonna keep quiet for his sake since it sounds like he doesn't want rumors to spread, but I think he's amazing enough that he could make a living from fortune-telling if he wasn't a dagashi-ya.

Incidentally, I asked him to read my love fortune but he instantly shot me down, saying he couldn't possibly know. Maybe what he does is a little different from fortune-telling? Man, I thought he'd tell me what my future boyfriend would be like... Well, it's no fun if you know too much about the future. I'll find out when the time comes. Until then, I'll wait with bated breath.

Mira used that new product Stick Chocolate in our hunt today. I could tell just by looking that it increased her offensive magic's power. I think it's a pretty useful snack. It's just that the fact you can only use it once is kinda meh...

I suggested she take three of them but she told me she'd get fat if she ate too much, while clutching her boobs. What's so bad if only your boobs get fat? (Humph!) Jeez, Mira's amazing figure should be a crime!

Mister Yusuke commissioned us to help him map floor B3. We decided that the base price to escort him was 4,000 rims, and that we'd divide the money and magic crystals the monsters dropped evenly among us. The terms were pretty agreeable. As expected of Mister Yusuke—generous as always. The four of us went down there together right away. Mister Yusuke's skills have improved, and

Rigal's offensive magic isn't half bad. If Rigal can increase his mana a little more, I think he'll become a fine adventurer. With Mira and me added to the mix, I think this mapmaking team has gotten a lot stronger. We were scouting out B3, yet there wasn't a single situation that had me biting my nails.

The one and only thing I was uneasy about was Miss Michelle's jealousy. Is she going to shout and accuse us of seducing Mister Yusuke again? She's recently gotten nicer to us too, so I think it'll be fine, but her jealousy is terrifying... I really don't want to get cursed like the former king, thanks.

I think I'd be happy if we could just stay together in this four-man team. Oh! But I'm the one who'd be in trouble if the dagashi-ya went away... Out of everyone, I'm the one who's enjoying Dagashi-ya Yahagi to the fullest!

Something happened! It's been almost two years since I became an adventurer and I finally came face-to-face with a treasure chest! The power of Mister Yusuke's fortune-telling is a little scary. When we went to the place he told us about, there really was a treasure chest, just like he said.

Hm... Is it really fortune-telling? Maybe he's using some secret dagashi! If he is, I definitely want him to sell it. I'd buy it up every day...

The treasure chest was small, so there were only eight silver coins inside. Still, that was 80,000 rims in total! Each person got 20,000 rims. Combined with the magic crystals and the day's drops, I raked in 27,000 rims. I've never earned that much in one day before.

We all went out to eat dinner together right after that, and I gobbled down three of my favorite grilled chicken drumsticks. I'll be able to pay my rent no problem, and I can rest easy this month. Maybe I'll pull ten Scratch Cards tomorrow? I could indulge myself in that at least, right? No, I'll make it twelve!

Mira and I talked about it, and we decided to take the day off tomorrow. I'm happy I'll be able to sleep in until noon. I feel like I'll have some good dreams tonight.

Chapter 3: The Iron Plate Is Hot

That morning, the first one to come barging into my shop was Rigal, who was now accompanying Garmr and his team. Rigal's face was flushed, overflowing with happiness. "Good morning, Mister Yahagi!"

"Good morning, Rigal," I said. "You've finally become an official member of the team, huh?"

"Thanks to your help, I'm going to be starting my training today!" he exclaimed. His offensive magic had improved remarkably and just as promised, Garmr had let him onto the team. He'd finally taken one step toward becoming a full-fledged adventurer. Seeing him like this, it was hard to believe he'd been a teary-eyed porter just a short while ago. Growing young boys surprise you by maturing in the blink of an eye.

"So about me helping you out with your map..." he started.

"Don't worry about it," I said. Losing Rigal was painful, but this mapmaking business was short-term work, while he'd be on Garmr's team for the long haul. As a new member, he needed to focus on getting used to his new team. Including Rigal, there were three newbies undergoing training. Garmr would grow his team, then transfer their base of operations to B3; this was how rookies became veteran adventurers.

"Heya, Garmr," I greeted him. "Your family's getting a lot bigger."

"We're just getting started," he replied, his eyes lit up with determination. "We're gonna rake in the cash and make sure the whole capital knows our names!" Garmr turned around to face his newbies, breathing heavily through his nose with excitement. "All right, today's my treat. You greenhorns get to buy whatever you want, up to 300 rims."

The newbies burst into cheers. Their excitement reminded me that they really were still kids.

Rigal and the others thought long and hard and gradually began filling their

baskets with my store's products. *They get to buy up to 300 rims' worth of snacks, huh...?* It reminded me of field trips during my time in elementary school. I'd also gone to my neighborhood dagashi-ya and shopped like this, carefully selecting my snacks.

Let's see, what did Rigal buy?

Skewered Squid - 30 rims

Ten-Rim Gum (x7) - 70 rims

Monster Chips - 100 rims

Stick Chocolate - 30 rims

Rocket Bombs - 50 rims

Morocco Yogurt - 20 rims

I see, I see. Using Skewered Squid to heighten your senses was the most basic of basics. You never knew when you might be hit with a surprise attack in the dungeon. Then, as a mage, Rigal had bought several pieces of mana-restoring Ten-Rim Gum, and he'd prepared a Stick Chocolate for dishing out a blow at a critical moment. This was also standard practice.

Even though Monster Chips were expensive, you could hope for a rare card. He probably thought that he could exchange the chips with friends too. It was also a good decision to pull the Rocket Bomb lottery to prepare for when he ran out of mana. And he hadn't forgotten to buy a Morocco Yogurt in case he got hurt either... *Not too shabby, Rigal!*

"Oh right, this may not matter to a mage like you, Rigal, but I got this new product."

Product name: Chocolate Bat

Description: A snack featuring a chocolate-coated biscuit shaped like a baseball bat.

Restores some HP upon consumption.

It features a lottery. If the words “Home run” are written inside the package, you can receive the Legendary Spiked Bat.

A seasonal item available from fall to spring.

Price: Thirty rims

Rigal curiously picked up the Chocolate Bat. “It’s rare for there to be a lottery where you can obtain an additional item beyond the original product,” he said. “What’s the Spiked Bat like?”

I grinned. “Heh heh heh. Look and be amazed. This is the Legendary Spiked Bat!” I took out the Spiked Bat I had hidden under the table. Bathed in the overhead lights, it sparkled silver. Though it was called a Spiked Bat, that didn’t mean it was a wooden bat with nails jammed into it. If you used something like that in battle, it’d break before you could blink. This was a *metal* bat that appeared to have nails driven into it. Unlike the type used in high school baseball, it wasn’t hollow on the inside. The whole thing was precisely machined and profoundly heavy. “Now this is a magic item that deals a set 300 damage,” I said.

“What does that mean?”

“It means that no matter who uses this, they can dish out a fixed amount of damage.”

Well, they did have to actually land the hit. Therefore, it was probably the kind of weapon that a close-quarters combat specialist should wield.

“Are you serious?!” Garmr exclaimed. As a warrior, he’d been the one to react to the Spiked Bat’s stats. “It really deals a set 300 damage?!”

“That’s what the product description says.”

“So that means I’ll be able to smash those Big Coconut Crabs to bits in one blow! Give me five of those Chocolate Bat thingies!”

“Give me six,” came Meryl’s voice. I didn’t know when she’d arrived, but she was suddenly handing me three large copper coins. She was becoming a little

more reckless with her money—maybe it was because she was earning more than she used to.

“Hold it, Meryl,” I said. “You won’t win so easily.”

“Don’t stop me, Mister Yusuke. I’m buying dreams here!”

“These aren’t dreams. They’re snacks!”

That’s the logic of gambling addicts, Meryl.

“Meryl, let’s leave it at three,” Mira coaxed her. “I’ll buy one, and if I win, I’ll give you the bat.” She then nonchalantly bought one and opened it up. “Oh? There’s something written here.”

No way... Had Mira and her scarily good luck immediately drawn the winning ticket for the Legendary Spiked Bat?! Everyone held their breath and goggled at her as Mira happily showed me the letters written on the package.

“It says ‘hit.’”

“If it says ‘hit’ then you can trade it in for another Chocolate Bat.”

Sheesh, that scared me. Mira had really good luck, so I’d panicked for a second.

Despite that small scare, not one adventurer actually got the Legendary Spiked Bat that day. It probably wasn’t something you could obtain that easily.



The end of the year was approaching. *This year will soon come to a close, huh.* I thought about how I had been transferred here this past spring; so much had happened within a short period of time. I'd started a dagashi-ya in a new world, gotten to know Michelle, and found myself wrapped up in a coup d'état. *It's been a life full of twists and turns, if I do say so myself.*

"What are you going to do for the Cordelius Procession, Mister Yusuke?" Rigal, who was visiting my store, asked me.

"What is the Cordelius Procession?"

"It's the festival of Saint Cordelius."

Apparently, there had once been an admirable priest named Saint Cordelius. Stories told that when an epidemic broke out at the end of the year, he examined the sick in each and every house in only one night, lighting his way with the Lamplight spell.

"To honor that," Rigal continued, "the people in the capital hold lights and march around the town on New Year's Eve. Many street stalls open up along the roads, and it's very lively."

Having been a Japanese person in my previous life, I interpreted it as something like a lantern procession. "Sounds like a fun event."

"Are you going to set up your store, Mister Yusuke? Or are you going to participate in the festival with Teacher?"

The "Teacher" he was referring to was Michelle. She'd taken him under her wing since Rigal had grown attached to me, and she occasionally taught him magic. *But hmm...open up my store or participate in the procession... Which should I do?*

"I was thinking of taking some time off at the end of the year. How about you?" I asked Michelle, who was nearby.

"I'm fine either way, so long as I get to spend time with you," she replied, fidgeting bashfully. We'd been spending a lot of time working apart from each other recently, so I also wanted to at least spend some time together at New

Year's.

"We should participate in the procession then," I said. "My hands are gonna be full once the new year starts since I'll be going all in on B3's map, so I'm gonna take New Year's Eve off."

I planned to first enjoy the festival with everyone and then go on a date with Michelle, just the two of us. "Still, the Cordelius Procession, huh...?" I mused. "This product might sell."

"What is it?"

I took out the new product that had been added to my lineup today.

Product name: Neon Jelly

Description: Stick-type jelly. It emits light if you pour mana into it.

Includes five types - Soda, pineapple, strawberry, melon, and grape. Each one glows blue, yellow, red, green, or purple, respectively.

Price: Thirty rims

It was delicious, with a refreshing sweetness, and it had an interesting mouthfeel thanks to the konjac it contained. You could buy something like this for only 30 rims—the corporations had put in a lot of effort to keep it that way despite the good quality. Eating glowing jelly wouldn't harm your health either, it seemed.

"Here, look." When I loaded my mana into the soda-flavored one, the roughly thirty-centimeter-long stick glowed a light-blue color. It wouldn't stand out in a bright place, but once you placed it in the shade, it glowed like a beam sword.

"Oh! It looks like fun!" Rigal exclaimed.

"Give me ten. Two of each color," Meryl said, popping up from somewhere to immediately purchase it. "I'm going to use these to totally deck myself out and capture everyone's attention! You buy some too, Mira."

“What? But I can use the Lamplight spell...”

“But it only comes in one color,” Meryl pointed out.

“Yeah, but...”

Michelle, who stood beside the troubled Mira, used magic to create a sphere of light, catching Mira’s attention.

“Huh? A Lamplight?”

Wow, so this was the Lamplight spell. It was pretty bright. *Huh?* Meryl had said that it only came in one color, but Michelle’s Lamplight was changing from red to yellow, from yellow to green, glowing with one color after another!

“Amazing!” Mira exclaimed. “You can change the color of your Lamplight?”

“Basically, all you have to do is change your mana’s wavelength,” replied Michelle.

“I understand the theory, but for me, changing it so smoothly is practically...” Mira trailed off, staring intently at Michelle’s magic.

“Once you get the hang of it, you can do it right away. I can show you.”

“Really?!” Mira gasped. “Thank you!”

“It’s nothing...”

As of late, Michelle had been giving off a softer vibe than before. She might be in a calmer state of mind now that she’d been removed from the wanted list. It was a good thing.

“See, if the mana’s wavelength is long, it becomes a bright color, doesn’t it? Conversely, if you make it short, it becomes more plain. Like plain old me... Gloomy...”

Hmm. It seemed there was still a ways to go before she was stable. Regardless, Michelle had recently been nicer to people other than me. *Maybe that’s who she’s always been, deep down.*

Chichi’s Side

The former queen, Chichi, looked down on the Cordelius Procession from the tower she was imprisoned in, disgusted. This year, there were a number of colorful lights she hadn't seen before, making for a more spectacular sight than in previous years. Chichi didn't know that the unusual red and green lights were thanks to the Neon Jellies that Yusuke Yahagi sold. If she had, her anger would likely have swelled.

"Chichi, would you like to come here and drink some wine?" the former king's voice called from the dining table. "Tonight's New Year's Eve, so we've been given some red wine as a special treat. Well, it's pretty worthless wine, but..."

Chichi ignored him. Since being imprisoned in this tower, she hadn't spoken to him for the most part. Theirs had always been a loveless marriage. She'd only stolen the king from her sister because she'd been drawn to his status.

"Hey, Chichi, are you listening to me?!"

She grew irritated even hearing her husband's voice. She hadn't the slightest bit of interest in a loser who'd lost his money and political power. Why didn't this idiotic man understand that? Normally, she'd be enjoying an end-of-the-year party at the royal palace right about now, yet she'd gotten nothing but shabby food this year.

This is that new King Bartos and my sister Michelle's fault, Chichi thought. She had no remorse for how she and the former king had done as they pleased.

"And that man..." she murmured aloud, remembering the man who had dared to say she was ugly. She gritted her teeth. It wasn't like she'd never been insulted before. However, that was the one and only time she'd ever been called ugly. To Chichi, her own good looks were the unshakable foundation of her confidence. Even if he was an insignificant street vendor, she couldn't forgive anyone who dared question *that*. "I'll definitely have my revenge," she seethed.

First things first, she thought to herself, *I need to escape. I'll go for the newly hired servant to start with. I'll tug on his heartstrings by playing the part of a poor, deceived woman. All I have to do is flash a cordial smile at them, and stupid men instantly believe me.*

Chichi faced the window and smiled a humble smile. Her expression was

innocent, the spitting image of a pitiful woman in miserable straits.

Yusuke's Side

Michelle and I arrived at the end-of-year event, the Cordelius Procession. From afar, the lights looked beautiful, like a luminous, flowing kimono sash.

"Now let's turn our lights on too," I said, taking out my Neon Jelly. "What color do you want?"

"I want grape," she replied. "The purple one..."

She'd chosen the most subdued color, as always. However, when my witch lit her purple neon light, she took on an enchanting atmosphere and glowed more mysteriously than usual. The color she had created with the short wavelength fit the witch Michelle very well. I hadn't realized it before, but women like this really were my type...

"What's the matter?"

Noticing my gaze, Michelle tilted her head, curious.

"I was learning something new about my sexual preferences," I said.

"Huh?"

I took out a green-colored melon-flavored stick for myself and made it glow.

We didn't often hold hands outside, but today was New Year's Eve. I wouldn't say I was too embarrassed. We were going to enjoy the festival together, so I gently took Michelle's hand.

"Yusuke..."

"You don't want to?"

"No, I do!" Michelle exclaimed, vigorously shaking her head. The sight was so unbearably precious.

"It's warmer like this, right?"

"Yeah, I'm happy."

We joined the flow of the procession, still holding hands, and started to walk.

When I first transferred to this new world, I'd worried about what was going to happen, but I had somehow found happiness. If I had to be honest, my days were more fulfilling now than they'd been in my previous life. *Those were some really dark times...*

As I pondered my past and my future, I felt a strange sensation on my right hand, the one holding Michelle's. When I looked down, a thin, gleaming gold string was coiling around our wrists. "Miss Michelle..."

"Mm-hmm?"

"Pray tell, what might this glowing thread be?"

"Captivity Magic," she chirped. "So you can't get away from me. Just in case." Michelle's smile glowed mysteriously, illuminated by the Neon Jelly. *Is this really okay?* But even though I had some anxieties, I was happy.

The festival's participants were citizens of the capital, so I frequently ran into people I knew.

"Happy New Year, Mister Yahagi!"

"Huh? You're in the middle of a date. Hmm."

I exchanged words with my adventurer acquaintances and walked along, browsing the roadside stalls. We were headed toward the shrine dedicated to Saint Cordelius. It was said that if you visited it, you'd be blessed with good health in the next year.

Among the many smiles, there was one disheartened band—the usually energetic Garmr and his team. Normally, they'd be rowdily drinking mulled wine or something, but today they were sitting on some stone steps, shoulders slumped.

"Hey now, what's wrong?" I called out to Garmr, who seemed down in the dumps.

"Huh?!" Garmr half stood, as if he'd taken offense. Then he recognized us. "Oh. It's Mister Yahagi and the missus." He weakly plopped back down on the stairs. "Well, we got into some deep trouble in the B3 Back Regions."

Garmr had grown his team, so he'd enthusiastically set off for the B3 Back Regions. They'd earned good money for a while, but that hadn't lasted long. One day, not only had they gotten lost, but they'd also encountered a formidable enemy and barely escaped with their lives.

"I really thought we were going to die," he mumbled. "We even dropped our belongings by accident, and the cost of medical treatment was also expensive, so that's got us deep in the red."

So, they didn't even have money to buy wine during a festival.

"Ugh, it's freezing," Rigal said, shivering. "I wanna drink some hot apple wine."

Though he'd been promoted from a porter to a team member, financial stability was still far out of reach. *Sometimes the year just ends like this, huh.* I didn't mind treating them to some wine, but I was a dagashi-ya. *I guess I should help them out in a manner befitting a dagashi-ya.*

"I'll give you something warm to drink, so come here." I moved to a spot where there weren't many people and took out my carrying-pole store. "I'll make you something good with this."

"A Tasty Stick? I'd rather have those Curry Rice Crackers that make you warmer, though..."

"Well, just watch."

Product name: Tasty Stick (Corn potage flavor)

Description: A snack food that recovers HP.

Price: Ten rims

The Tasty Stick was a pretty popular item at my store. The way it filled you up for such a cheap price kept the customers coming back for more. Today, I was going to use it to treat them to something good.

I took out a pan and some milk that I kept stocked in my live-in store. "All right, everyone. Smash your Tasty Stick to pieces inside its bag."

“Is that okay?”

“Yep. Make sure it’s completely turned into fine dust. Don’t accidentally rip the bag.”

Garmr and the others divided the labor between them to crush the Tasty Sticks one after another. I then transferred the now-powdered Tasty Sticks to the pot.

“Now I’ll pour the milk in... Michelle, can you use magic to heat the pot?”

“Okay.”

I quietly stirred the pot as it warmed up, and the contents began to thicken.

“Is this corn potage?”

“Bingo,” I said. “For now, drink this and warm up.” Adding three to four Tasty Sticks to one hundred milliliters of milk made it delicious, with just the right amount of richness.

“Whoa, it’s really a potage!”

“It’s tasty.”

I was glad that I’d stocked some tableware and pots in my live-in store. I predicted I’d be able to summon an iron plate too, if I leveled up. It might not be a half-bad idea to offer some easy cooking like this from now on.

“There’s more where that came from, so don’t be shy.”

“Seconds please!”

“Me too!”

The young adventurers didn’t hold back and quickly emptied the pot.

“We’ve warmed up thanks to you.”

“Thanks, Mister Yahagi!”

I was glad that they could be pleased by such a trivial act of service. It really was no big deal.

“Oh, well. The past is in the past, and we’ll earn more again tomorrow!”

“Yeah!”

Everyone seemed to be a little more cheerful now. The group, having regained their spirits, headed off to the shrine. I was kinda starting to feel hungry and cold too. The freezing wind buffeted me and made my body shudder.

“Are you cold, Yusuke?”

“Yeah. I should’ve had a sip of that corn potage too.”

Michelle and I hadn’t had a single drop of that soup since Garmr and his group had greedily devoured it all.

“They all had such big appetites.”

“No kidding,” I chuckled. “Now then, you want us to stop by a street stall and get something to eat too?”

“Well...” Michelle quickly leaned toward me. “I have some delicious apple wine at home. It’s sweet and goes down easily. If you’d like, you could...”

Apple wine, huh...? Although she was anxious as she invited me over, I felt like I’d had a spell cast on me tonight. Even if it were a witch’s poison apple, I’d probably eat it with no hesitation. I’d been ready for a while now.

“Can I stay the night?” I asked.

“Yeah...”

We took each other’s hands again and walked on.

When I awoke, Michelle was so close to me that I could feel her breath. My head gradually began to clear in the dim room. We were in the same bed and wrapped together in the same blanket. Michelle was staring into my face with a serious expression, as though it were a rare sight.

“Good morning, Yusuke. Did you sleep well?”

“Yeah.”

The sun of the new year shone from beyond the curtains.

“It’s a new year,” she said. “I’m looking forward to spending it with you.”

“Same here. Happy New Year.” I reached my arms out and gently pulled Michelle in close to me. As I basked in the bliss of her warmth, I allowed myself to indulge in a bit of bedtime laziness. Michelle nuzzled her face into my chest like a cat and let out a small laugh.

“I gotta get up soon.”

“You can wait a little longer...” she murmured.

“I want coffee. You want some too, don’t you?” I made up my mind and crawled out of bed.

“Then I’ll help too.” Michelle also got up, and the light that shone through the curtains cast a spotlight on her breasts. No matter how many times I looked at them, I was impressed by how big and beautiful they were. She noticed where I was looking and covered herself up with the blanket. “Don’t stare so much,” she whimpered. “It’s embarrassing.”

I’d gazed at her all night, yet it seemed she was still embarrassed. *Maybe that’s just how it is.*

“Stay in bed for a bit longer. I’ll turn on the heater and make some coffee.” I left Michelle in bed and headed for the kitchen.



This was the first night we'd spent in the same bed, but we actually hadn't taken that final step. We'd thoroughly talked about it and come to that decision. Michelle had her research, and I also had my own goal of making maps. Raising a kid didn't fit into either of those plans. I'd touched on this before, but there were no reliable contraceptives in this world. I did think our future child Macherie (temporary name) was cute, but it was still too early. Michelle was of the same opinion.

Several adventurers died in the dungeon every day. It wrenched my heart each time I heard someone I knew had died. The thought that Rigal, Meryl, or Mira could die tomorrow filled me with excruciating pain. It wasn't even a complete impossibility. But if I could finish my map, I was sure that more adventurers would be able to survive—especially the novice rookies. Firm in that conviction, I'd make my map. I wanted to preserve these small joys around me for as long as I could. Such was my modest desire and my dream as a dagashi-ya.

On the fourth day of the new year, I headed into the dungeon for the first time in a while. Just like in Japan, it seemed you generally took the first three days of the new year off here, although the adventurers who found it hard to get by kept up business as usual regardless of the holidays.

"Good morning, Mister Yahagi! I was waiting for you to open."

When I arrived at the B2 hot spring, Garmr and his team were eagerly waiting for me.

"Hey there," I greeted him. "You're early."

"Well," he started, "you know how we really messed up at the end of the year?"

If I remembered correctly, they'd run into a tough foe and scrambled home. I'd heard that was when they'd dropped their bags full of magic crystals in the back regions of the dungeon. I was sure that was why they'd returned to work during the New Year holidays. "Have you earned some money since then?"

"Enough to buy some dagashi, yeah."

Apparently, he was going to buy dagashi at my place and go out to work for a bit longer.

“Hang tight a sec. I’ll bring out my store right now.”

I said the words “Store, open” and summoned my live-in shop inside the wall. I did this because it took up a good deal of space if I opened it inside the room, even if it was just a small wooden house. It wouldn’t get in anybody’s way if I put it inside the dungeon wall, so recently I’d been doing this as a rule. At a glance, it looked like a stone building where the inside had been remodeled into a Showa-era shop.

“Huh? The store’s gotten more spacious.” *Looks like I’ve leveled up again.*

The entrance was the same, but the inside had gotten a little bigger. When I opened the sliding door to enter, it looked like the right side of the store had expanded. There were even three tables over there.

“What weird tables. They’ve each got an iron plate in the middle.”

“Maybe they’ll serve as protection against a surprise attack?”

Garmr and the others were surrounding the new tables with curiosity. *I see. So the time has finally come. Dagashi-ya Yahagi has finally gotten its iron plates!*

“It’s an iron plate meant for cooking,” I explained. “It gets hot since there are magical burners underneath.”

“Cooking? You’re going to cook, Mister Yahagi?”

“No, usually the customers do.”

When I considered what best represented stuff made on an iron plate, things like okonomiyaki and monjayaki came to mind. Was okonomiyaki more mainstream around the Kansai region? It seemed monjayaki was served in only one part of Kanto. Even in Tokyo, it could only be eaten in a limited area. Neither of them had been offered at the dagashi-ya I used to frequent.

Now then, what would Dagashi-ya Yahagi be offering?

“Oh, there’s a new fridge.” My gaze fixed on a white fridge I’d never seen before. It looked like an old-fashioned refrigerator that could be considered the

quintessential household appliance.

“Let’s see, what’s inside?”

When I opened up the fridge, Garmr and the others, brimming with curiosity, peered in with me.

“What is that? Pasta?”

“And are these cabbages cut into chunks?”

There were only two ingredients inside of the refrigerator.

“It’s not pasta,” I said. “They’re steamed noodles.”

“What is that?”

“An ingredient for yakisoba.”

“Yakisoba?”

These adventurers from this new world, unfamiliar with sauce yakisoba, looked at me with puzzled faces.

Product name: Sauce Yakisoba

Description: Made simply of noodles and cabbage. Customers can prepare it themselves using things like sauce, salt, pepper, and oil. You’re free to mix in any dagashi or meat you’ve brought yourself! Reduces fatigue and increases HP upon consumption.

Price: Two hundred rims

It was pretty simple, as one would expect for such a cheap price. *There isn’t even green dried seaweed or red pickled ginger?*

“I don’t really know what it is, but I’m hungry. I think I’ll buy one for breakfast,” said Garmr, handing me the two large copper coins that he’d just earned.

“All right, then I’ll show you how to fry it.”

When it came to cooking yakisoba, making a few mistakes wouldn't render it inedible. I grasped spatulas in both hands as I gazed at the steaming iron plate.

I sensed that the yakisoba combos the adventurers were making would be all the rage soon. They didn't simply fry the noodles and cabbage. They also mixed in various ingredients. Many added vegetable scraps and dried meat, but there were also more people adding in dagashi. They'd figured out that if you cooked yakisoba with dagashi, you'd obtain strong blessings.

"For example, this Jumbo Katsu," I explained to Michelle. She was sitting in front of the iron plate while I chopped up the large katsu into bite-size chunks with my spatula. "Normally, it'll only give you increased physical strength for three seconds when you shout, 'Power boost,' but when you put it in yakisoba..."

This dagashi was already sauce flavored, so it didn't clash with the flavors of the yakisoba. You mixed the yakisoba and katsu well, then added cabbage at the end. If you fried everything while putting sauce on it, you'd soon finish making the Jumbo Katsu Yakisoba.

"What happens then?"

"Amazingly, the power boost's duration will be extended to twelve seconds."

"Four times longer is amazing," she noted. "It'd probably be useful in battle too."

"Even better, its effectiveness lasts half a day. In other words, for half a day after eating this, you can use a onetime power boost whenever you want."

Thanks to that, there'd recently been many adventurers who'd come here to eat Jumbo Katsu Yakisoba for breakfast. We only had three iron plates, so a line would form due to its sheer popularity.

"All right, it's ready. Eat up."

It was Michelle's first time eating yakisoba. I felt I'd done well making it but I was just a bit nervous.

"Don't mind if I do."

It was cute to see Michelle huffing as she ate the hot yakisoba. “How is it?”

“It tastes delicious. (*Anything is when Yusuke makes it.* ≡)”

She was always cooking for me, so I was happy that she was pleased. I would put lots of vegetables in next time. I could easily get stuff like carrots and onions at the town market.

“What other combinations can you make?”

“Apparently, it’s popular to take the snack New Orleans Mayonnaise and break it up to use as a topping. Also, you can boost your defense if you put yakisoba in between some Sauce Rice Crackers and eat it.”

Would Yakisoba Bread be a hit too?

“Hmm,” Michelle hummed, glancing over at Meryl and Mira who were sitting at the table beside her. “So is that a new recipe under development?”

Meryl was wolfing down yakisoba day and night trying to find the best combinations. It appeared Mira’d had no choice but to tag along for the ride.

“All right, here I go...” Meryl said in a trembling voice. To my surprise, she was holding a Powdered Drink Mix (Pineapple flavor) packet in her hand.

“Are you serious, Meryl?!” I shouted without thinking.

“I’m telling you, you definitely shouldn’t do it!” cried Mira, also worried.

“Don’t stop me, guys,” Meryl declared. “I’ve decided to offer my body on the altar of research!”

Research, huh...? The Powdered Drink Mix (Pineapple flavor) that she held in her hand would multiply the amount of money you’d obtain from defeating a monster by 1.2 times (within ten minutes of consumption), and it was a popular item. She was probably just trying to increase the duration and the multiplier.

“Adding the Powdered Drink Mix seems like it would make it taste awful,” Michelle said, eyeing the packet in Meryl’s hand.

“I wonder about that,” I mused. “There was a store back in my hometown where they put pineapple in a stir-fry dish called sweet-and-sour pork. If you add in some pork, there’s a chance that’d be tasty too...”

It'd depend on the amount, but I didn't think it'd taste that awful. *Well, it may become a really sweet yakisoba...*

As Meryl sprinkled the Powdered Drink Mix on top of the noodles, the room filled with the smell of pineapple. It was the same scent I'd experienced when I'd passed by a Pine Candy factory, and it brought back sudden memories of Japan. But that lasted only until the sauce entered the picture.

Once Meryl poured the sauce on top, everything was overpowered by its aroma, proof that the sauce was the ultimate champion. However, there was more of a fruity smell than usual. It kind of felt Hawaiian.

"Wait, this could actually work! I might be a genius!" Meryl exclaimed, inhaling the smell of the sweet yakisoba. It was obvious that she wasn't a genius and that this was just a happy accident. Also, yakisoba combos were all about not letting your guard down until you actually gave it a taste. I was saying this as the guy who'd witnessed many an adventurer choking on Sacchan Squid Yakisoba, so you could take my word for it.

Meryl crammed the finished yakisoba into her lunch box. It might only take effect for a short time, so she'd probably wait and eat it once she found a monster. *It's a lot more annoying to deal with than Powdered Drink Mixes, though...* I felt like the monster would run away or attack you while you were eating.

"All right, I'm off now!" she said once she'd finished. "I might get five times as much money now, or maybe it'll last a whole thirty minutes. Keep your hopes high and wait for me!"

Well, I have no idea what will happen... This was Meryl, she of the awful lottery luck, so I felt she'd have bad luck with yakisoba combos too. I prayed it'd at least taste good.

The Royal Palace's Side

While the royal palace was equipped with rooms of various sizes, the new King Bartos preferred to use small rooms for his private talks. Right now, there were only two people in this twenty-square-meter room—King Bartos and

Baron Ethel.

Bartos looked over some reports with a bored expression, then tossed the documents onto the desk as if he were throwing away scrap paper. “Has my brother made any moves?”

“For now, no.”

“I’ve even been giving him opportunities to try rebelling,” he sighed. He didn’t want people to speak of him as the man who’d killed his brother to usurp the throne, so Bartos was keeping the former king imprisoned. But that was only his official stance. His true intentions lay elsewhere. He was waiting for those powerful aristocrats who opposed him to rally around the former king as their puppet. However, at the moment, there were no signs of that happening. “So, they’re being submissive for now.”

“It is something to be thankful for.”

“Don’t relax your surveillance.”

“I am aware. Oh yes, there is one concerning matter,” Baron Ethel said with a smile. His expression said it wasn’t anything serious.

“What’s the matter?”

“It seems that rather than the former king, the former *queen* is the one devising an escape plan.”

“Chichi?” Bartos smiled wryly as he remembered the kind of character she was.

“This is a report from the handmaiden we set to observe her. It seems Chichi has been ogling the servant.”

“Oh dear, so she’s stooped that low?” Bartos said with disappointment. “I thought I’d taste her at least once, seeing as she’s such a fine woman, but I’ve suddenly lost my appetite.”

“Your Majesty,” the baron chided.

“It’s a joke. Don’t be so angry.”

Bartos was a capable man, but lust was his one and only vice.

“What shall we do about Mistress Chichi?” asked the baron.

“Hmm...” Bartos muttered in thought. “Leave her be. If she actually attempts to escape, you can capture her and have her executed. If we make a show of it in the town square, the people will likely get some satisfaction from it as well.”

The baron wasn't fond of that way of doing things, but the king's words held weight. He managed to hold back a heavy sigh, but his emotions were bottling up inside him. He was in the mood for a dip in the hot spring, a Ramune, and a Mobile Forces match.

The Adventurer Meryl's Diary: Entry 3

The Pineapple Yakisoba I've been developing turned out to be a failure! It was supposed to be a groundbreaking experiment where I'd mix some Powdered Drink Mix into yakisoba to increase the money drop rate from 1.2 times higher to even more than that, and yet... Ugh, I can't stop crying!

It didn't taste that bad. It was a bit too sweet, but it was good in its own way. Mira also had a taste, and her face only scrunched up a little. But it didn't increase the money drop rate. And that's not all. It didn't even give that 1.2 times boost anymore! What was the point in trying so hard to make that yakisoba then?

We defeated the Black Bait today, which is a monster that looks like a catfish with legs. They drop an average of 700 rims. We defeated twelve of them, but all we got was 8,400 rims exactly. Instead, they dropped slightly more magic crystals than usual. By combining the Powdered Drink Mix into the yakisoba, it seems the drop rate of magic crystals increases by about 1.3 times. But that means it was in fact a loss. I mean, actual money is worth more.

But I'm not going to lose! I'm not called a persistent adventurer for nothing, so there's no way I'll give up so easily! (Actually, I've never been called that...although I have been called stuff like an unlucky woman or a gambler on a losing streak...)

After my development of the Pineapple Yakisoba turned out to be a failure, I made even more attempts. However, all of them ended with miserable results. Things like my Ten-Rim Gum Yakisoba, Odama Candy Yakisoba, and Cocoa Cigar Yakisoba experiments were all total failures. They're all novel ideas that no ordinary person would come up with, so what on earth am I doing wrong?

"Everything, I think," Mira told me. She can be so cruel sometimes... But I continued to spread my wings. I had faith that my free-flying ideas would one day carry me to victory. Ramune Yakisoba, Choco Yakisoba, Gummy Yakisoba—the failures went on.

“Why do you keep putting in the sweet snacks?” Mister Yusuke asked me, also sounding exasperated, but I wanted to develop a recipe that’d surprise anyone. When you’re straying off the beaten path, you can’t calmly grasp what you’re doing, right? Looking back, I feel that is exactly what was going on.

But I finally succeeded in making the best yakisoba ever! It was a supercomplex recipe where I mixed in a ton of ingredients.

“Everyone, listen up. I’ve finally succeeded in making the best yakisoba recipe ever!!!”

“Really?”

“I struggle to believe it.”

“I have my doubts.”

Not a single person believed me—not Mister Yusuke or Mira or Miss Michelle. If that was how it was, I had to have them actually try it.

“Whatever, just look,” I said. “First, you fry the pork on the iron plate. Then you add in onions and carrots and bell peppers...”

The three of them were totally speechless after seeing my finished yakisoba. I’m sure they hadn’t thought my yakisoba would have so many ingredients. However, Mister Yusuke’s brief comment plunged me into the darkest pits of despair.

“That’s just regular yakisoba.”

“What?”

I’d done a 360 and wound up making normal yakisoba! How stupid was I?! But I think I was saved by what Mister Yusuke said after that.

“Yeah, it’s tasty,” he told me after trying it. “I didn’t know you were good at cooking. The seasoning is just right.”

I feel like I realized something. Cooking isn’t only for boosting your own strength. It’s supposed to be something delicious for you to eat, and it’s important to make others happy with it.

That day was the turning point for me, and I gave up on developing a new

recipe. I've gone far enough. But I think I want to make just that final Special (Normal) Yakisoba I developed again. If I did, would Mister Yusuke eat it again? I'm a bit scared of how Miss Michelle would look at me, but I feel like a little sister seeking praise from her big brother.

Chapter 4: The Leproses' Treasure

Seven days into the new year, I resumed my mapmaking. I was receiving Meryl and Mira's assistance again today, and we were now at the B3 Back Regions. Losing Rigal meant we'd taken a painful hit to our combat ability, but we'd brought a powerful weapon with us to compensate.

"Is this really gonna be okay?" Meryl asked, worry filling her expression as she swung around her toy sword.

Product name: Murasame Replica

Description: A toy lottery product.

Although it is a plastic toy, its cutting ability can hold its own against legendary demonic blades. Can be used up to five times before disappearing.

Price: One hundred rims (Lottery price)

My store had newly added what was known as a drawstring lottery to its lineup. It was that game in which you pulled one string from a bundle of several, which each had a toy on the other end. There was a healthy variety of toys, with around one hundred different types you could win.

That didn't mean they all had magical abilities. Among them were retro toys like regular plushies and Bamboo Dragonflies. That being said, there were also powerful products like the Murasame Replica mixed in.

The products were ranked, from special grade down to seven, and the Murasame Replica ranked at number two. For someone with poor luck in lotteries, Meryl had won a pretty decent product.

"But seriously, can this thing really cut anything when it's so light?" she asked, skeptical. Her concern was understandable. The Murasame Replica looked like nothing more than the kind of toy sword you'd see sold at a temple festival. The

blade was a good fifty centimeters in length and all, but could you actually use it in battle? I wanted to believe in it since it was one of my products, but its appearance left me unconvinced.

“It’d be kind of a waste, but why not try it out once?” I suggested. It’d reduce the number of times you could use it, but I wanted to eliminate any risk when it was a matter of life or death.

Meryl noticed a vine hanging from the ceiling. “Okay, I’m going to try cutting that vine then.” It was about as wide as my arm, and it looked difficult to cut in one go.

“All right...” Meryl faced the vine and unsheathed the Murasame Replica. Then she let out a small cry of surprise and stumbled forward. At the same time, a red, wavering light enveloped the once-lifeless white blade.

“Are you okay, Meryl?” I asked.

“Yeah, the sword absorbed my mana, so I just stumbled a bit,” she said. “This thing sucks up a lot more mana than I expected...”

Just because it was a toy didn’t change the fact that it was a demonic blade. Meryl had been listless mere moments ago, but she now had a sharp look in her eyes.

“Don’t you think it’s a waste to use it after all? Maybe you should cancel it.”

“Seems like you can’t,” she said, shooting that possibility down. “Once you put your mana in, you can’t sheathe it again until it cuts something.”

That’s better than being unable to sheathe it again until it tastes blood, I guess...

“Got it. Then do as you like.”

“Okay. Although I’m gonna go for that over there instead,” Meryl said, pointing to a stone pillar that jutted up from the ground. It was about two meters tall and as thick as my torso. Its solid stone must be incomparably harder than that hanging vine.

“Hey, are you serious?”

“I feel like I can cut it.” Meryl licked the corner of her lips, her eyes bloodshot

as she crouched down low. She didn't look anything like her usual cheery self; in her place was some menacing thing that could send shivers down people's spines. She bolted toward the stone pillar. The tip of the sword sliced upward, mere millimeters shy of grazing the ground, and her diagonal slash left the thick stone pillar cleanly cut through.

"Amazing..." Mira murmured, her voice and body both quivering. Meryl resheathed the sword with a snap.

"Meryl..." I was at a loss for words.

"Man, this is a scary sword," she said, turning back to us. She appeared to have returned to her usual self. It seemed the sword had fully released her from its influence. *Oh man, I'm so glad.*

"Are you okay?"

"What do you mean?" Meryl asked, staring at us blankly. "I'm the same as always."

"If you are, then that's good to hear..."

"Maybe I shouldn't have done that," she said. "I think we can take down some pretty strong monsters with this sword. So, that means we can use it four more times..." Meryl clicked her tongue and cried, "I wasted it!"

Yeah, it really was the usual Meryl. Both her mind and body seemed free of any lingering influence from the Murasame Replica. What a relief.

"Now, let's keep searching!" She began walking forward, full of energy.

Meryl, who had taken the lead, turned her head and put a finger to her lips. It seemed she'd spotted something up ahead. She hid behind a rock and put a Cocoa Cigar in her mouth, so Mira and I followed suit.

(What's the matter?) I wanted to know.

(There are three Leproses.)

When I took a peek from behind the rock, I saw three men about 150 centimeters in height. They weren't that tall, but their muscles were incredible.

Their upper arms and pecs were twice as big as mine. All of them wore black leather masks and held warhammers in their hands. I imagined my bones would shatter to pieces if I got hit with one of those.

(Are they human?)

Mira decided to chime in. *(No. Those are monsters born from the fog.)*

That'd been a close one. I might've run up and said hello if I hadn't known.
(What should we do? Launch a surprise attack?)

Meryl seemed hesitant. *(We could, but Leproses are pretty strong. You'd normally use traps for them.)*

(Traps?)

(You put down magical traps and lure them in using a silver coin. But they're fast, so I think there's a fifty-fifty chance of it working? In the worst-case scenario, they'll run away with your silver coin.)

If it was a silver coin, then that would be 10,000 rims. For rookies, that would be a pretty painful blow to their wallets.

Mira offered more intel. *(But Leproses are big game, with each one dropping 2,000 rims. You can't just leave them be when they're right in front of you. Also, they become difficult enemies to handle if too many of them appear.)*

(They enjoy capturing humans and torturing them. I even hear that it's better to be killed if you get caught.)

Now that was terrifying. It might be better to use traps for them after all.

(Do you really have to use a silver coin to lure them? I think you could get away with a big copper coin.) If you used a big copper coin, you'd only lose 1,000 rims if they took off with it.

(That won't work. The higher the value, the higher the chance of success.)

You'd think they'd enjoy running across even small change. I couldn't figure out how monsters thought.

I was struck with a good idea. *(Oh right, let's use this.)*

(A gold coin?!) Meryl was excited at the sight of the snack I took out.

(Take a good look. It's actually a snack.)

Product name: Gold Chocolate Coin

Description: Chocolates shaped like gold coins that come in a pot.

They look like real gold coins, and it's difficult to tell otherwise until you touch them. Your financial luck will increase very slightly upon consumption.

Price: Twenty rims

(It's too light...)

(Of course. It's a snack. No reason to cry about it.)

Meryl looked disappointed as she opened up the aluminum wrapper and ate the chocolate.

(Hey, don't eat them all. We're going to use them to lure the Leproses.)

Mira brightened. *(I see. That's a good idea!)*

(Right? If we put down this Gold Chocolate Coin and the Jewel Candy, won't they think they've stumbled upon some fallen treasure?) Both of them were snacks that looked exactly like the real deal. The monsters likely wouldn't be able to tell until they got really close to them.

(These do look like they'd be capable of fooling the Leproses. I'll put down the magic trap right away.) Mira chanted a spell as she drew a magic circle on the ground. It was round and about fifty centimeters in diameter. Apparently, if a monster took one step inside, they'd instantly be frozen in place. *(It won't last long, though. At best, it'll prevent them from moving for twenty seconds.)*

(Twenty seconds is all I need.) Meryl confidently stepped up to the plate as she repeatedly smacked the Murasame Replica against her palm.

We'd made all the preparations, so we hid behind the rock. Then we threw a

stone against the wall to make a small sound. The Leproses immediately took their warhammers in hand and trotted over to see what was going on.

“Gyah gyah gyah!”

“Gyaaah! Gyaaah!”

Judging by their squeals, they were excited about finding the gold coin. They were wary types, but they were suckers for treasure and lost all sense of reason when they found it. They approached with short, hurried steps, as if they were on the verge of breaking into dance, and rushed straight toward the chocolate.

The Leproses shrieked as they set foot inside the magic circle. Their bodies seemed to have gone numb from head to toe, stiffening in backward arches. Meryl leaped forward without a moment’s delay and flashed the red-lit Murasame Replica.

“One!”

She cut a Lepros’s body in half, and it dissolved into smoke. The cut of the Murasame Replica’s blade displayed formidable power even in combat. When the Lepros was gone, it left behind purple magic crystals the size of large beans, and two silver coins.

“Two!”

Meryl paid my amazement no mind as she slashed the second one diagonally across its chest. I was blown away by how keen and agile her magically enhanced body was. She killed this monster in one go too.

However, the third one was a different story. Maybe it was because the magic trap’s effect had worn off, but the Lepros was thrashing around trying to undo the bindings. As for Meryl, her speed had visibly dropped off and it was hard to believe she had just been dishing out attacks one after another.

“Is she tired? Or is this some backlash from using the Murasame Replica?!”

It *was* a demonic blade, even if it was technically a toy. Did it have some kind of curse?

“It’s okay. Just watch,” Mira assured me as if she had guessed what was concerning me.

“But Meryl—”

That was when Meryl sprang into action. She rushed forward in a zigzag so the monster couldn't home in on her for an attack. The Lepros still seemed unable to escape the magic trap. It raised its warhammer, poised for a blow, but its movement was slow.

The red blade once again flashed through the air, and the monster's right hand plopped to the floor, still clutching the warhammer.

The monster screeched, and as its body twisted in agony, its feet escaped the magic circle. Although it had tumbled to the ground, it sprang to its feet and made a run for it. I readied my Eight-Round Pistol.

“Wait!” Mira cried, gripping my wrist and diverting my aim.

“But it's getting away!”

“She let it go on purpose.”

“On *purpose*? Even though she could've defeated it?”

“Yes. It's common for Leproses to hoard treasure in their nests. It has its risks, but I'm certain she let it go so we could hunt down their nest.”

“That's right,” Meryl said. “Let's go!”

She took off after the Lepros, and Mira and I followed at a run.

I'd come down here to make my map, but I was now involved in full-blown adventuring. It was true that I'd gotten swept up in Meryl and Mira's momentum, but I didn't have any complaints. They'd done a lot for me. If there was a chance for them to get rich quick, I wanted to lend them a hand.

I could make out the Lepros's brawny back farther down the dim dungeon passageway. We were currently pursuing it while keeping our distance. Since it was injured, its movements were slow. Tailing it probably wouldn't be that difficult.

“But don't get too close,” Meryl warned me. “It may not go back to its nest if you do.”

“Got it. Incidentally, how much treasure are we talking here?”

“I heard they usually have 300,000 rims at the very least,” Meryl told me, looking excited.

“That much?!” I exclaimed. “That’s a huge step up from the lame chest we got the other day.”

“That was still quite helpful, though,” Mira said. “I was able to send some money home. But this time, if we split the treasure among us three, each person gets 100,000 rims. I can put more money into savings.”

Mira also had her head in the clouds, a rare state for someone as cool and collected as she was. That probably meant we really did have a good chance.

“But what will you do if there are other Leproses in the nest?” That single, injured Lepros might not be the only one there.

“Then we’d have to ask for help from someone else,” Meryl replied. “That’d decrease the amount we each get, though.”

“Let’s ask for help from Garmr and the others,” Mira said. “Of course, we’ll subtract the price of the information from their portion.”

It was probably common for adventurers to band together like that. Even if they quarreled over one thing or another, those who’d known each other since their rookie days offered mutual assistance and grew side by side.

Up ahead, the Lepros we’d been following was swallowed by the darkness.

“Huh? Let’s pick up the pace a bit.” Meryl, a few steps ahead of us, took off. Before long, we arrived at a fork in the road.

“Damn it, which way did it go?” I muttered. We were being cautious, but it seemed we’d kept too much of a distance. There were no traces of blood on the floor either.

“If we don’t hurry, we really might lose sight of it,” Mira said with some panic in her voice.

I had no choice. *Michelle might scold me, but I guess I’ll use that power of mine.*

I sat down and quietly closed my eyes.

Which way did the Lepros go? Left or right? I thought to myself as I activated my Clairvoyance and circulated the mana inside my body. If I searched up “injured Lepros,” I would probably see it right away. However, I wouldn’t know the details of its location, and it’d take time to look those up.

In which case, it was faster and easier to peek into the past and search for what road it had taken. I needed a huge amount of mana to look into the past, but I only wanted to see events from within the past minute or so. *I think that means the burden on my body will be minimal.*

I settled on my decision and took out my Stick Chocolate. If I used this, my mana would increase by thirty percent.

“Wait, Mister Yusuke. Is this really the time for snacks?”

“Please be quiet. I have an idea.” Holding the stick in front of my chest, I swung it downward, thus increasing my total mana.

“Will you move forward? Or will you go back?” The usual voice resounded in my head. I chose “go back” and fixed my gaze on the forked path.

A vision unfolded before me in which my surroundings appeared to be veiled by a haze. For a while, I saw an empty dungeon passageway, but at last I heard footsteps and heavy breathing. Then the Lepros that was missing its right hand entered my vision. It looked bewildered for an instant, but after casting a look behind it, it took the right-hand passageway. That was all I needed to know. I immediately canceled my Clairvoyance.

“Right. It went right.”

“How do you know that?” Meryl asked, but my Clairvoyance was a secret.

“There’s no time to explain right now. Let’s just go.”

“Meryl, let’s try to believe in Mister Yusuke,” Mira said, vouching for me. Meryl seemed to accept it, so we once again chased after the Lepros.

The moment I started running, pain coursed through my heart as though it’d been stabbed by a thorn. It was a small, prickling pain, but it was definitely uncomfortable. I clicked my tongue without thinking.

“Is something the matter?” Mira asked.

“It’s nothing,” I said. “I’m just not feeling too well now.” Based on what Michelle had told me, increasing the amount of mana I had would reduce this kind of discomfort. I guessed I was experiencing this since I’d used the Stick Chocolate to force out more power. That probably meant I needed more training.

“It’s there,” Meryl whispered. She’d been running ahead of us, but she now raised her hand. When I peeked out from behind a rock, the Lepros was standing in front of a wall carved with a relief that depicted the sun and the moon. It raised its remaining left hand and slowly hit the wall.

Knock, knock, knock. Knock, knock, knock, knock.

It hit the sun three times and the moon four times, and the wall with the relief split in two, revealing an entrance.

“Who would’ve guessed there was a mechanism like that?” Meryl murmured with surprise. She enhanced her body using magic, so her vision was way better than mine.

“Did you see what was inside?” I decided to ask her.

“It’s impossible at this angle. It’s all or nothing. We just gotta charge in there.”

“Hold your horses.”

I decided to once again sit down and use my Clairvoyance. This time, all I was going to do was pass through the wall, so I wouldn’t need my Stick Chocolate.

“Are you doing your weird good luck charm again?”

“Yeah, more or less. Just hang tight for a bit.” I closed my eyes and activated my Clairvoyance. I rapidly moved my camera and reached the sun-and-moon wall. My body currently had no physical substance, so there was no need for me to tap the wall and open the door. I passed through the stone wall just like that and entered the Leproses’ nest.

“Ugh!” I reflexively felt sick. As for why, it was little wonder at all: there was an adventurer in a horrific state chained to the wall. They were already dead, with no life left in their vacant eyes. There were heart-wrenching traces of

torture left on their body, which I was sure was the handiwork of the Leproses.

The adventurer's body was riddled with so many ghastly wounds that I had zero desire to describe them one by one. I'd been told that Leproses were fond of torturing humans, but I hadn't expected something like this. I felt like I'd been reminded once again of the terrifying nature of the dungeon.

"Are you okay, Mister Yusuke? Please get a hold of yourself."

I could hear Mira's voice from somewhere in the distance. I recomposed myself and checked my surroundings.

There was an open-air fire in the center of the room, with a large pot over it. Something appeared to be simmering inside, and a single Lepros was stirring the pot with a ladle. There were human bones gathered in one corner of the room, so the ingredients were probably human...

I endured the renewed surge of nausea that welled up inside me and moved my sight farther inside the room. There I found the Lepros we'd just seen, wrapping a bandage around its arm. It seemed it didn't have any other buddies. I stopped my Clairvoyance and returned to Meryl and Mira.

"There's one more Lepros aside from the injured one. You think we can defeat them if we launch a surprise attack?"

"We can, but how could you tell what's inside?" Meryl asked.

"It's that fortune-telling thing. Just believe me."

"Your fortune-telling, huh... Okay. I'll believe you, Mister Yusuke."

Meryl and Mira both nodded at me.

We stepped up to the relief, where I prepared my Eight-Round Pistol and Mira readied her magic wand. Meryl also raised her buckler and began hitting the sun and moon engravings, knocking on it the same way the Lepros had done. The wall immediately split into two, and a dimly lit entryway appeared.

I'd passed on my info to the other two in advance, so Mira and I started attacking the Lepros sitting in front of the pot as soon as we rushed in. I fired my pistol, and Mira's Wind Blades danced. Unable to put up even a half-decent resistance, the Lepros next to the pot collapsed beside the bonfire.

The injured Lepros came at once from the back of the room, but we also took it down with our magic and pistol. Its movement was restricted thanks to the narrow space, and it was already injured, so it wasn't hard at all to finish it.

"It's over," Mira breathed.

"Ah... Urk!" At that moment, the rotten stench of the room assailed my nostrils, and I finally emptied out the contents of my stomach.

"Jeez, get a hold of yourself," Meryl complained, but she rubbed my back anyway. This nice side of her made it hard to dislike her.

"Ugh..."

"If we have to take care of you, Mister Yusuke, Miss Michelle may get the wrong idea and kill us. Hurry up and get better," she said, though she kept rubbing my back.

"Sorry. I'm okay now. More importantly, let's bury that guy up on the wall."

"Yeah..."

The three of us dug a hole and buried the battered adventurer. The air in the room improved significantly once Mira used her Wind Magic to sweep the stench out the open door.

"All right... Now let's find the treasure!" Meryl exclaimed, her voice perking up as if she were shifting emotional gears. Mira and I also nodded with determination.

We speedily began searching for the treasure. It was possible that other Leproses might return, so obviously it was better not to take our sweet time. Meryl turned over some shelves that held torture tools, and Mira checked under the carpets spread across the center of the room.

"Wait, wait," I said. "I'll teach you the secret art of cleaning and finding things."

"What's that?" asked Meryl.

"You go from top to bottom, back to front."

Michelle was very organized and loved keeping tidy, but there were still times

she could be careless. Maybe that was why she often lost things. Sometimes it was small stuff like accessories and handkerchiefs; other times she couldn't even find her underwear. Those were my times to shine. If you searched carefully just like I'd described, you'd definitely find what you were looking for. I was sure the Leproses' treasure was no different.

"Then let's start from the other side of the room," Mira agreed.

"Yeah, got it."

We hadn't searched long at all before we found a metal chest underneath the bed. It was about the size of one of those boxes meant for mandarin oranges that I'd often seen back in Japan.

"This has to be it. Okay, I don't think there are any traps." Meryl, who had been examining the treasure box, placed nervous hands upon the heavy lid. When she applied some elbow grease and slowly lifted it, it opened without a sound. Inside were silver coins, magic crystals, and even several gold coins.

"Whoa! That was more than I expected! They were really stocking up!"

"I'm amazed," Mira marveled. "How much is there total?"

"I estimate there's at least a million rims here," I said.

"A million?!"

"Yeah. Even if you exclude the magic crystals and only count the actual money, it should be about that much."

They'd heard how big the haul was, but it appeared it hadn't quite hit them yet. They gaped at the glittering treasure with vacant expressions.

"With a million rims," Meryl started, "you could, um, buy ten thousand Ten-Rim Chocolate Coins..."

"One hundred thousand," I corrected her.

"Oh jeez..."

"I can send so much money home to my family with this," Mira murmured.

The two of them had gone limp, as if all of their strength had left them. They wouldn't be able to put up much resistance if anything attacked us right now.

“We’ll count the money after we get home,” I said. “Let’s stop here for today and hurry back.”

We transferred the money and magic crystals into three jute bags, then shouldered one bag each.

“Let’s go.”

At Meryl’s brief words, we all rushed toward the entrance. However, in a stroke of bad luck, right then seven Leproses appeared farther down the passageway. They were probably other Leproses who lived in this nest. Considering we had their treasure now, there was no point in a full-on frontal attack.

I took out my Monster Smoke and put up a smoke screen. Then I recklessly spent all of my Eight-Round Pistol’s ammo. That would probably buy us some time. On top of that, I took out a Monster Chips card.

“Monster summon, activate! Come forth, C. Kelpie!”

Kelpies were horselike creatures that lived on shores and banks. They frequently took on the form of thoroughbred horses and dragged humans who attempted to capture them into the water.

“Mister Yusuke, we have to retreat!” Meryl cried. “What’s the point in fighting?”

“I know that,” I said. “Just summoning a monster doesn’t always mean I’m going to attack. Kelpie, lie down!”

At my command, the Kelpie lay on the ground like a dog. I mounted its back without hesitation. “You two, hurry up and hop on too!”

Even though monster summons only lasted three minutes, Kelpies were among the speediest of all monsters. We could probably escape our enemy if we had three whole minutes.

Meryl and Mira got the hint and immediately hopped onto the Kelpie.

Nngh! Mira’s breasts are against my back... No, no, no, I shouldn’t be thinking about that right now.

“Run, Kelpie!” I commanded. The Kelpie, with the three of us on its back,

bolted for the B3 stairs.

That afternoon, I put up a notice of Dagashi-ya Yahagi's temporary closure. I securely locked the door and pulled the curtains over the windows. With that, nobody should be able to peek at what was going on inside. The three of us huddled close together in the living room as we discreetly inspected our treasure.

"Ninety-seven, ninety-eight, ninety-nine, one hundred..."

"Th-There's still more?" Meryl asked in a trembling voice as I counted each stack of ten silver coins.

"Calm down. There are a hundred silver coins in all. If we add in the twenty-six gold coins we get...3,600,000 rims."

"3,600,000!"

"Shh! Keep quiet, Meryl," Mira warned.

"Y-Yeah. Sorry. But it's 3,600,000 rims. Even if we split it three ways, um..."

"It's 1,200,000 rims each," I said.

"O-One millio— Mmf!" Meryl had once again attempted to raise her voice, but Mira clamped a hand over her mouth.

"I told you to be quiet."

Meryl gasped as Mira removed her hand. "S-Sorry. I won't make any more noise. But what should I do? My hands won't stop shaking."

"Mine neither. I never would've thought we'd get 1,200,000 rims each..."

We had initially thought that the treasure would be 300,000 rims, with each person getting 100,000. Then we'd opened the box and found this kind of money instead.

To these two who had finally graduated from being rookies, 1,200,000 rims was a whole lot of money. *Would this kinda be like if a college student suddenly won 1,200,000 yen in a lottery?* Taking the value of this world's currency into account, it might be even more amazing than that.

“Let’s keep this a secret from everyone,” Meryl said.

“Yes, there’s no reason to publicly announce that we’ve obtained all this money,” said Mira. “We’d lose everything if we were targeted or something.”

“Right,” I agreed.

Suddenly, someone knocked on the door, prompting the three of us to leap to our feet. It appeared we had a customer.

“Wh-What should we do?” Meryl squeaked.

“First of all, we gather the money in the bag,” I said. “Then we take it upstairs so that no one sees.”

“Got it!”

The one hundred silver coins jangled as the three of us worked together to stuff them into the bag. The person at the door knocked several more times during this ordeal.

“Are you there, Yusuke? It’s me, Michelle!”

I was relieved. Michelle had just returned from the dungeon depths—that was all.

“Welcome back, Michelle,” I called out to her as I hurried over and opened the door.

“Just what is going on?” she pouted. “The door’s locked and the curtains are closed, so you had me worried.”

“Well, you know...”

That was when Michelle caught sight of Meryl and Mira in the tatami room in the back. The two of them smiled stiffly.

“Ah.”

“What’s the meaning of this?” Michelle asked, her voice dropping an entire pitch.

“Hey, don’t misunderstand,” I said cautiously.

“What were you doing with these hussies?!” she screeched. “I guess you

don't care about gloomy women like me anyway, right?!"



“I’m telling you, you’ve got it wrong!”

“I’m going to kill you, and then I’m going to kill myself too!”

Had her long-dormant Ultra Yandere side been reawakened?! *Hang on, there’s an atrocious surge of mana going on!*

“Michelle, don’t use your Maximum Magic incantation! Just look at this!”

I cast a glance at Meryl, who caught on at once and dumped the contents of the bag onto the tatami. The silver and gold coins jangled as they scattered across the floor.

“Huh?”

“We searched a Lepros nest and found this treasure,” I explained. “All we were doing was counting our money in secret so no one else would notice.”

“So you weren’t indulging in some harem role-play?”

Where did she learn that term?

“There’s no way,” I assured her. “I’m devoted to you and you alone, Michelle. Please have some faith in me.”

“I’m sorry. I was fully convinced...”

She deflated, her rage disappearing as though it had never existed. Well, it was the kind of situation that you couldn’t blame anyone for being suspicious of. *I’ll also apologize later, and we can talk it out.*

“Can we be together tonight?” I murmured in her ear, and she gave me a small nod.

Three days had passed since we’d found the Leproses’ treasure, but as of now, nothing about my life had significantly changed. I couldn’t think of anything that I particularly wanted, so I’d left my portion of the treasure in my store’s safe. To be honest, I was satisfied with my current life. Yeah, there were some inconveniences compared to my previous one. I wouldn’t be lining up for the latest smartphone release in this world, nor were there any social games I was dying to blow my money on. There weren’t even any light novels or manga

that I wanted to read. Even so, I was savoring the ultimate happiness I'd won with the hand I'd been dealt.

I had a wonderful girlfriend, even if she was a yandere, and she made me any delicious thing I wanted. My living arrangements weren't half bad either. The restrictions she placed on me were a bit tight, but the two of us were complete lovebirds.

If I had to spend my treasure on something, I honestly wanted to use it for Michelle. *I'll buy Michelle clothes or jewelry soon.*

"Hey, have you two decided what you'll spend your treasure on?" I quietly asked Meryl and Mira, who were at my store again this morning.

"I immediately ordered a new sword and some armor," Meryl replied. "I went to the armory yesterday."

So, it appeared Meryl had invested in herself.

"That's incredible. Did you use up all 1,200,000 rims?"

"No way. I only spent 120,000. After that, I'm going to eat delicious food and have fun, and then I'll put the rest in savings."

The fact that she'd spent so much money on equipment put her a peg above a mid-rank adventurer. It felt like Meryl had finally become a full-fledged warrior.

"How about you, Mira?"

"I ordered a new magic robe," she said. "As for the rest of it, I'm going to send money back home, have fun with Meryl, and put aside some savings too."

It seemed they were using their money responsibly.

"What are you going to do?" Meryl asked.

"Me? Nothing really."

Meryl and Mira stared at me with intense, unreserved gazes.

"Wh-What?"

"Why don't you get some equipment too?"

"That's right," Mira concurred. "You'll be going around the dungeon to make

your map, so I think it would be good if you had some proper equipment.”

Now that they mentioned it, that was true. The stuff I normally wore were cheap things I’d bought from a tool shop. *No doubt I should buy something a little better to reduce my risks.*

“You’re right... Okay, I’ll get some armor too then.”

If I was going into town, I’d try inviting Michelle along. *Maybe we’ll go together, and I’ll buy her a new coat as a present?* As I pondered these thoughts, Michelle, who had been cooking breakfast on one of the iron plates, called out to me. “Yusuke, breakfast is ready.”

I eagerly headed over and discovered that the iron plate that usually fried yakisoba now held golden brown pancakes. In addition, there were sausages and cooked vegetables on the side, sizzling with a mouthwatering sound.

“Whoa, that looks delicious!”

“You won’t know whether it’s good until you eat it, though...” Michelle said, blushing in a bashful way.

“Your cooking has never missed. Thanks for the food!” I promptly took a seat and stuffed my cheeks full of the freshly made pancakes. They had a springy texture, and they weren’t heavy. They were the ultimate pancakes, the kind I could eat by the dozens. “It’s absolutely delicious.”

“Really? I’m glad. I’m going to take a break from my research tomorrow, so let’s go buy some equipment together.”

It sounded like she’d been keenly listening in on our conversation even while cooking. We’d cleared up the misunderstanding the other day, but was it still bothering her after all—the idea that Meryl, Mira, and I had been role-playing a harem? No way. I wasn’t *that* popular. At the very least, I wasn’t the type to enjoy cheating.

Chichi’s Side

Chichi was submissively spending her days under house arrest. Her husband, the former king, was still arrogant, yet it was as though Chichi had become an

entirely different person. She'd grown calm and would sometimes admonish her husband for his discourteous behavior. She'd even started treating the servants with politeness, shocking those around her. Of course, this was all an act.

"Good morning." "I appreciate the meal." "Thank you."

Greetings and words of gratitude slightly eased people's wariness. The more arrogantly the former king behaved, the more angelic the woman beside him appeared. Before long, the servants had begun to grow just a little bit less wary of Chichi. A new common understanding blossomed among the servants, that the former queen wasn't as bad as the rumors said.

One day, as Chichi was walking down the hall, she happened upon a single servant lugging some huge baggage. This man was among the most naive of all the servants and was very simpleminded.

A wicked woman could sense when someone had a kind nature. She couldn't overlook a good-willed person she could use. Chichi internally chuckled to herself when she noticed how the young man's face reddened as he lowered his gaze. Yes, this was the man she'd been aiming for.

"You..."

The servant flinched as she suddenly called out to him. Even with her social standing stripped away, she was still a former queen. Normally, a servant wouldn't be addressed by such a woman. As he was considering whether it'd be okay to respond, Chichi spoke to him in a kind voice. "Your hand is bleeding."

This winter was severe, with a chill that seeped into the bones. The servant's hands were frostbitten and cracked.

"You poor thing." Chichi covered his hand with her own handkerchief. "Now let's wipe off that blood. Oh, your hand is so cold."

The man's body remained stiff and he uttered not a sound as Chichi held his hand.

"Mistress Chichi, do not do anything unnecessary." The female knight on

surveillance duty checked her with a warning, but Chichi appealed to her with an earnest expression.

“I couldn’t bear to see such a pitiful sight. It’s fine. All I’m going to do is cast some Healing Magic on him.”

Chichi’s hand, which rested upon the servant’s wounds, emitted a pale green light as she used her Healing Magic. While she wasn’t as amazing as her older sister Michelle, she was also a brilliant mage.

Having received this unexpected medical care, the man stared at her with a dumbfounded expression.

“There. All better now.”

Smiling sweetly, Chichi could truly have been mistaken for a saint.

“Th-Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

The servant was so enraptured by Chichi’s wistful smile that it was as though the soul had been wrenched from his body.

“What’s your name?”

“M-Marco.”

“I see. That’s a wonderful name. If there’s anything else you need, come to me.”

Chichi gracefully took her leave, her handkerchief still draped across Marco’s hand as he saw her off. Upon it lingered the scent of her perfume. Checking that no one would notice, Marco deeply inhaled the handkerchief’s aroma. When he did, a mind-numbingly pleasant sensation coursed through his body.

Marco lifted his head and watched as Chichi’s back grew ever more distant. When she rounded the corner, their gazes met for an instant. That was enough to elevate Marco’s spirit to the heavens.

Once she’d rounded the corner, Chichi smiled to herself. She’d succeeded in step one of her escape plan. That man who’d sniffed her Binding Rose would

soon seek to contact her. Despite the drug's high price, she'd hidden it in a poison ring she kept on her at all times, and it seemed that her efforts had borne fruit.

(He said his name was Marco. He seems like a boring man, but I'll give him a bit of a good time, for the sake of escaping this place.)

Chichi was carefully thinking things over and working out a plan for what came next.

The Adventurer Meryl's Diary: Entry 4

Something crazy happened! It's super-duper insanely insane! I'm putting so much pressure on my pen as I'm writing in this notebook that the paper's gonna tear! Actually, no, the pen's gonna break! But I can't help it! I mean, I've got this huge amount of money that I've never seen before!

Mira and I have often asked each other what we'd do if we had a million rims, just for fun. We enjoyed fantasizing about all the luxuries we'd indulge in. Now that's somehow become our reality.

We got 1,200,000 each from the Leproses we defeated. That's two hundred thousand more rims than we even daydreamed about!

Whew, I may not be able to sleep tonight. I never thought this day would come. I guess this is thanks to the fact that we got to know Mister Yusuke. I immediately put one million of it in savings so I wouldn't waste it.

Mira and I have plans to go to the armory tomorrow. I can pick up the new equipment I've been wanting. If I can get my hands on some durable, lightweight armor, I think it'll widen the scope of our activities. Also, if I get a sword with a good sharp edge, it'll shorten the time it takes to finish a battle. That'll lessen my fatigue, so I'll be able to patrol a broader area. There's no doubt that I'll earn more.

Oh yeah, Mister Yusuke said he was going to buy some new armor too. It's the right call to buy something better if he's going to map out B3. Mister Yusuke always considers others, yet he tends to ignore himself. I think he should be more careful.

I want it to be tomorrow already. I'm gonna go to the armory, eat delicious food, and even buy a new winter coat. The one I'm wearing right now is really worn out. It's not cute at all either.

I'm just so happy that I could even kiss Mister Yusuke on the cheek—no, I won't do that. If Miss Michelle happened to see me do that, I think she'd blow

away the whole capital.

I've taken another step toward my dream of opening a general store. What kind of store should it be? I've already decided that it'll have a red roof. If my funds allow for it, I want to spend some money on the interior design. I want to put up bright wallpaper and use lots of fancy lamps for lighting. I can put small tables in one corner and offer tea and snacks. Maybe Mister Yusuke will become one of my regulars.

That's it! I may as well open up my shop beside the dagashi-ya! I could rest easy with my reliable big bro nearby! But you know, I may not get any customers if I'm located at Hot Spring Yahagi. My target demographic is young women, but there are basically only adventurers there. There's no way those grimy adventurers would purchase small, cute things. I can't imagine idiots like Garmr squealing with delight over a fancy teacup. Also, if Mister Yusuke frequented General Store Meryl, Miss Michelle really might get jealous and blow away the capital.

Heh heh, I can't stop with these fun daydreams. I really don't think I'll be able to sleep tonight.

Chapter 5: A Story of Success

While I enjoyed a breakfast of pancakes before opening my store, Michelle and I talked about what we'd go shopping for tomorrow.

"Are you gonna buy a weapon first?" she asked. "Or armor?"

"I don't think I need a weapon," I replied.

"You do have your Eight-Round Pistol. Also, when the need arises, you have something as incredible as that Legendary Spiked Bat."

"No way. That one's a prize." Just because I was the shop's owner didn't mean I could freely use my toy prizes. For example, my Chocolate Bat's special prize, the Legendary Spiked Bat, was a superconvenient weapon that let you deal guaranteed damage. However, only those who pulled a "Home run" from the Chocolate Bat lottery could own it. Similarly, I couldn't use things like my lottery toys as I pleased. I was limited by magic. Though, of course, if I used my own money to buy the product and won the lottery, it'd become mine.

"So what if there's something you want from your store?"

"Then I guess I'll have to pay out of pocket until I win the lottery. It's what they'd call 'bulk buying.' I would like to avoid that if possible, though."

"Why?"

"Because they're meant for my customers."

Dagashi-ya Yahagi restocked its products using my mana. Of course, my mana had its limits, so how much I got restocked was limited accordingly. If I used it all to my liking, then there obviously wouldn't be any products left for my customers. Yeah, I'd bought up all my Monster Chips before, but I didn't want to make that a habit if I could help it.

"If that's your reason, then I suppose this is out of the question," Michelle said, tapping on a certain item. It was the special prize of one of my lotteries, the Azure Dragon Shield. This small, round shield was an extraordinary item

that could repel any attack three times. Just like the Murasame Replica, it was a product which would disintegrate into dust once you maxed out the number of uses.

“There are customers who have their eye on that,” I said. “I can’t use it.”

“You’re so serious when it comes to these things, Yusuke.”

“I dunno about serious,” I said. “I just don’t wanna see my customers look sad.” Imagining those rookies coming to my store, tightly gripping their small change, only to find that the product they’d had their eye on wasn’t there—I wanted to avoid that scenario as much as possible.

“Okay. Then tomorrow, we’ll go to a store that specializes in armor together.”

“I’m not that familiar with equipment shops, so I’ll let you handle what stores we go to.”

Tomorrow will be our first date in a while... The thought made me excited. When I looked at her, Michelle was smiling back at me. She probably felt the same way.

“Talking about equipment reminded me that you have a new product today. What is it?”

Oh, right. Her words had just reminded me too. Starting today, a new product had been added to my shop’s lineup. It was a bit pricey, but it looked like a fun item.

Product name: Only One Gum (Limited-time product)

Description: A stick of gum that comes with a bonus.

The bonus is an elaborate scale model of the armor worn by Paladins.

It’s made with metal and realistic enough to be mistaken for the real thing.

Price: Three hundred rims

It was something I'd seen often back in Japan, one of those fancy toys that came as a prize with a food product—the kind where we'd joke about how the *toy* was the main attraction, and the snack was the bonus. This was, well, probably the same thing. But would it sell?

My dagashi lineup was full of items that harbored wondrous effects. Even a piece of gum that cost a scant 10 rims could replenish your mana. But the Only One Gum didn't have an effect like that, and the armor was a mere toy. Looking at and admiring it held more than enough appeal in my book, but I had my doubts that my penniless rookies would actually buy them.

Wanting to see the real thing, I paid for and opened one of the boxes.

"Huh, it's pretty well-made," I mused. The armor was exceedingly beautiful, crafted down to the finest details. *Does it have some kind of special ability?* Once I assembled the pieces of armor, they charged up with mana and glowed with a blue light. It was really nice to look at.

"Oh...! My word, could this be the legendary Holy Armor...?" I heard a quivering voice say, and when I looked up, the elder and the other gnomes who had shown me to Hot Spring Yahagi were staring at me intently.

"It's been a while, Elder," I said, greeting him. "What is Holy Armor?"

"The Holy Armor is the armor that the legendary Twelve Paladins wore."

"No, no, this is a bonus item for this gum..."

"A bonus for gum?" he asked. "No matter how I look at it, all I see is the Valkyrie Shakashaka's armor..."

Size-wise, it *was* just right for gnomes to wear.

"Would you like to try it on, Elder?"

"Is that all right?!"

"By all means, go ahead." I was indebted to the gnomes for buying up all my furniture gacha. Also, if he wound up liking this armor, they might buy from me again.

"Itchee, Scratchee. Put this armor on me."

“Very well, Elder!”

“Leave it to us!”

After his two attendants equipped him with the Holy Armor, he quietly closed his eyes.

“Hmm... The mana within me feels as if it’s expanding without end... I sense that, as I am now, I could use the ultimate secret technique passed down among us gnomes, the Emperor’s Wishing Gem...”

Seriously?! I’d thought it was just a freebie for the gum, but it had turned out to be some awesome treasure for these gnomes.

“Sir Yahagi... May we purchase all of your stock?”

“Ah, yes. With pleasure.”

I’d sold all twelve boxes of my Only One Gum. To top it off, this was a limited-time product, so it seemed that it would not see a restock.

“Sir Yahagi, you have assisted us greatly,” said the gnome to me, face beaming. “You’ve sold us such divine treasure for only 3,600 rims.”

“Well, that’s just the regular price,” I replied. Even if I hosted the occasional special sale, I could never increase the price.

“It seems we must once again express our thanks.” With his eyes sparkling brightly, he ordered his two attendants: “Itchee, Scratchee, bring us some manpower to carry the Holy Armor. Also, fetch us the Clear Stream Ring.”

“Understood.” The two of them bowed their heads and knocked on the ground with their fists. A hole then opened up, and their bodies disappeared into it.

“We shall bestow a wonderful present upon you, Sir Yahagi,” the elder told me.

“Oh please, don’t worry about me,” I said, but the elder insisted.

“Nonsense, nonsense. The Holy Armor is the most supreme treasure for us gnomes. I cannot rest easy if we do not repay you.”

A large crowd of gnomes immediately appeared at Hot Spring Yahagi. “Elder!

We heard that you've obtained the legendary Holy Armor! Oh, the one you have donned belongs to the Paladin Shakashaka, she who was lauded as the strongest knight!" They all looked equally excited.

"Hmm, all of the Paladins have been collected, such as Yoichi of the Sacred Bow and the King of Lions, Arion."

The gnomes gleefully lifted each of the Only One Gum boxes.

"I'll carry the King of Lions, Arion's box. You carry the Crab Mask of the Northern Sea."

"To hell with that!"

No matter the product, there were always some versions that were more popular and some that were less so—at least based on the way the gnomes were fighting over who'd carry what. Humans and sprites were alike in that way.

"Now, Sir Yahagi..." the elder said to me as I idly observed the gnomes. "Please accept the gift of gratitude I previously mentioned."

Itchee and Scratchee had brought a thick, tubular ring with them. It shone with a greenish luster, like jade, and had a very elegant quality.

"This is a magic item called the Clear Stream Ring. Now, please feel free to put it on."

It didn't look like it was cursed, so I did as instructed.

"How is it?"

"Huh? I suddenly feel better somehow." I'd stayed up late last night, so I was a bit sleep-deprived. Michelle, who had come back home for the first time in a while, hadn't really let me sleep much. I'd felt kinda sluggish today because of that, but after I put on the ring, I felt completely refreshed. "What's going on? It feels like my body's lighter now."

The gnome laughed heartily. "Seems like you've taken a shine to it. The Clear Stream Ring regulates your body's mana circulation. The smoother the flow of mana, the more it promotes your healing and strengthens you physically."

"Then you won't have any issues with stiff shoulders or back pain if you have

this.”

“That’s not all,” he added. “You won’t catch colds, and it can repel low-level curses and mild poisons.”

In other words, it gave a supernatural boost to your immunity.

“Are you really okay with giving me something so incredible?” I asked.

“It’s not as if the ring fits any of us anyway,” he replied.

Well, when you put it like that... I decided I’d go ahead and accept the Clear Stream Ring. With the ring on my finger, I held out my hand toward Michelle. “This is really amazing. Do you wanna try wearing it too?”

I couldn’t say it aloud, but Michelle had stiff shoulders. *Look, it’s because her boobs are big, okay?* But maybe this ring could really improve that.

“Don’t worry about me,” she said. “You hold on to it, Yusuke.”

“But—”

“I feel pretty good today thanks to the massage you gave me last night.”

“Oh ho ho! It’s wonderful to see you getting along so well,” said the elder, smiling and nodding. Michelle must’ve found that embarrassing, judging by how she lowered her gaze.

“It’s nothing to be ashamed of. It’s a beautiful thing.” The elder then perked up. “Oh yes, if you give someone a massage while wearing that ring, it’ll also regulate the flow of mana in their body. Isn’t that rather handy?”

“That’s amazing,” I agreed.

“Indeed. Now then, Sir Yahagi, may we meet again.” The elder stabbed the ground with his cane and disappeared into the hole.

“At any rate, this really is amazing,” I marveled once he was gone. It seemed this thing could help countless people regulate their mana flow. I stared at the gleaming Clear Stream Ring on my finger. “Hey, Michelle. I want to test this ring out, so can I give you a massage?”

“That’s fine. Should I take off my coat?”

“No, just a massage on the palm of your hand is fine.” That’d probably be

enough to regulate her mana circulation. I took Michelle's hand once she presented it to me, and I used the pads of my thumbs to gently massage her palm.

"Ah..." Hitching sighs tumbled from her lips.

"Well? Does it feel good?"

"Yeah. All you're doing is pressing the palm of my hand, but it's like my body's being purged of all its pent-up toxins. My mana circulation is completely smooth. Right now, I can probably handle my magic much better than usual. I feel that I could blast several rounds of my Maximum Magic in a row and blow the Royal Capital away two times over."

Please don't.

"If it's that effective, maybe I could open up a massage parlor," I said brightly.

"What do you mean?"

"I'll give the rookies a magic massage for a cheap price. Everyone's physical and magical abilities will increase if I do that, right? I'm sure they'll be happy."

"Y-You can't!" Michelle cried with all her might, her face red.

"Why not?"

"I can't bear the idea of you touching other girls!" she protested. "No, I can't accept you touching even a boy!"

"Hey, relax. It's just a massage."

"No means nooo!!!"

So, not only were Meryl and Mira out of the question, but Rigal too? *Man, I guess my hands are tied.*

"All right," I relented. "Then only you can get my massage."

"Really?"

"Yeah. I'll do it specially for you."

With tears welling up in her eyes, she vigorously nodded her head, satisfied.

Man, I guess I'm never becoming a master masseur. Oh well. I'll just keep

living as a dagashi-ya.

The warm days continued. Now that the cold was easing up a little, you could sense that spring's arrival was near. The snow might thaw soon too.

A new gachapon appeared at Dagashi-ya Yahagi. Unlike the previous small machines, this one was a tall case like a soft drink vending machine. Instead of spinning a dial, you were supposed to press down on the lever to retrieve the product. The word "Cosmic" was written in white letters on the red box. *Is that the company name?*

I saw my store's gachapon as being most popular among the gnomes, but this product was a hit with the adventurers this time around as well.

Product name: The French's Perfume

Description: There are four types - Deamond, Emrod, Sapphill, and Rubee.

If you use Deamond (Lily Scent), it becomes easier for monsters to target you. If you use Emrod (Grassy Note), monsters will stay away. Sapphill (Citrusy) will charm monsters. Rubee (Rose Scent) causes monsters to become dizzy.

Price: Three hundred rims

The perfumes were inside very small bottles, and there was a gold chain attached to each one. When I opened the lids, every one of them gave off an intense scent.

"Hmm..." I muttered. "I dunno whether to say they smell good or bad."

"But they look like they'll be useful for taking down monsters." Garmr, who had come to my store, took some small coins from his pocket and pulled the gachapon. What came out was the Deamond perfume, the one that made it easier for monsters to target you. I suspected that the intense smell let the

wearer draw aggro from monsters.

“Hmm, so it’s Deamond,” he said. “Hey, Grapp, you try it.”

“Sure thing.” Grapp was the tank of Garmr’s team. He was a big man who carried a large spiked shield, and he had a reputation for using his huge, beefy body as defense. That Deamond perfume’s special characteristic made it so that monsters would target the wearer more, so it was perfect for him. *But whether he’s a perfume guy in the first place is a different story.*

Grapp took off the lid and sprinkled the perfume liberally over his shaved head.

“Hey, you’re putting on too much!!!”

“You think? Heh heh. It smells good!”

In my opinion, most people would think it stank, but Grapp seemed to have taken a liking to it.

We had just witnessed the sudden birth of the Fake-Lily-Scented Tank. Grapp would eventually earn the nickname Tiger Lily, but that was a story for another time.

“By the way, what is ‘The French’?” Garmr asked me with an artless expression.

“They come from a place called France,” I answered. “It’s a really...really faraway place.”

It’s like that Hagiwara poem, “I’d like to be off to France, but France is so frightfully far,” huh... I felt a little wistful recalling my past life’s memories.

“What’s wrong, Yusuke? You look sad,” Michelle asked, peering at me with concern.

“It’s nothing.”

“But...” Michelle drew closer to me and whispered into my ear. “When the store settles down, I’ll give you a hug in the back.”

Michelle was shy, and yet she was encouraging me... She was just way too precious.

“S’il vous plaît.”

My French was kinda good today.

Chichi’s Side

About the same time the adventurers were swarming around The French’s Perfume, a lone man was similarly enchanted by a bewitching scent at the Rondas Tower, where those who had committed political crimes were imprisoned. It was the servant, Marco, who had been seized by Chichi’s perfume, the Binding Rose.

This perfume was a magic potion that had a charming effect. Chichi had formerly used it to even steal her older sister’s fiancé. That was right—the king was also a victim who had been charmed by Chichi’s magic potion.

Marco couldn’t sleep a wink the night after he’d received Chichi’s perfumed handkerchief. Even once midnight had passed, all he could think about was Chichi. His mind and body festered with his passionate feelings until he finally left his bed, thinking to himself that he’d be satisfied if he got even one glimpse of her.

He’d intended to sneak into Chichi’s chambers, but there were a great number of soldiers standing guard in the corridor and in front of the door. He’d only be thrown out if he approached from the front. In that case, he’d go to the top floor of the tower. Fortunately for him, there was no one in the dark stairwell.

When he poked his head out from the inspection door on the ceiling, he felt his body freeze in fear of how high up he was, but he could somehow bear it thanks to Chichi’s magic. Then he used the rope meant for repairing the outer walls and gradually lowered himself to Chichi’s bedroom window.

Chichi internally bent over with laughter when she caught sight of Marco knocking on her bedroom window while hanging from a rope. It was terribly delightful to watch this man freezing in the cold while awkwardly hanging there. *I charmed this man, just as I planned. Now I’ll just turn him into my slave who*

does whatever I ask.

“What are you doing, sir?” she asked, acting as though she were demanding an explanation even while inviting him into her room.

“I apologize, my queen. I understand that this is rude of me, but I couldn’t hold back my feelings, so I came to see you.”

“Why?” she asked, allowing her eyes to moisten with tears.

“It is because I yearn for you.”

She desperately held back the instinctive urge to burst into laughter.

(Oh my god, this is hilarious! This guy’s for real. He’s seriously spellbound!)

Yusuke’s Side

A certain product at Dagashi-ya Yahagi was experiencing a quiet boom. A full twenty units arrived at my store every day, but it sold so well that it was out of stock by the afternoon. This was the product in question.

Product name: Neri Neri Mizuame

Description: Mizuame in a cup.

Comes in four flavors - Strawberry, lemon, apple, and soda. Your body becomes flexible after consumption.

Price: Fifty rims

It was mizuame in a small cup. It came with two sticks, and if you stirred it while aerating it, it became white and fluffy and gained a nicer mouthfeel. It was gentle on a tired body, and since it also increased your flexibility, it was popular right out of the gate—but that wasn’t the only secret to its success. There seemed to be another way you could use it that wasn’t in the description.

“They happened upon it completely by chance,” Meryl told me as she used the two attached sticks to mix the soda-flavored mizuame. “A certain adventurer was eating the Neri Neri Mizuame while they were on their break.”

Sweets healed tired bodies. My business was flourishing thanks to that.

“They were a solo adventurer and carelessly sat down on a rock in the passage to eat it.”

“Whoa, even I wouldn’t do that.”

“You normally wouldn’t,” she agreed. “However, it seemed they were so exhausted that they’d neglected their safety.”

“So, they sat by the roadside and had their mizuame.”

“Yeah. But the dungeon isn’t as sweet as this candy. A bunch of Army Ants suddenly appeared and attacked them.”

Army Ants were ant monsters that were about the size of small dogs. While they were weak on their own, they attacked in groups. A solo adventurer wouldn’t stand a chance if they found themselves surrounded.

“They’d been cornered by twenty Army Ants and were bracing themselves for death,” she continued.

“There’s nothing you can do when your escape route’s been cut off,” I observed.

“However, that adventurer safely escaped the enclosure.”

“How?” That was impossible if you weren’t exceptionally capable. Of course an amateur who’d let their personal safety fall by the wayside would get killed.

“Rather than attacking the adventurer, the ants swarmed around the Neri Neri Mizuame instead. Additionally, a frenzy broke out as they surrounded it, and they started killing *each other*.”

Thus, the adventurer had escaped by the skin of their teeth and watched the Army Ants kill each other from behind a rock. After finally eating up the Neri Neri Mizuame, the Army Ants had withdrawn, but more than ten of them had disappeared in the friendly slaughter. An Army Ant’s average drop was 200 rims. That meant this adventurer had obtained 2,400 rims without engaging in combat. That information had gradually spread and led to the current popularity boom.

“Making money while just standing there and watching sounds so nice and

easy,” I commented.

“Yeah. Although that doesn’t mean it doesn’t have its risks.”

“What do you mean?”

“It takes a while to get to the Army Ants’ habitat, and there have been times they’ve noticed humans who were hiding. Using the Neri Neri Mizuame might also attract way more of them than you can manage.”

“So that’s why it’s experiencing only a slight boom.”

“That’s right,” she chirped. “I’m personally eating it because I like it, not for my hunts. Give me one more of each flavor!”

Meryl finished her snacks and headed back out to hunt. A lone young man passed by her on his way into my shop. This was my first time seeing him. He had good equipment, but it wasn’t that of an adventurer. He was clad in some old armor, the type worn by regular soldiers. It wasn’t that uncommon to see, since there were a lot of adventurers who used to be soldiers, but it seemed this young man wasn’t used to the dungeon. He was surveying my shelves filled with products unfamiliar to him with a bewildered expression. I’d thought he might be a shoplifter, but he wasn’t giving off that impression now. *I guess I’ll call out to him.*

“Welcome,” I said. “Are you looking for something?”

“Oh, he-hello,” he squeaked. “Um...I heard there was a candy sold here for hunting Army Ants...”

Oh man, it looks like this customer also has his eye on the mizuame.

“Of course, the Neri Neri Mizuame, yes? We just had a gluttonous adventurer buy up four of them, so I’ve only got one each of the soda and lemon flavors.”

“Oh, I see... Then I’d like those.”

I grew worried as I watched this young man awkwardly take out his wallet. “Can I ask you something?”

“Wh-What is it?”

“You aren’t an adventurer, are you?”

“I-I’m one of Rondas Tower’s...” he stammered, trailing off. “No, um... I’m working at a certain mansion.”

“Why are you in a dungeon when you’ve got a job?” I asked. The young man before me didn’t look like the ambitious, greedy type who wanted to get rich quick. He had a meek face, and it looked like he hadn’t seen much battle.

“I just need to make money no matter what...” he murmured.

I see. Everyone had their reasons, but it was way too reckless of him to suddenly try going for Army Ants as a complete newbie.

“Do you have any companions, sir?”

“No, I’m solo.”

So that’s why he’s going for Army Ants, huh? He’d probably heard somewhere that he could make money off of them even while on his own. But just like Meryl had said, danger was an unavoidable part of the dungeon. I couldn’t imagine this greenhorn was capable of skillfully hunting those things down.

I might have been stepping out of line here, but he seemed like a good person. I’d regret letting him go just like that. “I’m Yahagi. I run this dagashi-ya here in the dungeon. What’s your name?”

“Oh, I’m Marco.”

“Mister Marco, a word of advice, but you should give up on those Army Ants.”

“But there’s a girl I want to save!”

So this was about a girl... He looked desperate. *Love makes you blind, and that’s what makes it so scary.* “And that’s why you need money now?”

“Yes... The two of us are going to live together in a foreign country. To that end, I came to the dungeon on my day off...”

I supposed he normally worked at the mansion and had come to the dungeon to hunt on his day off. That girl must have really been important to him. I was moved by this young man’s single-minded determination and decided I’d meddle a little.

Now then, how skilled is this Mister Marco? Dagashi-ya Yahagi was located at

Hot Spring Yahagi on B2. You needed to know at least some level of martial arts to safely make it down here. “How much battle experience do you have?”

“I had about two years of training in military service. Oh, but I don’t have actual combat experience.”

“You don’t? I’m surprised you got here.”

“It’s because I followed the other adventurers early this morning. Everyone headed to this hot spring, so I also arrived here without losing my way.”

Basically, he’d slipped into the morning rush and ended up here. “How about your battles with monsters?”

“I took down one Giant Worm,” he said, slightly puffing out his chest. *Come on. That’s a level of monster even I could take down.* This was bad. It looked like this was a situation in which an extreme beginner had followed veteran adventurers and just mindlessly wound up on B2.

“Mister Marco, do you know the way home?”

His face immediately turned pale. “Um, well... Kinda.”

I held back a sigh and handed him a dungeon map.

“What’s this?”

“It’s a dungeon map we offer at my store,” I said. “The map of floors B1 and B2 is free of charge, so please take it.”

“Th-Thank you!” he said, deeply bowing his head before poring over the map. Army Ants appeared on B2, so he was probably memorizing its structure.

“Can you get back to the surface by yourself?”

“I’m fine so long as I have this map.”

The road wasn’t complicated, so I guessed he could manage it somehow. “Then please be careful. However, before you go, I have a product I’d like to recommend to you.”

“What is it?”

“Please have a look at this.”

Product name: Yahagi Set A

Description: An assortment of dagashi. It's a single bag containing popular items. Ten-Rim Gum, Odama Candy, Morocco Yogurt, Kielbasa, Chocolate Bat, Tasty Stick, and Lettuce Tarou are included.

Price: One hundred rims

This set was exclusive to porters. It was a tad cheaper than the usual prices of these goods, and it was popular among the porters since they didn't have much to spend. Incidentally, in Yahagi Set B, there was a Jumbo Cutlet instead of a Chocolate Bat. The HP-restoring Chocolate Bat was something that porters were really thankful to have. On the other hand, eating a Jumbo Katsu gave you a power boost, even if only for three seconds. That granted porters with low combat abilities a chance to hunt monsters.

"There are lots of useful snacks in this bag," I said. "Truth be told, these are meant for porters only, but would you like to buy one?"

One by one, I explained each of their effects.

"It sounds wonderful. Please give me one."

After he'd bought the Yahagi Set, he immediately put the Odama Candy in his mouth. With that, his agility would increase. He probably wouldn't instantly die even if he ran into a monster.

"Please be careful," I said. "After you exit the hot spring and come to the first fork in the road, you go left. Then if you go left, right, and left in that order, all you have to do is follow the road after that."

"Thank you very much. You've really been of help to me."

As I saw Marco off, I watched his retreating form and hoped from the bottom of my heart that he'd survive.

Chichi's Side

Right around midnight, Marco sneaked into Chichi's bedroom.

“Oh, I’m so glad. I was worried I wouldn’t be able to see you today,” Chichi said, clasping her hands in front of her chest and pretending to look relieved. With those actions alone, her form in its comfortable nightgown took on a bewitching aura.

“I had the day off today, so I went to the dungeon.” Marco handed her a small leather wallet. “Here, have this.”

When she checked what was inside, she discovered 5,600 rims.

That’s it? Chichi internally clicked her tongue. Between the money needed to buy a disguise, bribe the soldiers at the checkpoint, and pay her living expenses in the place she would be fleeing to, this would *hardly* be enough. She regretted not choosing a slightly better man to seduce and control, but she didn’t show that on her face.

“Thank you, Marco,” she said. “I’ve really caused you trouble.”

“What are you saying?” he asked. “If it’s for your sake, Mistress Chichi, then I’ll...”

“Oh, did you forget again? I’m not Mistress Chichi. I said to simply call me Chichi.”

“B-But...”

Chichi’s hand with its translucent white skin took Marco’s own rough hand. “We should be able to open the door to our future if we can save up some more money. It’ll be difficult, but let’s both do our best.”

“Yes.” Marco then groaned as he grimaced and held his arm.

“What’s the matter?”

“I was injured in a battle with a monster.”

“Show me.”

When his shirtsleeve was rolled up, it revealed a blood-soaked bandage around his left arm.

“This is nothing,” he mumbled. “The bleeding’s stopped—”

“Don’t speak such nonsense.” She immediately used her Healing Magic.

(Despite how I am, I take good care of my toys. Though I'll throw him away once I'm done with him.)

As Chichi cast her magic on him, Marco grew as spellbound as if his soul had ascended into heaven. He was so lost in her that he'd begun to feel that if he could only keep receiving such kindness, it didn't matter if he died in the dungeon for her sake.

"Now that should do it," she said. "Don't push yourself so much."

"It's fine. A nice merchant helped me out today."

"Oh, that's good. What's the name of the man who helped my future husband?"

Chichi's words made Marco's face feel hot enough to evaporate. "I-If I remember right...um...I think it was Mister Huggy maybe?"

She giggled. "Whether he's Mister Huggy or Mister Kissy, either is fine. We must be grateful to him."

Chichi hated Yusuke Yahagi, but she didn't know he ran a dagashi-ya in the dungeon. That was because after he'd called her ugly during their first encounter, she'd immediately been imprisoned and had had no time to learn more about him.

(It'd be nice if he'd just steal money from that merchant, but I guess that might still be a tall order...)

If she surrendered her body to Marco and pretended she'd become pregnant, he might steal for the sake of his child... Such a lowly idea crossed her mind, but she immediately shut it down—but not because of her conscience. It was simply that she didn't want to sleep with a man like Marco. She was a woman who'd never give her body away for cheap.

The Adventurer Meryl's Diary: Entry 5

Mister Yusuke is always helping me, but this time I've gotta complain. That's how angry I am. I'm talking about Grapp's perfume. It smells way too strong! It's supposed to be lilies, but it isn't. It's a perfume that words can't describe. Actually, I'll just come out and say it—it stinks. It absolutely reeks!

Sure, even Mira and I have some interest in perfumes. They give off mature, womanly vibes, so I actually kinda want to buy a nice one someday. But you know, that perfume of Grapp's is, um, well, not that. Not only does it draw monster aggro to whoever uses it but it also gives a sensation like it's numbing your brain, and you get a bit nauseated if you sniff it for too long. Honestly, I want Mister Yusuke to take it off the shelves. But that Grapp liked it so much, he bought 9,000 rims' worth of it in bulk, so even if the dagashi-ya stopped selling it, Grapp would continue his smelly reign of terror for the time being. Now this is a pickle.

Still, that Cosmic gachapon is filled with weird products. There's tons of stuff with kinda iffy effects despite the high price tag, like Hydrogen Bombs weaker than Rocket Bombs, a King's Sword (actually a paper knife) that doesn't cut anything, a Pencil Gun only useful against Slimes... Well, you could say that also makes it fun, but it can get irritating when something extremely lame comes out. I think the only useful item is the Gold Lighter. It uses magic crystals to light fires. You can easily ignite a flame without using Fire Magic, so it's become popular. The gold color makes it look gorgeous too, even if it is obviously fake. I also bought one, and I always carry it around with me. It really comes in handy when cooking or lighting an open-air fire.

Recently, Mira and I've been solely hunting down Army Ants with the Neri Neri Mizuame. Having the crazed ants destroy themselves makes things easy for us, and it's great that our weapons don't need as much maintenance.

If there is one thing we're struggling with, I guess it's that I keep accidentally

eating up the mizuame that's meant for the Army Ants. Mira scolds me, saying that we've run out of mizuame to feed the ants, but I just love that smooth mouthfeel. I particularly like the apple flavor.

It's just that recently, word has gotten around, and there've been more adventurers hunting for Army Ants. Because of that, the number of ants has dramatically decreased. I'm a little worried since even rookie adventurers who aren't that strong are going after them. I guess it's about time we change our hunting grounds. Isn't there somewhere else where we can easily make money?

If I had that Legendary Spiked Bat, I could take down Big Coconut Crabs. Those things have high defense, but they move slowly. That Legendary Spiked Bat deals a set amount of damage, so I could hunt them down as much as I wanted if I had it.

All right! I'll go all out tomorrow then! I've been buying six of those Chocolate Bats every day, but I'll start buying ten tomorrow! Mira told me not to since I'd get fat, but I can't worry about my appearance! It'll be all right! I'll burn as many calories as I take in while on the job! But maybe ten is too many after all? Maybe I'll give the ones I can't eat to Rigal.

Chapter 6: The Legendary Spiked Bat

Every once in a while, Dagashi-ya Yahagi received products that I just could not sell. The product this most applied to was probably these plastic sunglasses.

Product name: Wide Sunglasses

Description: A trendy item on the cutting edge of fashion. It enables you to see really well.

Price: Three hundred rims

It said it was trendy and cutting-edge, but it was honestly cheap looking and lame. I thought that it might sell anyway since tastes varied depending on the time period and place, but there was absolutely no demand for it in this world.

“You’d be treated like a weirdo if you went around wearing that,” Meryl informed me.

“Indeed,” Mira said. “It’s pretty embarrassing.”

It seemed Meryl and Mira were uninterested.

“I don’t think I’d be able to either,” Michelle chimed in. “Also, they’re dark and I wouldn’t be able to see.”

Her point of view was understandable. The dungeon was a pretty dark place to begin with, so your field of vision would become even worse if you wore these. It was highly improbable that you could fight a battle in them.

The description said that they’d make you able to see really well, but that just had to be false. I had been excited at first, thinking they’d work like night vision goggles, but they were just some cheap old sunglasses.

Meryl put the sunglasses on. “Yeah, I really can’t see anything. Also, when I press this thingy sticking out, a bunch of letters I can’t read show up. This’d be too distracting to hunt in.”

Letters she can't read? I have no idea what she means.

"What thingy sticking out?" I asked.

"Here."

Now that she mentioned it, there really was a small protrusion on the right side of the frame.

"You're right. I didn't notice it at all." I also put on the sunglasses and pressed the little bump. "Hmm? No letters are showing up. What's going on, Meryl?" Then I saw it. "Wait, whoa!"

Sex: F

CP: 128 *PHYS* ATK: 78 MAG ATK: 50

Adept at using body enhancements in physical combat.

Height: 165 cm / Bust-waist-hip measurements: 82-58-83

Nothing had shown up at first, but the moment Meryl came into focus, a ton of information had popped up! It was written in a combination of Japanese, the Latin alphabet, and Arabic numerals, so Meryl just couldn't understand it... So *her total Combat Power is 128?*

"What's the matter, Mister Yusuke?"

"No-Nothing..."

"You're acting a little weird."

"N-No I'm not, Mira."

Ah, this time I'm getting Mira's information...

Sex: F

CP: 119 / *PHYS* ATK: 29 / MAG ATK: 90

Adept at magic with wind and water attributes.

Height: 158 cm / Bust-waist-hip measurements: 90-57-92

This item may be dangerous in a variety of senses. While I was pondering this, Michelle poutily raised her voice. “Hey, why are you staring at Mira?!”

“Gah! I’m not!”

Sex: F

CP: 1324 *PHYS* ATK: 542 MAG ATK: 782

Versed in every kind of magic. Can use magic with the darkness attribute. A master in the ways of the saber.

Height: 165 cm / Bust-waist-hip measurements: 95-56-87

She’s dynamite in all sorts of ways!

“Really, what’s the matter, Yusuke?” Michelle demanded, exasperated.

“No, I was just thinking how useless a product this is,” I said hurriedly. “I doubt it’ll sell, so I’ll put it away in the closet.” I took the box that held the sunglasses and stood up. I felt I couldn’t release this to the world. In fact, if it were an option, I’d return it to the sender at once.

Marco stopped by my shop again this morning. I’d gotten the impression that he wasn’t experienced in battle, so I sighed in relief to see that he was alive. There were a number of gashes on his armor and clothes, which told me that he’d gone through many battles. Though his equipment was all battered, there were somehow no traces of any injuries. Had he paid for a healer? Healing Magic was expensive, but he might’ve made good enough money to foot the bill.

“Thanks for your help the other day,” he said. “Your snacks saved me.”

“Glad to hear it,” I replied. “Are you going hunting today too?”

“Yes, I’ll be heading out after this. Today, I’m here to buy a Morocco Yogurt and an Odama Candy. Also, I heard there was some food you sell here that

sharpens your senses.”

“That’s the Skewered Squid. It’s inside that pot over there.”

This was how rookies would go about finding products that suited their needs. Of course, there were times they’d buy snacks or toys just because they liked them and not for any particular effect.

“Five Morocco Yogurts, three Odama Candies, and a Skewered Squid,” I said. “Your total is 160 rims.”

“All right, here you go.” Marco handed me the money to pay for his snacks. Then he paused. “Oh, right.” He started digging around his pockets. “When I ate this candy, this was written on the wrapper.” He took out a Chocolate Bat wrapper.

No way...

Home run! Make sure you turn this in to the shopkeeper in exchange for a prize!

F-Finally, there it is.

“Congratulations!” I exclaimed. “Your prize is the Legendary Spiked Bat.”

“Excuse meee?!”

“Wow!”

As Marco stood there staring blankly, Meryl and Mira, who had arrived at my store, voiced their surprise in his stead.

“Um...” he started hesitantly. “What is the Legendary Spiked Bat?”

“It’s a valuable item that allows you to deal 300 guaranteed damage to any enemy!” Meryl exclaimed excitedly, explaining for me. “I’ve been after it for so long—I would’ve never guessed that someone would beat me to it... Ugh...”

“Don’t cry over something like this, Meryl.”

“You don’t understand my feelings, Mister Yusuke,” she cried. “How much money do you think I’ve thrown at those Chocolate Bats?!”

Yeah, she's already bought over a hundred. Well, each one was only 30 rims, so that meant one hundred sticks was about 3,000 rims.

"Now you can hunt Big Coconut Crabs to your heart's content," Mira told Marco, beaming at him.

"Big Coconut Crabs? What kind of monsters are those?"

Irritated by Marco and Mira's easygoing conversation, Meryl butted in. "You don't know a thing, do you?! Big Coconut Crabs are monsters with bizarrely high defense, but they're slow, so you can hunt them relatively safely. However, their shells are so absurdly strong, they take forever to break. That's why we normally ignore them. But if you have that Spiked Bat, then you should be able to take them down in one or two blows."

"That easily?!"

"That's right! Big Coconut Crabs drop an average of 500 rims. Now do you understand how incredibly valuable that bat is?! Ugh, *man!*"

"I see..."

I handed the Spiked Bat, shining with the sheen of oxidized silver, to Marco. Reality still hadn't hit him, it seemed. "Big Coconut Crabs aren't all it's good for," I said. "It should come in handy even during regular hunts. With this, you may be able to save the person you hold dear."

"Yes! Thank you!" Marco said, lighting up with a smile I hadn't seen before.

"Oh right, you're a solo adventurer, aren't you?" Meryl perked up. "Then team up with us and we'll go hunting together!" Having missed her shot at obtaining the Legendary Spiked Bat herself, it seemed Meryl had decided to drag its new owner onto her team.

"Huh? I don't know what to say. This is so sudden..." He was utterly confused by her out-of-the-blue proposal.

"What are you talking about? Big Coconut Crabs are on B3. Even if you have that Legendary Spiked Bat, it's dangerous to go alone." Her ulterior motives peeked through here and there, but she did have a point. It was a dangerous enough proposition already for a dungeon newbie like Marco, but I had the

feeling he'd overdo it now that he had this new weapon. Teaming up with Meryl and Mira would probably also be a great learning experience for him.

"Mister Marco," I said, "these two are capable adventurers you can rely on. How about you team up with them just for today? You can consider it a test run."

Marco hesitated before he agreed. "I understand. I'll be in your care."

With those two on his team, I didn't have to worry about Marco. A weight seemed to lift from my shoulders.

A pretty grown-up product got added to my shop. Although it apparently had existed in my previous life, I'd never seen it before now. It was the fabled Perfume Gum.

Product name: Eva (Perfume Gum)

Description: Has a perfume-like allure. If a couple eats this together, it makes them want to kiss.

For those who are not lovers, there's no effect.

Price: Seventy rims

It was a product featuring sticks of gum in a gorgeous golden box. There was a love poem written on the wrapping paper, apparently the work of Mitsouko Toronton, a famous writer in this world. At first, it seemed kind of wild for gum to be scented like perfume, but when I had a try, it was surprisingly delicious. Also, Michelle and I kissed a ton after that. It was crazy. *Kisses are kinda sweet somehow. Well, I won't go into details.* Michelle had bought an entire box of them on the first day, and she kept encouraging me to eat some every chance she got. *I've been in a bit of a bind...*

Since its effect was unrelated to hunting, I questioned whether it'd sell, but I was actually moving a good amount of stock. Boys and girls who wanted to feel a little more grown-up were buying it, whether they had a lover or not. I'd

heard it'd recently become popular to hand some Perfume Gum to someone instead of a love letter.

"Mister Yusuke, gimme some of this, please." Meryl had stopped by to purchase my new product.

"That's 70 rims."

As she was paying, Garmr and the others currently at my store all started poking fun at her. "What are you doing, Meryl? You don't even have a boyfriend, yet you're buying that?"

"Oh, shut up," she snapped. "I'm buying it because I like the taste and smell. Why don't you hurry your butt to work, and go to hell too while you're at it!"

Garmr grinned and reached out his hand to her.



“What?”

“Give me a stick too,” he sneered. “I’ll kiss you as thanks.”

“Like hell you will,” she spat. “I’d prefer kissing *Rigal* over the likes of you. Like, a hundred times more.”

“Yo, Rigal! You’ve been requested!” Garmr and his buddies burst into heaving laughter, but Meryl was calm. She took out one stick of gum and quietly gave it to Rigal.

“Huh?” The boy jolted, confused. “What? I—um...”

“I’m just sharing one with you is all,” she said coolly. “Or did you *want* me to kiss you?” Meryl was usually tomboyish, but she seemed especially mature today. Girls *did* suddenly grow up in the blink of an eye, suddenly enough to take you aback. Still, at that age, girls tended to be the more mature ones. It seemed Garmr and his friends still hadn’t outgrown their “brat” stage.

“All right,” she said. “I guess I’ll try my luck again today. Gimme a Ten-Rim Chocolate Coin and a Chocolate Bat, Mister Yusuke!”

And this is where Meryl is still very much a child.

“Speaking of Chocolate Bats, how did it go with Marco?” I asked. “You went hunting again with him yesterday, right?”

“We did. That Legendary Spiked Bat should be illegal. You wouldn’t believe how many Big Coconut Crabs you can take down with it.” Meryl then lowered her voice and whispered in my ear. “How much do you think we earned yesterday?”

“Dunno.”

“Over 40,000 rims total. Mira and I said that we were okay getting 10,000 rims each, but Marco insisted that we each take 16,000.”

“That’s amazing.” For adventurers who’d recently graduated from the rookie life like Meryl and Mira, even an 8,000-rim take made for a banner day.

“He invited us to go next week too, so we’re gonna be teaming up again.”

“That’s great to hear. Maybe it’s time you go ahead and give Marco some

Perfume Gum.”

“What?” she complained. “Marco’s a good person, but he’s not my type. He’s also totally in love with someone.”

“Yeah. He said there is a girl he wants to save.”

“Mm-hmm, about that... I’m kinda concerned.”

“About what?”

Meryl lowered her voice even more. “It seems she’s married...”

“Seriously?!” According to Meryl, the woman that Marco had fallen in love with was the lady of the mansion he worked for. That was a surprise considering how earnest Marco seemed. No, it might be exactly *because* he was so earnest that he’d decided to support a poor, unfortunate married woman.

“W-Well, that doesn’t mean they’re in a relationship...” I mumbled.

“Yeah, but could you really put your life at risk for someone you didn’t love? Marco’s got his day job, right? That’s why he’s thinking about going into the dungeon at night too.”

That was no good. The monsters in the dungeon got pretty strong at night. It was dangerous even with the Legendary Spiked Bat. “What are you going to do, Meryl?”

“Mira and I intend to tag along with him on the condition that it’s only up to B1.”

“Is that all right?” I asked. “Isn’t B1 dangerous too?” There were rumors that—although it was rare—monsters from B4 would sometimes climb up to B1.

“But I’m worried for Marco,” she continued. “I can’t just let the poor guy go alone. Also, Mira’s mother is sick.”

“What?!”

“Apparently she needs a lot of money to go see a healer. There’s still some of the Leproses’ treasure left, but she invested it into a fixed-term deposit. So we thought maybe we should work a little harder.”

I’d had absolutely no idea. Mira hadn’t said anything. She had a modest

personality, so she had probably been keeping it to herself. “All right. I’ll bring out my store tonight too. Dagashi-ya Yahagi will be having a special late-night opening. You can use it as a rest stop.”

“Really?!” she exclaimed. “But are you sure? If your store gets attacked—”

“I can summon my store inside a stone wall, so I’ll be fine.”

“What about the entrance?”

“Don’t worry. I have an idea.”

Meryl and I proceeded to conduct a thorough discussion of what we’d do tonight.

The morning rush ended, and the adventurers headed to work. Not a soul was left in the Hot Spring Yahagi clearing.

“Yusuke, I finished cleaning the back room,” Michelle called, poking her head out after tidying up the tatami room.

“Thank you. I’ll come over once I finish calculating my profits.”

“Yeah, let’s have a break. We can have some Perfume Gum as a snack.”

Um, I think it’s better not to eat that just now. It was hard to resist when she tempted me while fidgeting like that. *It’s cute, but...*

“Let’s save that for tonight,” I said, before I remembered. “Oh wait, I actually have to go out.”

The look in her eyes grew intense. “Where are you going?” she demanded. “Weren’t we going to be together tonight?!”

We spent a lot of time apart while she did her research, so she was clingy on her days off. That tendency had further intensified recently. But whenever we were together, she did practically everything for me, which made me feel kinda guilty.

“I have plans to open my shop tonight,” I said and then proceeded to explain the situation.

“So that’s how it is.” She relaxed. “Then I’ll stay in the dungeon with you too.”

“Are you sure? All I have here is a thin futon...”

“I’m happy no matter where I am, so long as I’m with you,” she said, her cheeks flushed. She was way too cute.

“Actually, Michelle.”

“What?”

“Can I have a stick of Perfume Gum after all?”

“Yeah...”

In the back of the store, the two of us chewed our gum together.

The slender moon silvered the night sky with a wintry light. Even the dungeon plaza, bustling with life during the day, was silent as a mouse, with no one there to make a sound. Michelle and I headed for the entrance staircase and found Mira and Meryl waiting there for us.

“Where’s Marco?” I asked.

“He’s not here yet,” Meryl replied. “He may be working overtime at the mansion.”

They were making him work late, and then on top of that, he had to brave the dungeon at night? If I were in his place, I’d be so exhausted I wouldn’t be able to move. *And this is all for the sake of that married woman...* I had to give him props for how deep his love for her went. Was this woman he loved really *that* attractive? I started getting a little curious. “I wonder what kind of person his lover is?”

“Probably really pretty? He’s just so desperate over her.”

Would someone really risk his life just for a pretty face?

“He also said she was so kind, like a saint,” Mira chimed in.

“I see,” I said. “So if she’s pretty and has a good personality, I guess it’s not impossible to imagine why he’d devote himself to her so wholeheartedly.” Those were my thoughts, but Michelle cocked her head.

“I wouldn’t be so sure,” she said. “It could be that some wicked woman is

tricking him. He looks pretty gullible.”

“Tricking him? But what for?”

“I don’t know, but does such a person really exist: so beautiful, with such a nice figure, *and* a saintlike personality? Also, even if I were in the same position as that woman, I wouldn’t throw you into a dangerous dungeon. I’d be so worried about you, my heart would split in half.” She kept me on a short leash, but she was deeply compassionate.

“You do have a point, but in order for them to elope, maybe there’s no other option,” Meryl suggested, defending Marco and his lover. It was possible that the husband was a tyrant, and as a result, his wife had absolutely no money she could use to leave.

“Then she could sell everything from the mansion and use it to fund her escape,” Michelle reasoned. “That’s what I would do. I would never put you in danger!”

“I know that you really care about me, Michelle,” I soothed her. “So you don’t need to get so agitated.” It flustered me a little how Michelle was always frank when she expressed her emotions. Meryl and Mira were here, so I wanted her to tone it down a bit. Thanking Michelle out loud would be too embarrassing, so I wordlessly put my scarf around her neck. *I hope this can convey my feelings...*

“Yusuke’s smell... I’m wrapped in Yusuke’s love... Even if I die, I’ll...him... I’ll destroy the world if he cheats...”

She was mumbling something. *Did my feelings reach her at least? Whew, I’m glad.*

After we’d waited for a while, Marco appeared, carrying his Legendary Spiked Bat. “I apologize for my tardiness. I had to work a little bit of overtime.”

“Don’t worry about it,” I assured him. “More importantly, did you eat?”

“No, I just came straight here...”

I thought so. “Here, eat this for now. It’s better than going in on an empty stomach, right?” I passed around Curry Rice Crackers to everyone. It was a snack that restored stamina *and* warmed up your body. I’d eaten this countless

times back when I was freshly arrived in this world.

Once everyone had finished their Curry Rice Crackers, we stormed into the dungeon.

The nighttime dungeon was enveloped in a thin fog, creating a strange atmosphere.

“The demonic miasma is stronger than usual. On a night like this, there’s a high probability that monsters will appear,” Michelle said, her eyes darting vigilantly left and right. I tightly grasped my Eight-Round Pistol in one hand and my Rocket Bomb in the other.

“You don’t need to be so tense as long as I’m here,” Michelle assured me. She was so dependable at times like this. We’d taken up arms, but Michelle and I were positioned at the rear, basically as backup. Marco, Meryl, and Mira were going to be doing the hunting. Otherwise, their share of the rewards would be reduced by Michelle’s and my portion.

“Let’s go.” Meryl, our vanguard, headed out in front of us with her shield in hand.

A Stone Golem was the first monster to appear that night. It was a strong foe that you’d never see on B1 during the day. It was usually found on floors B3 and below.

Mira promptly used her Wind Magic’s Wind Cutter, but it didn’t seem effective.

“Mira’s magical attributes don’t mesh well with the Stone Golem’s. Mira is good with speed and rapid firing, but her destructive power is lacking,” Michelle calmly explained as she gathered mana in her right hand. It seemed she was preparing herself to jump in and help at a moment’s notice. When all was said and done, Michelle *was* a kind person.

“I’ll attack. Marco, get around behind the enemy!” Meryl sheathed her sword, and charged toward the Stone Golem while gripping her shield with both hands.

This was likely a strategy to attract the monster's attention by focusing entirely on defense. Meryl's whole body glowed blue from her Body Enhancement Magic.

"It's good that Meryl is so decisive," Michelle observed. "She can make quick decisions, so she's capable of being a leader in combat. She's not good with planning out strategies though..."

Yeah, Mira was the one who planned out their courses of action. The two were a good combo because they made up for each other's flaws.

Marco, who'd moved behind the Stone Golem, whammed the Spiked Bat into its back. Several lumps of rock broke off and tumbled to the floor. However, Stone Golems weren't so weak that you could kill them with one blow. Mira and Meryl distracted it with impeccable timing so that Marco could keep up his attacks, and on the sixth blow, it finally collapsed.

Still in the throes of post-battle adrenaline, Meryl let out a strange, high-pitched laugh. "Ah ha ha ha! It dropped a silver coin!"

It really was dangerous here, but it *did* seem like the profits were good. If they kept earning money at a steady pace, they could reach 60,000 rims by the middle of the night.

Engaging in two small battles along the way, we reached the central part of B1.

"All right," I said. "I'll bring out my store here. Store, open!"

The store appeared inside the stone wall of the dungeon. With the windows also buried within the stone, only the entrance was exposed.

"I think you'll be fine since Miss Michelle is with you, but won't the monsters break your door down?" Mira asked me, anxious. Luckily, I had an ace up my sleeve.

"I'll be fine. I have this."

Product name: Bikkuri Mountain Chocolate

Description: A chocolate snack that restores energy and HP.

A light-or dark-themed sticker is included. Each sticker depicts a character, an angel of light or a darkness demon.

Erects a strong barrier when you stick it on something. The barrier's strength is influenced by how strong the character is.

Price: Thirty rims

"Monsters can't come in if I stick this at the entrance," I explained.

"A Bikkuri Mountain Sticker!" Meryl exclaimed. "But this is a nighttime dungeon we're talking about. Won't the barrier break if it's just a regular old sticker?"

"How naive, Meryl. Take a gander at this." I presented a glittering prismatic sticker.

"Wow! It's the extremely rare Head Corocoro sticker! You'll be safe with that!" Head Corocoro was a seldom-seen strong character.

"Its defense is impenetrable, so you go on without worrying about me. Also, although you have to tear off the sticker to undo the barrier, only the person who put it on can do that. It's possible I won't be able to tear it off in time if you're being chased by a monster."

"That's true. You can neutralize a dark sticker by putting a light sticker on top of it, but a sticker strong enough to rival Head Corocoro is, uh..." Meryl trailed off.

"Take this." I then handed her a sticker.

"Whoaaa!" she gasped. "This is a Santa Maria sticker! You're really going to give this to me?!"

"I didn't say you could have it," I said, exasperated. "It's only in case of emergency."

"Okay, got it!" she chirped. "Wow, a super-rare sticker! If Garmr saw this, he

might beg me to sell it to him for a thousand rims!”

Did she really understand? *I didn't say I was giving it to her...*

“All right! We’re off to do some nighttime hunting!”

I watched the chipper group walk off and then placed the sticker on the door.

It became completely silent inside the shop once Marco and company were gone. Immediately, Michelle slid up close to me. When I looked down at her face to see what was up, she was gazing at me with glistening eyes. She traced my collarbone with her elegant fingertip and murmured, “We’re finally alone together...”

It seemed she wanted to fool around. While the feeling was mutual, I just couldn’t relax here in the dungeon. “Not tonight. We don’t know when they’ll come back, right?”

“What? But they just left,” she protested.

“Still...” They could run into a tough enemy, get hurt, and have to immediately turn tail. Thanks to the Head Corocoro sticker, monsters couldn’t come inside, but the door was made of glass, so they would immediately be able to see if we were fooling around from outside.

“You can just close the curtains. Or we can go to the back.”

“What if we get so absorbed that we don’t notice that everyone’s returned?”

Michelle sulkily puffed out her cheeks.

“I’ll go boil some water in the kitchen,” I offered. “I’ll make us tea, so wait here.”

“Humph...”

I’d decided I’d lift her mood by serving her some snacks she liked. When I came back from boiling the water, Michelle was holding one of my products.

“Did you find something you wanted?” I asked.

“No, it’s not that. I was just wondering what you’re supposed to use this for.” She held up a yellow talisman.

Product name: Jiangshi's Talisman

Description: A conspicuous sticker. Let's have fun sticking it on all kinds of things!

If you throw this at an undead monster, you can prevent it from moving.

If you put it on your weapon, it temporarily becomes an anti-undead weapon.

Price: Thirty rims

I'd seen this before in old movies with jiangshi in them. The kanji characters for "Imperial Edict: Protect Life" were written in red on the yellow talisman. I explained the Jiangshi's Talisman to Michelle, who had no way of reading kanji.

"By the way, are there undead monsters in the dungeon?" I asked.

"There are. The far northern part of B3 is particularly famous for them."

"Don't tell me they're jiangshi?"

"I've never heard of a monster called jiangshi. They're mostly Zombies and Skeletons."

Zombies and jiangshi actually had a lot in common. They were both dead bodies, and they shared other aspects, such as how you turned into a monster if you got bitten. This talisman might have some effect on Zombies and Skeletons.

"Zombies drop an average of just under 400 rims. There're a lot of them, so you can make some good money if you've got a team with a lot of HP. But there aren't many people who hunt them."

"Why not?"

"Their numbers make them tough to handle. Fire Magic is effective, but you'll quickly exhaust your mana."

"How about if you carried this?" I asked, referring to the talisman.

Michelle tilted her head, considering. "It may be fine during the day, but it's

way too risky at night. I heard even Zombies that are slow during the day start running once dusk falls.”

I’d also seen that before in a movie from my previous life. *Zombies that can run should be against the rules.*

“Also, Zombies were originally human,” she continued, “so it’s not good for your mental health either.”

I see. I could understand that well. It was probably a good idea to carry this talisman as an amulet after all.

Chichi’s Side

In her room lit by candlelight, Chichi was lazing around in bed. Marco was in the dungeon and wasn’t coming back tonight.

“Oh, what a relief.” She was fed up with Marco, who followed her around like a dog. As she sighed, Chichi fiddled with the small gold coin she’d placed on the palm of her hand.

“Finally, 100,000 rims...” she murmured. This was, of course, the money that Marco had worked so hard to make. However, for Chichi’s past self, this would have been nothing but chump change. Back when she was a queen, a one-hundred-thousand-rim gold coin had felt the same as a ten-rim copper coin. As someone who planned to flee the country, she wanted 3,000,000 rims at the very least. Finding someone to support her financially once she had escaped outside would likely pose her no challenge, but she didn’t want to sacrifice her standard of living while she searched for a good man.

She also still had some unfinished business to take care of before she left the country. If she could, she wanted to get back at the current king for making her suffer this fate. And even if that was impossible, she wanted to at least get her revenge on Michelle and Yahagi.

“I suppose I should try stoking the fire under Marco a bit more...” It seemed he’d acquired some kind of good weapon, so he was making decent money as of late. He wasn’t completely useless after all. She likely wouldn’t have to force him to commit a crime.

“That man. He looks at me like a puppy ignorant of betrayal.” Up until now, she had intended to toss Marco aside as soon as she’d saved up enough money. But she’d changed her mind. It would be all right to at least take him along as a servant. “It’s not like I’ve grown attached, but he does have his cute side.” Marco revered her like she was a goddess.

“Well, I don’t mind being with him for a bit longer.” First, she’d suggest he quit his job as a servant and live as a full-time adventurer. As he was now, Marco would probably earn more that way. Then, just when everyone had forgotten about him, she planned to slip out of Rondas Tower and go live at his house. For now, she decided she’d have him prepare every kind of means necessary for escape. She was already having him gather ingredients for sleep perfumes and poison. He’d bought all of them with the money he had earned. However, there was still a lot to be done, like obtaining a copy of the back door’s key to use in her escape, and stealing the roster of people on patrol duty.

“I’ll also need a wig for a disguise. Perhaps I’ll make my hair black like Michelle’s, so that I won’t stand out,” she mused. “It may be fun to disguise myself as a plain, boring woman like my sister.”

Perhaps Chichi found the plan she’d thought up amusing. She quietly giggled in her dimly lit room.

Yusuke’s Side

Late in the night, I started to hear the chatter of a group from out front. I’d been dozing beneath the kotatsu in the back tatami room, but I immediately jumped up.

“Mister Yusuke, open up!” I could tell just based on Meryl’s tone of voice that their group wasn’t in dire straits right now. It sounded like they’d returned safe and sound.

“Welcome back,” I said, opening the door and inviting them inside. “Here, hurry in and warm yourselves up.”

“Man, it was my first time hunting at night, so I was pretty tense,” Meryl said. She was shivering from the cold, but it didn’t look like she had any notable

injuries. I ushered the three under the kotatsu and set out tea and snacks for them. “The rumors gave me some idea of it, but the dungeon really is dangerous at night. There are monsters I’ve never seen before all over the place.”

“Right?” Mira agreed. “But we managed thanks to that Legendary Spiked Bat. The fact that it deals guaranteed damage is reassuring.” Mira might’ve spent too much mana, judging by how her face was so pale it was almost transparent.

Marco’s face, on the other hand, was rather red, probably from excitement. “But we earned a lot! The mistress should be pleased with this,” he exclaimed.

“You earned that much?”

Meryl puffed her chest out with pride. “We earned 97,000 rims! You hear that —97,000! In only three hours, we earned as much as we make in five days!”

That was pretty impressive. Even if you divided it evenly, each person would receive more than 32,000 rims.

“I’m happy for you, Mira. You can pay for the cost of your sick mother’s treatment with that, right?”

“Yes!” Her pale face flushed with some color.

“Oh right, this is from me. If you’re sending your mother money, please pass this along for me,” I said, handing her the various HP-restoring snacks I’d selected and then packaged into a bag. “Her body will probably feel sluggish while she’s recuperating, but I’m sure she’ll feel better after eating these.”

“Mister Yusuke... Thank you very much!”

The three of them promptly split their profits among themselves. Meryl spoke in a giddy voice. “Hee hee hee! Maybe I’ll buy a new cloak with this?” Then she looked at Marco. “You know, why don’t you quit your job as a servant and just work full-time as an adventurer, Marco? Team up with us.”

“If I stop working at the mansion, then I won’t be able to see the mistress.”

“Oh, I see. Then you wouldn’t have a reason to work so hard.”

This was a classic case of putting the cart before the horse—she’d forgotten why he was doing this in the first place.

“Mister Yahagi, is it all right if I buy something?” Marco asked shyly.

“I don’t really mind. Are you gonna buy some snacks to take home?”

“I earned a lot of money tonight, so I thought I’d buy the mistress a present.” Marco was looking at the toys. It appeared he wanted to buy something to stave off his imprisoned mistress’s boredom.

My shop had a lot of cheap toys, but they weren’t popular with the adventurers. At best, things that you could potentially use for gambling, such as Trump Cards and Hanafuda, sold sometimes. There were puzzles and Kendama too, but only the very young porters bought them. Were there things here that’d please the lady of an upstanding family? Well, many of them were things that didn’t exist in this world, so she might like some of them.

Marco put things like Bubble Wands and Sliding Puzzles into his basket one after another. He also put in every type of this retro portable game called Pocket Mates.

Pocket Mates was a minigame in a pocket-size plastic case that included various gimmicks. To play, you flicked the small, silver ball and rolled it around. There were many varieties, with themes like sports, shooting, mazes, and obstacle courses. If he bought this many, his mistress probably wouldn’t get bored for a while.

“That’s 5,600 rims altogether.” It was rare for anyone in this world to spend this much money on toys. He must really love his mistress. “Also, I’ll throw in a good freebie since you bought a lot.” I took out a Chocodora, an incredible snack that included two bite-size dorayaki with chocolate cream sandwiched inside them. If you shared them with someone and ate them together, you’d get closer to each other. These had helped me get closer to Michelle and the Swindoll Con Inn’s innkeeper. *I haven’t seen her in a while. I wonder how she’s doing.*

“I felt this product was a bit dangerous,” I continued, “so I haven’t put it out in my shop, but it’s a snack where if you share it with someone else, the two of you grow closer. If you share it with your mistress, you may be able to understand each other better.”

“It sounds interesting,” he said. “But is that all right? You said it was

dangerous...”

“It’s fine up to about five packs. However, if you have the other person eat too much, it has something akin to a charming effect, so I’ve refrained from putting it up for sale.” I couldn’t let my guard down since there might be guys out there who’d abuse it.

“If this will bring me closer to the mistress...” Marco carefully put the Chocodora in his pocket.

“All right, we should hurry back and sleep,” I said.

“Yeah, I’m beat too. I think I’ll take the day off tomorrow.” Meryl was sleepily rubbing her eyes. Meryl and Mira were free to take days off, but Marco, who worked at that mansion, didn’t have that luxury. He probably had to start working early in the morning tomorrow. I once again marveled at how strong the power of love was.

Chichi’s Side

That night, Marco once again brought a good chunk of the money he’d earned to Chichi.

“What happened?! This is so much! Don’t tell me you did something dangerous?” she exclaimed, deliberately putting on a worried expression for him, but internally, she couldn’t stop laughing.

“I earned this at the dungeon last night,” he said. “I also converted the magic crystals to money.” All that money turned out to be 34,000 rims. These were much better earnings than usual. It seemed that the dungeon at night was truly profitable. “Also, help yourself to these.”

(What is this garbage? And there’s a cheap-looking snack too.)

That was how she really felt upon looking at what Marco had brought out. Of course, she didn’t voice it aloud.

“I hope you enjoy them.”

Chichi had only eaten sweets made by first-class artisans before now, so she didn’t find the snacks he’d given her appealing at all. She thought about just

saying she'd eat them later and then throwing them out once he'd left. But she changed her mind. She lived a plain lifestyle under house arrest, and she hadn't had things like sweets in a long time. Also, it was probably good to eat it in front of him in order to curry favor.

"They look delicious. I'm very happy, Marco. Now let's eat them together."

(Hmm. It's not half bad.)

It was actually tasty, but she still complained internally. She didn't think her pride could handle admitting to herself that it tasted good.

"Marco, this is my first time eating such a delicious snack. It's even better than the snacks I had while I lived in luxury at the royal palace. Surely that's because you went through peril to bring this to me." Chichi placed her hand on top of Marco's. Just this gesture alone made Marco feel like all of his hardships had been rewarded.

After Marco left, Chichi listlessly reached for the toys. At first, all of them seemed stupid, but they were actually more fun than she'd thought once she tried them. "Hmm. Guess they're not entirely useless."

One of them caught her eye.

Product name: Groucho Glasses

Description: A three-piece set featuring round glasses, eyebrows, and a mustache, which pair together to create a disguise.

Its magical effect makes you look like a totally different person. Let's ramp up the party fun!

Price: Five hundred rims

Chichi didn't hesitate to put it on. When she checked her reflection in a mirror, her face was exactly like that of a goofy middle-aged man. Once she added a wig, no one would be able to recognize her. She giggled to herself.

“This truly is useful. Aha ha ha!”

Chichi couldn't stop laughing for quite some time.

The Adventurer Meryl's Diary: Entry 6

Every once in a while, Dagashi-ya Yahagi gets an item that disappears immediately after it's rolled out. Some disappear because they don't sell at all but others Mister Yusuke stops selling because the effects are too dangerous. The Wide Sunglasses were one of those that disappeared. Yeah, it did seem like a useless item, but maybe he should've left it out for a little longer? The tasteless likes of Garmr, Grapp, and their comrades might have yelled about how cool they were and snagged them.

But Mister Yusuke immediately stored them away. Did that maybe have something to do with those letters that showed up on the sunglasses? We couldn't read them, but it looked like he could. He somehow seemed anguished at the time... How suspicious.

Something really sad happened today. Someone else won the lottery for that Legendary Spiked Bat that I've had my eye on for so long. I wanted it so badly that I bought at least 130 Chocolate Bats, and I put about 4,000 rims into that thing, and yet some guy shows up and takes it... Does my misfortune know no bounds?

But the strategist Meryl wouldn't let it get to her! I dragged the bat's new owner, Marco, into my group. I'd half jokingly invited him, but Mister Yusuke also asked him, and we decided to go hunting for Big Coconut Crabs together.

Marco has done some military service, so he's at least learned the fundamentals of combat techniques—though his fighting style is exactly like that of a soldier enlisted in the national armed forces, and his movements are way too predictable. You have to apply your skills to real-life situations in the dungeon, so I want him to try a little harder.

But Marco is a good person, just like how he looks. He agreed to divide our rewards equally, and beyond anything else, I like how he doesn't look at Mira and me in a pervy way. That's a huge difference compared to Garmr and his

gang. It seems like Marco has someone he loves, so he's moonlighting as an adventurer for the sake of living together with her. I like the fact that he's doing his best for the woman he's fallen in love with. His skills aren't bad, and his endurance is all right. He's also considerate of his comrades. Maybe it'd be okay if I invited him to be an official member.

Still, isn't everyone way too lucky? Marco got the Legendary Spiked Bat, and Mira continuously wins those snack lotteries left and right. Even Mister Yusuke won an SSSR card from his Monster Chips today. It's crazy that he can summon the Archangel Lunadian! I asked him if I could have it, pretty please with a cherry on top, but he flatly refused. I guess he isn't that easy. That's fine. One day, I'll definitely win something great all by myself!

Apparently, Marco normally works at a mansion, and he's an adventurer only on his days off. We've been going hunting more often, and our coordination has been improving. The Legendary Spiked Bat showed us the full extent of its power, and today, we earned a whopping 42,000 rims hunting Big Coconut Crabs.

Now that Marco and I have gotten closer, he told me something crazy. He said that the person he cares for is the lady of the mansion he works for! That's adultery, isn't it?! I-Is that okay? Their relationship seems pretty pure but...you know... When I pressed him, he confessed that they'd gone as far as kissing. It's just that it sounds like the mistress is in a really sad situation. It seems that's why Marco has to save her. I don't really know about her, but Marco's my friend, so...

Speaking of kisses, I learned one more thing that's crazy! Among Mira, Marco, and me, I'm the only one who hasn't experienced her first kiss! I can't believe it! Marco aside, I didn't know Mira had also experienced one! Just as I was thinking about how I hated feeling like the only one who was still a kid, Garmr and his gang started pestering me. When I bought that Perfume Gum that I really like, Garmr had the nerve to say, "Give me a stick. I'll kiss you as thanks." That pisses me off! As if I'd let someone like Garmr steal my very important first kiss! Even if he asks me, it's a no! Compared to him, Rigal was cute today. He got all shy when I gave him the gum (LOL).

Did he actually want to kiss me? Whoa, what am I going to do if he was for real? Well, if it's just a kiss, then I don't mind...

Chapter 7: Team Harukaze

The weather was growing more reminiscent of spring. The snow covering the streets was starting to melt, forming a number of small streams. I wished it would just keep getting warmer and warmer, but it seemed that this world also had the “three cold, four warm” weather pattern. In early spring, it cycled between warm and cold days.

“As far as I’m concerned, it can just stay cold. It makes you cling to me while you sleep,” Michelle said shyly. It was another morning of Michelle being absolutely adorable. She’d be the absolute best girlfriend ever if she wasn’t so restrictive, but, well—I wouldn’t let it bother me.

Rigal stopped by right after I opened my store. He’d grown a lot tougher over the past half year, and he was now a full-fledged mage. Apparently, he was also making something of a name for himself as a wielder of Fire Magic.

“Some Acorn Candy, please, Mister Yahagi,” he said.

“Sure thing. What flavor would you like?”

“Cola and grape, two of each.” Acorn Candy was a product that had grown popular as of late. Mages in particular were passionate in their approval of its special qualities.

Product name: Acorn Candy

Description: Mana-replenishing gum wrapped up in a candy that raises agility.

Features a lottery. Enjoy three things at once with just one piece!

Price: Ten rims for one piece

This snack raised your agility so you could dodge enemy attacks, and on top of that, it replenished the mana you used. Not only was it popular with mages, but it was also popular with warriors, like Meryl, who were adept at using Body Enhancement Magic.

“Hmm, replenishing your items, I see! You’re certainly raring to go, little Rigal!” declared a loud voice. It belonged to Meryl, who was all puffed up with arrogance.

“What are you acting all high and mighty for?”

“I’m not,” she replied. “It’s a simple matter of fact that I’m amazing, little Yusuke.”

“Did the warm weather rot your brain?” I asked, exasperated.

“Wrooong! I’m the team leader. *That’s* why I’m amazing.”

“What team?”

“Team Harukaze.”

“Say what?” While I struggled to grasp the situation, Rigal explained it for me.

“Actually, as of now, Miss Meryl has recruited me from Mister Garmr’s team to hers.” Apparently, things were getting out of hand on Garmr’s end, with his team growing too big to handle. Hunting was safer that way, but Rigal had been a little troubled since each person’s share of the drops had grown smaller. That was when Meryl had dropped a word in his ear.

“Our team is made up of a select few people,” Meryl proudly chimed in. “We’re different from that group of laid-back lazybones.” She had been working as a pair with Mira, but they’d scouted Rigal so they could head to the deeper floors.

“So you three are gonna team up together from now on, huh?” I mused.

She tsked and wagged her finger. “We’ve got one more powerful helper on our team, little Yusuke.”

Her attitude’s kinda irritating me, but whatever. “Could that other person be...” I trailed off.

A head suddenly appeared from behind the shelves. “That’s right. It’s me.”

“Marco...” I said. It was a weekday morning. Normally, he would be working at the mansion. “By any chance, did you...”

“Yes, I’ve quit my job.”

“What are you going to do about the mistress?” I asked in a quiet voice.

“She herself recommended it, so I decided to become a professional adventurer.” Marco was used to hunting now, and he’d been making some good money from dungeon diving. He could probably save up more that way than as a servant at a mansion.

“But doesn’t that mean you can’t see the mistress anymore?”

“I was also worried about that,” he admitted, “but apparently, the mistress will also escape the mansion in one month’s time or so. She said she’ll then come to my apartment, and we’ll l-li-li...”

“Li...?”

“Live together...” he mumbled. His face was bright red, but he looked happy.

“I see. So you’ve already gotten that far in your planning. But is it all right for her to escape that mansion?”

“I’ll shelter her. We then plan to escape to a foreign country once we save up enough money,” he said, declaring his resolve without reservation. Marco usually seemed so meek, but he had the guts to do anything for the sake of the woman he loved. “Um, since that’s the situation, can I buy some Assembled Gliders?” It looked like Marco wanted to exchange messages with his mistress using the Assembled Gliders. He’d already bought her portion and dropped off a significant number at the mansion.



“By the way, what’s her name?” I asked.

“Oh... It’s Cecelia.”

So, Lady Cecelia, eh? “That’s a nice name.”

“She’s a really wonderful person too. She’s so kind and sweet and beautiful...”
He was really going on about her.

“Well then, you need to continue working hard, huh?” I smiled at him.

“Yes,” he agreed. “I need to make it so I can welcome Ch—I mean, Cecelia, anytime.”

I was worried he might do something reckless out of overzealousness, but he’d probably be fine if Mira and Meryl were with him. “Oh right, this is to celebrate your job change,” I said, handing him a small gift.

“A Chocodora!” he exclaimed. “The mistress said this was delicious.”

“Is that right? Now, it’s too heavy to put two on, but you can attach one to the glider and fly it. You can eat one and then send the other to Cecelia.”
Michelle and I had already experimented with this before. We had attached some Ten-Rim Gum to our gliders and sent them flying.

“Thank you,” he said, accepting the snack. “I’ll send it to her tonight.”

I was happy that Marco was pleased. He’d probably grow even closer to her now.

“All right, Team Harukaze! We’re off!” Meryl shouted. She cheerfully pulled everyone along.

Harukaze... So, spring breeze? It was a kind of laid-back-sounding name, but I felt like it was a perfect fit for them.

Chichi’s Side

Chichi heard something knocking on her window, so she lifted her head. A message from Marco must’ve arrived. Now that he’d quit his job, he sent gliders to her every day. Someone like Chichi should’ve been annoyed by something like that, but to her own surprise, she looked forward to their arrival. Marco

wrote to her about things like the dungeon's happenings, the apartment he'd rented for them, and his daily meals. These messages from the outside world provided some slight stimulation in her monotonous life.

"Oh, what's this?" There was a small package on the glider today. When she opened it, she found it was the small snack she'd had before. "This cheap snack again..." she mumbled, but even so, she tossed the Chocodora into her mouth. Sweets were precious in her current life. Marco would surely send more sweets if she wrote to him that it had been incredibly delicious. She took out her pen, poised to begin writing on the glider's wing.

While she was thinking of what to say, her fingertips unconsciously touched her lips. She suddenly thought of Marco. In order to keep the man wrapped around her finger, she had shared a kiss with him the day before he'd quit his job at the tower. She remembered how that moment had felt.

"What the hell!" Chichi spat under her breath. Did she *miss* him? There was no way.

(I'm only using that man.)

After she'd calmed down somewhat, she once more set her pen to paper. It was fun, pretending to be this woman who was ladylike and kind, yet at the same time passionate. Just thinking that this oh-so-kind woman would one day cruelly discard the man who'd grown as attached to her as a dog stirred up some twisted feelings within her. A pleasant feeling tickled deep within her belly... So why? Why was it that tonight, Chichi felt a little sad? Just a little—so little that she had yet to even realize it.

Yusuke's Side

The snow had melted, and sparse patches of vividly green grass appeared. The season was feeling more and more springlike. Apparently, this was the season when horses gave birth to their young, so I saw a number of foals cavorting near their parents in the grassy fields that lined the road to the dungeon. It was just so cute to watch them clinging to their parents, cantering and leaping around, or seeking their mothers' milk, that I felt I could watch them forever.

“Yusuke, you’re gonna be late opening your store,” Michelle said, rushing me, so we hurried to the store.

Once the busy hours of the morning came to an end, I headed out to make my map again. I was about sixty percent complete with B3. I wanted to finish it by the time the wysteries bloomed.

“Thanks for waiting, everyone,” I said, calling out to Meryl and the others who were waiting in front of my store. Today, I was yet again tagging along with Team Harukaze on their hunt in order to make my map. I would be completely at ease if I was with them.

“All right! Today, we’ve got a big target to aim for in the western region! Here we go!” Meryl declared and cheerfully strode on ahead. I fell in alongside Marco.

“Is it almost time for your mistress to move in?” I asked, checking in to see how things were going.

“Yes,” he replied. “She said she’ll be carrying out her plan at last, two weeks from now.”

“So you’ll finally start your happy-yet-embarrassing life together, huh?” I teased.

“Oh no, if you put it that way, it makes me nervous...” Marco said, smiling shyly before he gave me a look that told me he was at his wit’s end. “Mister Yahagi, this is just between you and me, but...”

“What’s the matter?”

“What can I do to make sure this works out? You and Miss Michelle sort of live together sometimes, right?”

“I mean, I can’t really say...” I hadn’t exactly sat down and thought about it.

“I’m at a loss because I’m not confident that I can make the mistress happy,” he admitted. “The thought that she’d possibly regret her escape after living together with me makes me so terribly anxious—”

“You’re overthinking it,” I said, trying to comfort him, but he still looked

depressed.

“Mister Yahagi, what do you do to make Miss Michelle happy?”

“Huh? I dunno. Anything I do makes Michelle happy, so...” *Thinking about it that way, she is the best girlfriend ever.* “Maybe cooking or cleaning or helping with her research. Oh, and going on special dates every once in a while...”

“W-Wait a second!” Marco hurriedly took out a waterproof notebook and began taking notes. This was also one of my store’s products, an item that my capsule toys featured. “I see. So I have to be the one to cook and clean since the mistress likely hasn’t had any experience...”

“Isn’t it better to just do those tasks together then?”

“I can’t make her do that.”

“Even if she is a lady of a high-ranking and prestigious background, she can’t keep living the way she used to, right?” I reasoned. “I don’t think it’s right of her to place all the burden on you forever.”

“Y-You think?”

“You can just work together in the beginning. I think it’ll also provide good opportunities to spark some conversation.”

“I understand. I’ll think about it. Also, um...” He started fidgeting as if he had something difficult to ask.

“What is it?”

“Uh, Mister Yahagi...how do you initiate the nighttime stuff?”

“What?”

“Well, it’s just, we’re going to be living together, so...” he trailed off.

The thing was, Michelle was the assertive type when it came to things like that, so it was way more common for her to take the initiative. *Michelle probably initiates it sixty-nine percent of the ti— Wait, I’m not gonna tell that to someone else!* “That varies from person to person,” I told him. “Isn’t it probably better to just be straightforward about it so she understands? Saying something vague and expecting the other person to just get it opens the door to

misunderstandings.”

“N-No way,” he stammered. “I doubt that I could say that when it’d feel so discourteous...”

“If you don’t have the courage, then buy the Anzu Sticks we sell.” Eating them gave you courage. Each stick was 30 rims, but he should currently be making enough that he could buy an entire box of them no problem.

“Then please give me your whole stock.”

So, he’s really buying it...

“Also, what’s something you absolutely can’t do?” he asked.

“I dunno? I guess you should respect her and not force her to do anything she doesn’t want to? Also, you’re not allowed to look at other women. She’ll notice right away when you’re looking at them in a pervy way, and something terrible will happen when she finds out.”

“Like?”

“Like blowing away the capital.”

“Isn’t that something only Miss Michelle would do...?”

Oh, right.

“What are you two talking about?” Mira asked, smiling brightly at us. Her soothing vibe was so cute— *Whoa! Nope, nuh-uh*. The peace of the capital lay squarely upon my shoulders.

It was really starting to feel like spring. With the change of season, one new product at Dagashi-ya Yahagi was experiencing a huge boom in popularity. Following up on the success of the Mobile Forces and the Chocolate Bats came this superpopular product.

Product name: Sunprint

Description: A tool that copies people and scenery onto special paper.

Price: One hundred rims

Apparently, antique dagashi-ya had sold these things called sunprints. They were toys from my grandparents' generation, so even I'd never seen the real thing before. It seemed you were supposed to paste this film that depicted characters and the like onto photosensitive paper; then, once it was hit by the sun's rays, the drawing on the film would be transferred to the paper. However, the Sunprint sold at Dagashi-ya Yahagi was totally different. To be frank, it was an item that didn't differ much from a regular photograph.

It was about as big as a caramel box. You held the box between your fingers, and when you extracted the paper that slightly protruded from the right side, it opened a hole on the front of the box, which exposed the special paper inside. Then, whatever scenery was in front of the hole would be transcribed onto the paper. It was like those instant cameras that were sold way back in the day, like a Cheki or something. However, this paper made it so the photograph wouldn't develop unless it was exposed to sunlight. The photograph was about five cm x three cm in size. It was a lot larger than purikura photo booth pictures, but it wouldn't be inconvenient to carry around.

These Sunprints were a big hit. They were popular among the young rookies, and even the middle-and old-aged veterans lined up in front of my store. It had become trendy to carry around pictures of your family or your lover, I'd learned. Also, apparently, taking photos of the monsters you fought in the dungeon was all the rage, and there was even a rise in demand for porters who were good at taking pictures.

Incidentally, Michelle was the Sunprint's number one consumer. She had purchased massive quantities, buying by the box, and snapping pictures of me before I realized it.

"What are you going to do with all those pictures?" I'd asked.

"I'm going to put them up on my wall, so I don't get lonely..."

I'd encountered a horrifying sight the other day when I went to hang out at her place. There'd been one wall that was completely filled with pictures of me. It was exactly like what I'd seen in psycho-horror films in my previous life...

“Thanks to this, I can feel safe even while I’m alone,” she had said to me.

I’m only feeling danger! Well, it’s fine...

Aside from Michelle, Baron Ethel was the next-greatest Sunprint consumer.

“Sir Yahagi, please hear my request. Could you sell me twenty sets a day? I beg of you!” he pleaded with me. According to him, he needed them for military purposes. They used them to record what was going on at the border zone and to discuss strategies. What made Baron Ethel admirable was how he bowed his head and made requests instead of using his status to force others to comply with his demands. I was also indebted to him, so I readily consented to selling him my Sunprints.

“Still, it’s incredible you use up twenty in one day,” I commented.

“That’s because His Majesty...”

I was baffled to hear that it was because King Bartos was using up at least half of them. From what I was told, he was completely obsessed with snapping photos of his beloved concubines. *That damn perverted king...* Just what kind of pictures was he taking?

By the way, I wasn’t the only one making a pretty penny off of the Sunprints. The blacksmith Mister Sanaga was also very busy making a related product to sell. When my product had first started making the rounds, I’d given Mister Sanaga some advice: “Make a selfie stick.” He’d made a killing producing Mobile Forces weapons, so he’d taken my advice without question. Then, he had succeeded in developing a stick with an easily accessible lever that would open the box in order to expose the paper. I’d received a prototype model, and it was really well-made. *I got to take several lovey-dovey photographs of Michelle and me... I guess I have no right to criticize the king.* In this fashion, Dagashi-ya Yahagi was thriving again today.

“Mister Yusuke!!!”

That was Mira’s voice. What was all the commotion out there? I stopped my cleaning and headed to the storefront to find Team Harukaze all assembled.

“What’s up, Mira?” I asked.

“I was thinking about using the glider to send a picture home,” she said.
“Please take this opportunity to join in.”

Her parents would surely be happy to see their daughter doing well. Even though I felt shy about it, I joined in. Mister Sanaga was the one who took the picture.

“All right! Smile wider, fellas! I’m taking it!” he declared. Plap! This world’s version of the shutter sound was the sound of peeling paper. My store’s products were connecting everyone’s hearts together. That thought stirred a feeling in my own heart that was as warm as spring.

Marco called out to me once we finished taking the photograph. “Um, do you still have any Sunprints left?”

“I’ve run out for the day. Sorry.”

“I see...”

“What’s wrong?” I asked. “You seem down.” *Does he really want a Sunprint that badly?*

“To tell you the truth, the mistress is finally carrying out the plan tonight,” he admitted.

“At long last,” I said. We continued our conversation in lower voices. It sounded like tonight, Marco’s mistress would be escaping the mansion.

“I wanted to take a picture to commemorate the start of our new life together.”

“Then I’ll sell you one I bought for myself,” I told him. “Michelle asked me to get it, but I’m sure she’ll understand if I explain.”

“Are you sure? Thank you very much!” he exclaimed.

“In exchange, show me a picture of Lady Cecelia next time. She’s the most precious person in the world to you, so I want to see what she looks like.”

“Well...if I have the chance to someday, maybe...”

Oh, it looks like Marco doesn’t want to show me. He apparently wasn’t the

type to show off, even if his lover *was* a wonderful person. Lady Cecelia was also running away from her husband's place to take refuge with Marco. He was probably being cautious in a number of ways.

Those were my thoughts at the time. I couldn't have imagined that before long, this Sunprint would be used for the most heinous of deeds.

Chichi's Side

As the hour approached the dead of night, and Rondas Tower fell silent, Chichi abruptly rose from her bed. She headed for the bathroom unshod so that she wouldn't make a sound. This also let her stand on the toilet seat to reach for the box of tools for her escape, which was hidden above the ceiling tiles. Marco had taken great pains to make this hiding space for her, and had even purchased and brought these tools for her escape.

She took sleep-inducing incense out of the box and lit it near the bedroom door. A sweet-smelling smoke immediately filled the room and started leaking out into the hall through the keyhole and the crevices around the door. After observing this for a moment, Chichi returned to the bathroom.

She took off her clothes right there and pushed them above the ceiling where the box had been. She even tossed aside her bra without caring in the slightest, exposing her beautiful skin. Then, she took a deep breath and began wrapping up her chest in bleached cotton. She was going to disguise herself as a man, so her big breasts would only get in the way. They'd charmed many men in the past, but their size was currently nothing more than a source of worry.

After she'd finished painstakingly wrapping her chest, she looked over the results. Her flattened breasts were still large swells under the cotton, but they likely wouldn't stand out if she wore a thick jacket. She was about to switch out her panties for men's underwear when she abruptly stopped her hand. What she was wearing right now were high-quality black silk panties decorated with lace. Even though she'd been forced into living a modest lifestyle, the dress and underwear that she'd been wearing hadn't been confiscated...

She changed her mind. There was no need to perfect her male disguise so thoroughly that she even changed her undergarments, right? Also, if Marco

perhaps made some moves on her tonight...

Chichi grew upset when she realized what her thoughts had jumped to. "How stupid!" she cried. She didn't like how she was fussing over Marco.

(This is so I can please him? Or so I won't be embarrassed? And the fact that I'm even assuming I'll sleep with him in the first place is the worst!)

Chichi cursed to herself. Even so, she remained in her panties and donned the pants of a commoner man. Chichi was happy that she currently didn't have time to dwell on such nonsense.

She put on her wig and equipped the Groucho Glasses as a finishing touch. These were the Groucho Glasses that Marco had bought at Dagashi-ya Yahagi; it was a three-piece disguise set assembled from round glasses, eyebrows, and a mustache. They were primarily meant to be silly party goods, but to Chichi right now, they were like a spider's thread tossed down to her as a lifeline out of hell.

When she completed her disguise and checked herself in the mirror, she was shocked to see a totally different person. Surely no one on the street would recognize her, even if she was walking around town. They probably wouldn't even suspect her of being a woman.

She held her breath, left the bathroom, and opened the bedroom window to air out the sleep perfume smoke. Then she slightly opened the door to her room. It appeared the fumes had traveled into the hallway well, judging by how the two sentries were lying on the floor.

Stepping over them, Chichi left the room. She hurried down the hall, keeping her eyes straight ahead. Midway, she passed by her husband, the former king's, bedroom, but not a single thought of him crossed her mind. He might as well not even exist anymore, as far as she was concerned. She'd already left him completely in the past.

In the darkness, Chichi made her way toward the courtyard. Both the front and back entrances were not only locked but also guarded by a heavy security detail. It would be impossible to break through even with her disguise. That was why, according to what they had arranged beforehand, she hurried to a location that faced the wall of the courtyard.

She didn't have so much as a candle on her, so was forced to proceed in extreme darkness. She took each step with great caution. Even so, she stuck close to the wall, walking slowly until she finally found what she had been aiming for: a rope, dangling down from outside the wall. Of course, this had been thrown over the wall by none other than Marco. There were evenly spaced knots along it to make it easier to grab. Relief filled Chichi. To tell the truth, she hadn't had the utmost confidence that Marco would come through in the end. She had charmed Marco using her special perfume, the Binding Rose. However, its effects wouldn't last forever. She'd been worried that it was about time for the brainwashing effect to wear off, but it seemed she'd had nothing to fear.

(Hee hee. So he'll brave such dangers to save little ol' me. Marco's so cute...)

Frankly, one could say that the Binding Rose's effect *had* almost completely worn off. So why had Marco come to help Chichi? That was because of Yusuke Yahagi. Yahagi had given the two of them the Chocodora so they could grow closer, but that very dagashi was what had repaired their connection which had otherwise been destined to collapse—and that wasn't all. It had also pushed them toward taking that last half step that they otherwise wouldn't have. Under normal circumstances, Marco didn't have the courage to make advances on Chichi. After rescuing her, someone with his personality would've quietly let her be. Conversely, Chichi would've paid no mind to his existence. A servant of the tower was nothing more than a convenient pawn to her. Once she was done using him, she would've found him no more notable than a rock on the side of the road. However, just one dagashi had made it so that Chichi had grown interested in this man named Marco. And as they'd worked together planning the escape, a sure bond had sprouted between them. It might not be wrong to say that this could, perhaps, be love.

Chichi tugged the rope two times to signal Marco. When she did, he returned her signal. Just as he'd promised, he was on the other side of the wall. Freedom was right within reach. She fiercely gripped the rope, put her legs against the wall, and began to ascend.

After she reached the ground, she immediately took off the Groucho Glasses

and threw her arms around Marco. “Aah, Marco!”

“Mistress Chichi...”

Chichi was rationalizing this action to herself. This wasn’t a hug imbued with any amorous sentiments, but simply a sign of gratitude for saving her. She was just giving her obedient little pet a reward. That was all.

We’re in a hurry, so we can probably skip a kiss, Chichi calmly thought to herself in the recesses of her mind as she moistened her eyes with tears. However, she was surprised when she gazed up at Marco as part of her act. It’d been a long time since she’d last looked at him, and in that time it seemed he’d become a little more muscular. His face looked much wilder than before too. When she touched his upper arm, she unexpectedly discovered some hard muscle. She felt a small twinge deep within her belly.

“What’s wrong?”

“It’s nothing.”

It was only natural that he’d gain a more rugged physique since he was exploring the dungeon day and night fighting monsters. He was also fighting with more devotion than most ordinary people. Everything was for the sake of enriching his new life with Chichi.

Her anxiety over possible pursuers, her expectation of a new life, the joy of freedom—somehow, these things weren’t the only reasons for her throbbing heart.

Chichi was the kind of person who never let her mind get hung up on things she didn’t understand. She quit thinking and focused on moving her hands and feet.

“Let’s hurry.”

“This way.”

They headed out into the darkness, their two shadows seeming to mingle together.

The Adventurer Meryl's Diary: Entry 7

Hee hee hee... Aha ha ha!!! We've finally formed a new team. It's called Team Harukaze, which means spring breeze. There're four members: Mira, Rigal, Marco, and me. Just like our name, we'll breathe some new life into this stuffy dungeon. Then, we'll rise up as the top team whose name is known to all... Oh, my dreams only get bigger.

The leader is, of course, none other than myself, Meryl, the one who prides herself on her wisdom and endurance. This is a serious responsibility, but I intend to make "Don't get hurt" our motto. You can't work if you get hurt. We'll make money by prioritizing safety first.

I poached Rigal from Garmr's team. It's just too big. I recognize Garmr's physical strength, but he's stupid. Bigger teams aren't always better. Sure, you feel safer when you have more people, but you have to consider that you won't be able to move as freely anymore. When you're doing things in a big group, it'll even limit where you can hunt.

After discussing things with Rigal, who'd come to confide in me about how his share of the spoils was shrinking, I decided to scout him. I also worked it out with Garmr. Apparently, it was good timing since Garmr had also been at a loss as to what to do. I want Rigal to work hard as a mage on Team Harukaze from now on.

Marco accepted our new team since he said he wanted to quit his job and put his full, undivided attention toward being an adventurer. It seems he'll earn much more money this way than if he stayed a servant at the mansion. He said he had to work hard to save up for their escape funds.

We took a Sunprint photo to commemorate the official formation of our team. Of course, we had Mister Yusuke join in. It's thanks to Dagashi-ya Yahagi that we were all connected, so it was a no-brainer.

I wonder if someday, when I'm way old, I'll look back on this photograph and feel nostalgic? I will survive tomorrow so that that future can happen. I have to

believe in that every day with all my heart. I'm the leader, after all.

Marco was totally restless during our hunt today. He was so giddy about something that it was like he was only half there. When I gave him the necessary warning, he announced that the day his mistress would escape is near. So, the time has finally arrived! They're gonna live together once she's escaped, right? I've seen Marco's apartment before, and it's pretty small. He's only got one single-size bed.

So he's gonna be living with an older lady in that place, huh? Even I started feeling excited at the thought and lost my concentration. Rigal's and Mira's faces were red too, so at noon, we returned to Hot Spring Yahagi and took a break.

We had some yakisoba all together for the first time in a while. My Powdered Drink Mix Yakisoba was a failure, but when I made yakisoba by throwing Baby Moon Ramen in, it gave me the ability to dish out continuous triple-slash attacks! That was a surprising discovery. That is why I can't quit my yakisoba experiments.

Mister Yusuke said combos that pair carbohydrates with other carbohydrates are supreme, but what are carbohydrates? It's probably a word from a foreign country I don't know about.

After lunch, we played with those Kendama toys that apparently help you concentrate, and then we resumed our hunt.

Chapter 8: Chichi's Conspiracy

Spring was in full swing in the capital. Flowers bloomed in abundance all over the place, and the world was dyed in pastel colors. It felt like the adventurers who plunged into the dungeon wore less tense expressions now. The wysterie-viewing season would soon be upon us.

My first date with Michelle had been to see the wysteries blooming on Mount Garges. *So it's already been a year since then? They say time flies, but just how quickly it goes by scares me.* Of course, we were going to have a date there again this year. We were gonna take our lunch boxes, which held fond memories for us, stuff them with delicious food, and head over there.

I got a new product today that was perfect for flower viewing, so I was really hyping it up in my sales pitches.

Product name: Flower Castella Stick

Description: Castella pieces decorated with a flower design and skewered on a stick.

Makes you slightly happier upon consumption.

The skewer becomes a weapon that can deal ten guaranteed damage. When thrown, it increases your accuracy by seventy-five percent.

Price: Thirty rims per skewer

This was also a snack I'd eaten in my previous life. The bite-size castella pieces were coated in sugar, so it was incredibly sweet. In my opinion, it tasted delicious when paired with tea or coffee. If I remembered correctly, it was a dagashi that had originated in Nagoya.

"Come one, come all," I shouted. "It's our latest product, Flower Castella Stick. Whether for tea or for flower viewing or for battle, this Flower Castella

Stick can suit all your needs. Bringing happiness upon consumption, or certain death to your enemies with a throw, it's a dangerously sweet snack!"

It was a kind of peculiar sales pitch if I did say so myself, but I was already used to this world's ways. Not only was I used to things, I was *happy*. That was because I had people like Michelle and my like-minded friends.

Then, one more extremely happy-looking man stopped by my store: Marco. The other members of Team Harukaze were also here to view my goods, as per usual.

"Good morning!" Marco said with an especially bright face.

"Good morning," I greeted him back. "Judging by your expression..."

"Yes. The mistress safely escaped yesterday."

So, the mistress had broken out of the mansion and moved into his apartment. That meant his long-awaited dream of living together would finally begin. "Congratulations. Would you like to buy some Flower Castella Sticks to celebrate? They make you a little happier upon consumption."

"No, even without eating one, I'm so happy that I could die."

Whoa, he's really bragging about it!

"In-Instead, please give me an Anzu Stick," he said.

"Didn't you buy every box last time?"

"I've already eaten them up..."

"But she only just arrived at your place yesterday, right?"

"I ate them while I was practicing sweet-talking Ch—I mean, the mistress."

That was very like Marco, but he shouldn't be using them all up on mere practice runs. I collected a box of Anzu Sticks from the tatami room in the back. "Is one box enough?" I asked.

"I received a kiss from her this morning when I was leaving the house, so probably..." he trailed off. "Mister Yahagi."

"What's up?"

“It’s so wonderful to come home to someone!” he exclaimed, his eyes sparkling.

I guess he doesn’t need this Flower Castella Stick then. But was he going to be all right going out like this? He might die if he went prancing into the dungeon the way he was now. I was worried, so I whispered to Meryl, who was already holding the brand-new Flower Castella Sticks in both hands. “Marco seems extremely giddy today, so please give him some support, okay?”

“I know,” she replied. “Today, we’re hunting somewhere that’s on the easier side. He’ll probably calm down if we give him two or three days, right? Then he’ll be back to business as usual.”

After all was said and done, she’d grown into a reliable leader. *That makes sense. It’s been a year since—*

“Gah! I lost at the Ten-Rim Chocolate Coin lottery again!” she cried. “What the hell’s with this?!”

Yeah, you just stay the way you are.

Everything seemed to be going great. Michelle was away in the dungeon depths, but we’d be going flower viewing together once she came back. Marco was also starting his new life with his lover. Team Harukaze, including Rigal, Mira, and Meryl, were beginning to level up as mid-rank adventurers. However, I did receive a slightly concerning bit of news that afternoon. It was that the former queen, Chichi, had escaped her imprisonment at Rondas Tower. A manhunt was currently underway but they had yet to find her.

Apparently, there was even a bounty on Chichi’s head. *Oh right, Michelle also had a 100,000,000-rim bounty on her head back when she was the accursed witch.* Considering they’d both had bounties put on their heads, in one sense, maybe the sisters *were* similar? Incidentally, the bounty on Chichi’s head was 1,000,000 rims, so Michelle’s bounty had been higher. However, in Chichi’s case, it was said that they wanted her dead or alive.

Chichi had lived a boundless life of luxury, committing the crime of draining the government’s national finances, so I felt that her imprisonment had been an

unavoidable consequence. But I did feel a little sorry that it meant she might be killed. She *was* Michelle's little sister. *So what's going to happen now?*

At that time, I was casually observing, like a bystander, but I'd get tangled up in this incident before long. I had no idea Chichi harbored a grudge against me. All I had said back then was "Shut up, ugly." It was a classic case of your own words leading you into disaster.

Chichi's Side

It'd been four days since Chichi had escaped to Marco's apartment. Search parties were sniffing all around town, so Chichi hadn't stepped a single foot outside. But things were comfortable considering the circumstances. Marco did all the cleaning, the cooking, and the laundry, so there was no need for Chichi to even lift a finger. If anything, all she had to do was pretend she couldn't do it while showing remorse and appreciation on her face. "I'm sorry, Marco. I'm truly hopeless. I haven't cooked or done laundry before."

"It's okay, Mistress Chichi. I'll do it myself!"

"I'll learn it all little by little...for your sake."

"Mistress Chichi..."

And so, there was no longer any need for her to do the household chores. She felt that things could stay like this for the time being, since she intended to leave anyway once the world outside had calmed down. However, it was boring to be by herself in this small apartment. Marco had thoughtfully bought her some toys from the dagashi-ya, but they couldn't keep her entertained forever.

To stave off her boredom, she slightly smoothed out the sheets on the bed. Their disheveled state was the remaining evidence of the deed they'd done last night. As she idly stretched out the sheets, she reflected on yesterday's events.

Marco, smelling of apricots, had made his advances, whispering some sweet, amorous words to her. She had accepted him. She probably could've refused him. If she'd declined, he probably would've backed off without protest. Moreover, there was no way he'd then betray her because she had refused. He was the kind of man who could heap mounds of love onto her without asking

for any reward—Chichi could see right through him. However, for reasons she just couldn't understand, Chichi had accepted Marco.

(I don't know why, but I got all hot and bothered...)

After seeing Marco try so hard for her, she'd honestly started wanting to do it with him too. Maybe that was also a form of love, but Chichi herself had yet to realize it. Additionally—and this came as a big surprise—doing the deed with Marco had brought her a pleasure she'd never experienced before. For better or for worse, the chemistry between their bodies was a perfect match. Reminded of how she had lost herself in the throes of passion, she mushed her face into the pillow. “It's Marco of all people, and yet...”

Chichi didn't move a muscle for a while, but gradually, she rose from the bed and headed to the kitchen. She definitely hadn't gone there to cook, but she would at least prepare some tea for him to drink once he returned.

Yusuke's Side

I'd woken up early this morning, so I arrived at the dungeon earlier than usual. I encountered Mira by the entrance.

“Good morning, Mister Yusuke,” she greeted me. “Miss Michelle isn't with you?” It'd been one year since we'd met, and I felt like Mira's face had matured some.

“Good morning,” I replied. “She's still in the dungeon depths. I think she'll be back in about three days.”

We headed for the B2 hot spring as we chatted. Once upon a time, even being near the entrance had frightened me, but by now I'd grown fully accustomed to the dungeon. Of course, I wouldn't forget to ready my monster cards and Eight-Round Pistols. I was completely prepared to take on any enemies at any time.

I opened my store right after we arrived at Hot Spring Yahagi. “You're gonna stop by too, right, Mira? Come in. I'll at least treat you to some tea.” There was no need to do any morning cleaning since my shop automatically became clean each time I closed it. When I boiled some water and checked the shelves, I saw

that I'd received another new product.

Product name: Basco

Description: Bite-size biscuits with cream in between. Strengthens your body upon consumption, and enhances your defense fivefold. Effective for ten minutes.

Price: Thirty rims

This really took me back. It was a snack I'd often eaten back in my previous life. From what I remembered, it was an extremely longtime seller with over ninety years of history. Apparently, since it was a biscuit that used yeast, it had been a pretty revolutionary product when it first hit the shelves. There should've been versions with strawberry or matcha-flavored cream, but the ones in this world seemed to only be the plain variety.

"Here, this is a new product," I said, taking one down from the shelf. "Let's try it out together." Each package of Basco had two inside, so I split it with Mira. It was just right for a tea snack.

"It's lightly crispy and delicious," she noted.

"It enhances your defense too," I told her, "so it'll probably become a hot seller. Let's see—I think I'll do a bit of an experiment. Mira, slap my cheek." I wanted to test how high my defense had risen. However, surprised, she shook her head.

"I can't do such a thing."

"It's fine. Don't worry! This is an experiment."

"Then, I'll ask you this—instead, could you slap *my* cheek, Mister Yusuke?"

"What...?" Slapping Mira's adorable cheek? There was no way I could do that even if she had eaten the Basco. "Yeah, I think a slap is too high of a hurdle," I relented. "Then let's do a finger slap instead."

"A finger slap?"

"Yeah, you slap the wrist with two fingers." It was that thing you often did as

a forfeit after losing a game. This would probably keep any feelings of guilt at a minimum.

“But...”

“This is an experiment,” I pleaded. “I’m begging you, hit me with all you got!” *To an outsider, I probably look like a super masochist...* “It’s not like I *like* being hit. But I have to, for the sake of the advancement of dagashi.”

“I understand. If you’re that determined, then...” Mira brandished her index and middle fingers. Then, she slapped them down on my wrist with vigorous force.

Smack! A sharp, satisfying sound reverberated through the store. While Mira was a graceful young maiden, she was also an adventurer who explored the dungeon—and she had the physical strength to prove it. By rights, I should’ve been dealt a pain that shot right down into my bones. “How is it? Does it hurt?” Mira asked me, concerned. I met her with a grin.

“Not at all! This may be an incredible product. Look! There isn’t even a bruise.”

“Really? Do it to me too then, please!”

“Huh? You too?” I blinked at her. *That’s kinda...*

“I want to test it too. Please also hit me with all you’ve got!”

Don’t look at me with those upturned eyes... It’ll stir some sadistic feelings in me... “G-Got it. This is only an experiment, after all.”

“Okay. Then, please.”

Smack! I really put a lot of strength into it, but she looked totally unbothered. My fingers should’ve hurt from hitting her with how much force I’d put in, but I was also right as rain.

“It’s amazing! I feel no pain at all. With this, you might be immune to injuries even if you’re struck by a blade,” she exclaimed, looking at me with a gaze that set off alarm bells in my head.

“W-Wait. I don’t have the courage to go *that* far with experimenting.” *Yeah, I just can’t be onboard with trying a knife.*

“Aww. It’ll just be a light stab.” Mira smiled as she drew her knife. “Don’t worry. It won’t hurt.”

“W-Well, no, that’s...”

“This is also for the sake of the advancement of dagashi.” With an underhanded grip, Mira raised the knife to about level with her face and—

Resigned to my fate, I clenched my teeth.

“There!” With a cute cry, she brought down the knife—but she’d aimed the tip at the back of her own hand.

“Whoa! A-Are you okay, Mira?” I stammered.

“Ha ha ha! I wouldn’t stab you, Mister Yusuke,” she laughed. “Anyway, this is amazing. I didn’t put much force into it, but the knife rebounded off my skin. My defense really has increased.”

“Jeez, you gave me a scare,” I sighed. “But this looks like it’ll be useful to adventurers.”

“Yes, I think everyone will buy it. I’d like three myself.”

“Thanks as always!” As a show of gratitude for humoring my experiments, I gave her a special deal of four Bascos for the price of three.

Chichi’s Side

Chichi happily welcomed Marco home when he came back from work that day. She’d been bored.

“Here, this is what I earned today, and some souvenirs.” Marco gave Chichi all the money and magic crystals from the monsters he’d defeated. It was because he’d sincerely believed in her when she’d said that she’d manage the funds for their future together. Her doing so allowed him to indulge in the illusion that they were a married couple. From Chichi’s point of view, all she wanted was cash on hand so she could escape anytime. She’d already taken more than 400,000 rims from Marco. It wouldn’t be easy, but it was probably enough for one person to flee the country.

Chichi quickly counted up the money and was satisfied with the amount. He'd earned 24,000 riyos today. For a mid-rank adventurer, you had to be on the higher end of the spectrum to earn this much. "Good work today. I'll wipe your body down, so take off your shirt." Marco's house didn't have a bathtub. Chichi would win Marco's favor by performing some easy, low-effort services for him like this. However, she wouldn't do a single bit of the household chores like cooking and laundry. That was where her stinginess shone through.

Marco took off his shirt, expressing sheepish thanks, and urged Chichi to open the bag he'd brought back for her.

"What did you buy for me today?" Chichi schooled her countenance to show great happiness and opened the bag.

"It's a biscuit called a Basco. It supernaturally boosts your defense when you eat it. If a pursuer spots you, eat that, and I'll do the fighting."

Chichi lowered her face to his now-bare back and planted a kiss. "Thank you, Marco."

"I'd do anything for you, Mistress Chichi."

Chichi's heart throbbed just a little bit, hearing his determination. Ever since they'd slept together, it was gradually becoming more difficult to detach herself from him. She was mentally prepared to abandon Marco when the time came, but she couldn't laugh at the thought of Marco's future despair anymore. She would've totally been able to before, though...

(Might even shed a tear...) Chichi even harbored these kinds of feelings now, although she still looked on it as someone else's tragedy entirely.

"Hey, did you buy this snack at the usual dagashi-ya?" she asked. She didn't like these melancholic feelings, so she changed the subject.

"That's right. This was also a snack I bought at Mister Yahagi's place."

"That store truly has a lot of mysterious snacks."

"It's not just his snacks that are mysterious," he told her. "The shopkeeper Mister Yahagi himself is an otherworldly man..."

"You're talking about Mister Yahagi again? I feel somewhat jealous."

“Ha ha ha, don’t be silly. Mister Yahagi has a proper girlfriend. She happens to be *that* Miss Michelle as well.”

Stunned, Chichi suddenly drew away from Marco. “By Michelle, you mean the witch Michelle?”

“That’s right.” He blinked. “Huh? Did I not tell you?”

“No, you didn’t. This is my first time hearing it.” Not many people were aware that the witch Michelle and the former queen Chichi were sisters. It would have been bad for Chichi’s reputation if word had gotten around that Michelle, a criminal with a bounty on her head, was the queen’s sister. That was why even Marco didn’t know that Chichi was Michelle’s younger sister.

(So Yahagi is that man—the man who called me ugly...)

“My interest in that dagashi-ya has grown a bit,” she said.

“But, Mistress Chichi, you can’t go see him.”

“I understand. Don’t worry. I’ll behave myself and remain here.” Chichi’s fingers undid the button on Marco’s pants. At the mercy of Chichi’s bewitching hand and its movements, Marco’s mind went totally blank.

(Perfect timing! Just as I was getting bored... I suppose I’ll go searching for that dagashi-ya tomorrow...)

As Chichi wiped Marco’s back with the water-soaked towel, she quietly smiled to herself.

Yusuke’s Side

Chattering noisily, Team Harukaze stopped by my shop.

“Oh! You got some new items!”

“As expected, Meryl. You noticed that, huh?”

“What is this? There’s a picture of a boy holding a sword on it.”

“That boy is Momotaro. He’s the most famous hero from my homeland.”

Product name: Kibi Dango

Description: A rod-shaped mochi snack.

You can tame monsters if you feed this to them.

(Depends on the user's status in relation to the monster's.)

Price: Sixty rims

Having read the description, Meryl jumped up and down with joy. "So that means if I feed this to a monster, I can make it my pet?!"

"Well, yeah, but there seem to be various limitations. In order to tame something, you have to fill the snack with your mana and have the monster eat out of the palm of your hand. Also, you can't tame monsters unless they're significantly weaker than you."

"So, something like a Kobold?"

"No, your total combat power is around 150, so maybe like a Slime... Perhaps Dungeon Mice or Chime Blossom Bugs, depending on the circumstances..."

"I have zero interest in mice or bugs!" she cried. Although they wouldn't attack humans, Dungeon Mice and Chime Blossom Bugs were, in fact, monsters. Apparently, they dropped something once every twenty enemies that were defeated. You wouldn't really wanna bother taming them to be your pet, though. "I got my hopes up for nothing."

I cut off a small piece of the Kibi Dango and handed it to Meryl, who was pouting with puffed-out cheeks.

"What? Are you trying to tame me?"

"Hell no!" I exclaimed. "Just try it. It's really good." I'd loved Kibi Dango since my previous life. I didn't want her to hate them just because their taming effect was weak.

"Jeez. This stupid thing..." she grumbled, putting it in her mouth and chewing on it. She perked up. "It's delicious!"

“Right?”

“One more, Mister Yusuke!” she exclaimed, opening her mouth. She looked exactly like a little chick, with her mouth open wide waiting for food. Or rather, a monster that had been tamed... I easily had her eating out of the palm of my hand. *Meryl, are you lower than a Slime?*

“Yep, I like it,” she confirmed after I’d put another piece in her mouth.

“Gimme six of them!”

“Thanks as always!”

Meryl was happily putting away the Kibi Dango before her hand abruptly stopped. “By the way, Mister Yusuke.”

“What’s the matter?”

“Why do you know my total combat power?”

“Oh, uh...” I knew it thanks to the Wide Sunglasses that I’d previously refused to sell, but I’d kept their function a secret. Their effects were way too crazy, like giving you the ability to find out people’s bust-waist-hip measurements. “I’ve been watching over you rookies all this time and seen how you’ve grown. I can just kinda tell.”

“Hmm...” More customers filled the store just then, so Meryl didn’t press me with further questions, which was a relief.

“Three yakisobas, Mister Yahagi.”

“Ring me up, pleeease!”

“Please let me exchange some money!”

I worked feverishly to manage my store, which had suddenly grown lively. I could’ve had Michelle’s help if she’d been here, but she was still in the dungeon depths and didn’t plan to be back until tomorrow.

(I miss her.)

The Sunprint of Michelle pasted on the wall smiled shyly at me. Just by looking at it, I somehow felt motivation welling up inside me.

Once it reached the point where my store had calmed down later that morning, I made some tea in the living room. There had been more customers than usual today, so I was exhausted. I'd noticed some ordinary citizens here and there mixed in with the adventurers. It was warmer, and people were hosting casual Mobile Forces tournaments in places like the town square. That was probably why I had sold eighteen boxes of Mobile Forces this morning. It was about time I held another tournament and invited my new customers to join in. It might be a good idea to call it the Wysteries Cup and carry it out alongside the flower viewing.

I thought about where my business would go from here as I drank my tea. I'd started to become a bit hungry. *Oh right, I have some Kibi Dango left over from the samples I gave Meryl.*

"Excuse me."

Just as I was about to eat my first Kibi Dango in a while, I received another customer. Their voice sounded like a rather elegant woman's. "All right, I'll be right there." I rewrapped my Kibi Dango and shoved it into my pocket. Slurping a single sip of my tea, I returned to the store.

There stood a middle-aged man with a short mustache. *Huh? That's weird. I thought it was a woman's voice I heard...* I looked around inside the shop, but I saw that no other customer was with him.

"Hello," the man with his round glasses greeted me, which surprised me yet again. It seemed I had been correct to conclude that the voice belonged to him.

"Oh, are you...?"

"That's right. I'm using the disguise set that this store sells," the old man laughed with a strange, high-pitched voice. *Yeah, this is super bizarre.*

"Man, that surprised me. It's one of my own products, but its effect is pretty impressive." These were mere party goods, but I was getting worried that people could be misusing them.

"Thank you for always taking care of Marco." He handed me a box of cakes and elegantly bowed. *Huh? He said Marco... Then could this person be...?!*

"Wait. Are you Lady Cecelia?"

The mistress put a finger to her lips and surveyed the room. This woman had run away from her mansion. She was probably taking precautions on the off chance that her identity would be discovered. After dropping my voice low, I continued. "I apologize. Marco just headed deeper into the dungeon."

"I am aware. I didn't come here to follow after Marco today. I came to see you, Mister Yahagi."

"Me?"

"Yes. To tell you the truth, I have something I wish to earnestly speak with you about." The eyes sparkling from behind those round glasses were serious. It seemed she had something important to discuss with me for some reason.

"Well now, shall we talk in the tatami room in the back?" I asked.

I then let her inside the back room.

I made her some tea and decided I'd hear her out. "So, what did you want to discuss with me?"

"No, no, it's nothing too complicated," she assured me. Although she was disguised with round glasses and a mustache, her voice was that of a woman. The tatami room was small, so I faintly smelled her perfume as well. It wasn't like I'd done anything wrong, but when I thought about how I was alone with a married woman, I started to feel uneasy. "I actually heard you were distributing maps for free to the adventurers."

"Oh, so this is about the dungeon maps?"

"That's right. I wanted to see if I could also receive a map of B1."

If so, then this would be quick. Right away, I took a map from the shelf and handed it to Lady Cecelia. "Please take it with you. But why do you need a map?" *Surely she doesn't mean to become an adventurer on the side?*

"Well..." She hesitated. "Could you keep this a secret from Marco?" With that stipulation, she told me her situation. "Not much is known about it, but apparently, a plant called Elshida Moss grows in the B1 Back Regions. I would like to have it."

“I’ve never heard of such a thing,” I commented. “Is it an ingredient for some medicine?”

“Precisely. It can be used as an ingredient in enhancement elixirs. I’m worried for Marco since he always overworks himself. I wanted to be more helpful to him...” So, she wanted to make that enhancement elixir for him and have him drink it. That was admirable.

“He’d be happy to hear that,” I said.

“Oh, please don’t speak of this to Marco yet. I want to surprise him.”

I see, I see. So it’s a surprise present. “I understand. But will you be okay alone? The dungeon is a dangerous place.” She’d made it to Hot Spring Yahagi on B2, so she probably had some knowledge. But could she explore the dungeon alone? She was the former lady of an elite family.

“I have no real combat experience,” Lady Cecelia admitted, “but I can use just one form of combat magic. I think I’ll manage somehow if it’s only B1.” She looked worried, but she probably wanted to do her best for Marco. Yet, it was still concerning. It seemed she hadn’t encountered any monsters on her way here, but it would be a different story if she was going to be exploring for a while. Even if she could use some combat magic, it’d be hard to fight once she ran out of mana.

“Would you like me to tag along?”

“You?”

“I’m very familiar with B1 since I mapped it out,” I told her with confidence.

“But you have work to do, don’t you? I can’t trouble you so.”

“Oh no, I’m only busy in the mornings and evenings. It’ll be no problem if we head out now and return by evening.”

Lady Cecelia smiled. “Thank you very much. Truthfully, I *was* anxious about going alone.”

“Well then, let’s get going.”

“Oh, before that, there’s just one thing.”

“What’s that?”

“You can buy Sunprints here, correct? I’d like to purchase some.”

Sunprints were currently my most popular item. However, I happened to have three in stock today. “Oh yeah, Marco came by to purchase one the other day.”

“Indeed. We took a commemorative photo together. I was surprised how close to the real thing it was, compared to a miniature drawn by a skilled artist. However, it gave me a good idea...” she trailed off, letting a suspicious smile slip. Would they take pictures together and each carry one? Apparently Michelle always walked around with about one hundred photos of me. They were like card collectibles. I’d told her to stop since it was embarrassing, but she hadn’t listened. She’d assured me she wouldn’t let anyone see them and continued carrying them on her at all times.

Without thinking much of it, I sold Lady Cecelia all three Sunprints I had in stock.

Chichi’s Side

Making sure it couldn’t be seen, Chichi let a twisted smile slip when he offered to tag along with her. She’d clocked this man as someone who’d lend her a hand so long as she played the part of a weak woman in need, and her predictions had precisely hit the mark.

(What an easy man. Well, not that I mind it.)

“What is it, Lady Cecelia? You’re smiling a lot.”

“I mean, Marco has such a wonderful friend. It made me happy too. I hope you continue to take care of him.”

Yusuke Yahagi looked bashful, as if embarrassed by the praise. Of course, there was no way he could know her true feelings. She’d already made the preparations. She had headed for B1 early in the morning and carried several things into a small room people rarely entered. Although not as brilliant as Michelle, Chichi was also a first-class mage. She was fine going to B1 alone.

(Hee hee hee. Michelle, before I leave this country, I’ll cast you into the pits of

despair. Accept this “reward” for stripping me of my queenly status.)

“Now then, let us be off,” she called to Yahagi, who had closed up his shop. Her older sister and this man would soon walk down the path of ruin. Just thinking of that made Chichi ecstatic enough to start writhing with pleasure.

With his Eight-Round Pistols and monster cards in hand, Yusuke Yahagi walked on ahead of Chichi.

(This is your fault. You called me ugly. I will never forgive you.)

Watching Yahagi’s back, she licked her lips with a red tongue.

Yusuke’s Side

Lady Cecelia and I stepped into the B1 Back Regions.

“Based on the map, we’re just about there,” she said.

“Yes, if we turn left up ahead, we’ll be there in about four hundred meters.” That was where the small room she was aiming for was located. There was a small red moss growing in the corner of that room, and apparently, that was what would be used in making the enhancement elixir. We’d had three monster encounters up until this point. All of the enemies had been weak, so I’d been able to defeat them with my Eight-Round Pistols alone. If things continued like this, I probably wouldn’t have to pull out my monster cards.

After turning the corner and walking for a while, a rusty iron door appeared before our eyes.

“We’ve arrived,” I said. “This is the room, right?”

“Yes. Let’s head inside with caution. I’ll use my magic to provide backup.”

“Understood.” With my pistols in hand, I kicked open the door. Inside the small room was—

“There’s no sign of the enemy! It’s safe!” Then I paused. “Huh?” There were unfamiliar things inside the room. Maybe someone had forgotten it, but there was a blanket spread out on the floor. Aside from that, there was a rope and also some lanterns, as if someone had prepared a place to stay. “Is someone

going to live here?” That would be a reckless thing to do. The dungeon was extremely dangerous at night. Monsters grew stronger at night, and even those from the lower floors came up here. “Staying the night somewhere like this is dangerous unless you’re highly skilled,” I said.

I was stooped over to try and poke around some more when something covered my nose and mouth. “Mmph?!” *This is...a handkerchief? It kinda...smells sweet, and my vision is getting dark...*

With that, I lost consciousness.

Shivering from the cold, I came to. My head somehow really hurt. Had I caught a cold? *Wait, why am I naked?! And I’m tied up!* My mind started racing. *Huh? What? Did Michelle unleash a new fetish?! Hold on... Is this the dungeon?*

That was right. Lady Cecelia and I had already arrived at the small room on B1. *Yep, it’s slowly coming back to me.*

“It seems you’re awake,” said a voice. I saw an unfamiliar woman inside the dim room. *Could this be Lady Cecelia?*

It was Lady Cecelia—stripped from the waist up, exposing her large, pale breasts. I averted my gaze reflexively. “What the—” I sputtered. “What’s going on? I don’t understand.”

“Oh my, don’t you remember? You and I did aaall sorts of fun things together,” she cooed. *Fun things?! Don’t tell me we went there!!!* She was Marco’s lover! And Michelle was my girlfriend!

...Wait, that’s not right. I was naked, but it was only my upper half. My clothes were still firmly on my lower half, and there were no signs that they’d been taken off. Feeling safe, I unconsciously sighed in relief.

The woman giggled. “Don’t you think it’s a little early to be relieved?” she asked provocatively, putting on her bra.

“Huh? You’re...”

“That’s right. Do you remember now? I’m the former queen, Chichi.”

I couldn’t forget that sharply defined face. It was Michelle’s little sister,

Chichi! “What are you trying to pull here? What are you going to do to me now that I’m tied up?”

“No need to be so panicked. I’ve already finished my business here. I’ve just taken our commemorative photos.” She flashed me an eerily beautiful smile. There were three Sunprints between her pale fingers. It appeared that they hadn’t yet seen any sunlight, so they were still pitch-black. *What on earth is on them?* No, considering this situation, I could sort of imagine it...

“Just to confirm, what did you take pictures of?”

“Why do you even ask? I took pictures of our loving deeds.”

“Tch. You came up with something so sleazy.”

Chichi sternly raised her eyes to mine and walked closer. Then, she placed a finger on the tip of my nose. “Everything is completely your fault, and hers.”

“What did we do?” I demanded. “All we did was get ourselves out of that situation. And wasn’t it the current king that ruined you two?!”

“Shut up! Shut your mouth! Moreover, *you* called me *ugly*!”

“Huh?” *Ah... I feel like something like that did happen... Yeah, I did say that.* “I did. So what? It’s your fault for doing something so horrible to Michelle.”

“Get out of here with that!” she snapped. “I’ve been called all sorts of things, like cunning or a wicked woman, but that was the first time I’ve *ever* been called ugly! *That* is an insult of the highest degree.”

Really? “So you’re going to involve me to get back at Michelle?”



“That’s right,” she said, laughing triumphantly.

“Man... You’re a real pain in the ass.”

“I don’t want *Michelle’s* boyfriend of all people to tell me that!” she shouted. “You’re dating the most high-maintenance woman in the world!”

“She’s not *that* much of a pain. She does have some unusual needs, like thirty kisses a day, or a sixty-minute baby pretend-play session, but she’s not as much of a pain as you!”

“Don’t spew that crap to me! Ugh!” she groaned. “Enough is enough! At any rate, if Michelle gets a load of these pictures, your relationship is over. Serves you right.”

“H-Hey, you better not!” Michelle would fly into a jealous rage and go on a rampage.

“You idiot. Of course I’m going to show her. It’s so cold. Why else would I have undressed?”

“Please don’t. She might blow away the capital!!!”

“That’d make my day. The current king would certainly grieve over it. Serves him right. Aha ha ha!!!”

“That’s not all!”

“Excuse me?” she scoffed. “What else could there be?”

“If Marco sees that...” I started. Chichi’s body flinched with surprise. “He would be sad.”

“Huh... So what? Marco will forgive me no matter what. That’s the kind of man he is!” Chichi looked away as if she’d grown sulky. Wait, by any chance, was she *worried* about Marco? I’d thought she was just using him, but it looked like that wasn’t all there was to their relationship.

“About Marco... You truly...”

“Of course not! He’s like my pet. I’m treating him nicely because he’s so attached to me. I plan to throw him away once I’m bored. I’ll ensure he never sees these photos anyway, so I’m not worried. When Michelle releases her

Maximum Magic, I'll be out of this country."

Then, with a moody "humph" Chichi left the room.

The Adventurer Meryl's Diary: Entry 8

I got an interesting snack today. It's a product called Kibi Dango, and it can tame monsters. Apparently, there's an old folktale from Mister Yusuke's homeland called Momotaro. It's a story where the hero, Momotaro, tames a dog, a monkey, and a pheasant with his kibi dango to slay Ogres. Speaking of which, Ogres are powerful monsters that lurk on floors B4 and below. They drop an average of 6,000 rims. And yet, they were slaying them left and right? That dog, monkey, and pheasant were way too OP!!!

My expectations weren't that high, of course, but I immediately tested the Kibi Dango out. I started off with an easy target: Slimes. I put on some leather gloves, ate a Basco to boost my defense, and had the Slime eat the Kibi Dango out of my hand. As for the results? I easily tamed it! It didn't have a face or a voice, so I couldn't tell what it was thinking, but the way it wobbled while trailing behind me was kinda cute. When I ordered it to attack a Dungeon Lizard during battle, it readily obeyed me. It did get beaten up in, like, five seconds, though. Rest in peace, dear Slime. I picked up the dropped money and magic crystals as if I were picking up its remains...

I tried it out next on an Army Ant that I just happened to come across, which also turned out to be a success. It was kinda creepy how it followed after us with its jaws making that rattling sound, but it didn't do anything to attack us. The Army Ant was stronger than the Slime. They normally hunt in groups, but it attacked lower-ranked enemies when ordered to, even though it was alone.

"Wouldn't taming a Queen Ant give us a huge advantage?" Rigal suggested. He was exactly right. Ants operate under their queen's orders. If we could command that queen, we would be able to mobilize troops of ants to our hearts' content. However, it's not really realistic since the queen is always protected. Our level has to be adequately higher than the queen's in order to tame it, and the idea of Army Ants getting attached to me doesn't make me feel that happy. Aren't there slightly cuter monsters out there?

Marco has been particularly happy as of late, so he works hard during our hunts too. I've been the only one in the vanguard until now, but Marco joining in has broadened our potential tactics. It's now possible to fight in situations we previously would have retreated from. Thanks to that, our earnings have doubled recently, and on the days we really hit it big, we sometimes surpass 20,000 rims in one day. I feel like I've taken yet another step toward my dream of opening up a general store. On days we earn a lot, I do succumb to the temptation to fool around with the money, but I am actually saving up too. It's not like I'm always scrubbing away at those Scratch Cards!!!

Chapter 9: A Settlement

About one hour had passed since Chichi had left. I'd probably caught a cold from being shirtless inside this chilly, dim dungeon. Luckily, I was wearing the Clear Stream Ring that the gnomes had given me. Because of that, my physical condition hadn't gotten worse. I was trying to press myself against the rugged stone wall to cut the rope, but it just wasn't going well.

"Ugh. I'm hungry." I sighed. It was right around lunchtime. I could've eaten one of my products if my hands were free, but that was a no go on account of them being tied behind me. It was said that monsters seldom appeared in small rooms like this, but was that true? I wouldn't be able to put up any resistance if one did show up now. *I have to cut this rope ASAP...*

"Squeak, squeak!"

"Wah!!!" I shouted, practically jumping a mile high at the sudden sound, only to find it was just a small Dungeon Mouse. It looked like it had somehow entered the room through a hole in the wall. It was a type of monster, but its size wasn't all that different from a common rat's. Dungeon Mice wouldn't suddenly attack humans, so I wasn't concerned, but apparently, they'd at least nip your fingers while you were asleep. *I'd hate it if I came down with some weird disease...* "Shoo! Shoo!" I used my feet to drive it away and resumed my attempts to cut the rope.

After scraping the rope hard against the wall for a while, I used a lot of force to try and tear it off.

I groaned as I strained and pulled before I gave up, exhaling. "Still no good." That damn Chichi. She didn't have to go *this* far, using such a sturdy rope on me.

With my shoulders heaving, I steadied my breathing. That was when the back of my hand hit a small lump in my back pocket. "Huh? What's this?" For a moment I thought I'd found some strange thing that didn't belong there, but then I recalled that I'd left the remaining Kibi Dango I'd given Meryl in my pocket. *Oh yeah, Chichi came to my store right when I was about to eat it, and*

we left afterward. Hmm...Kibi Dango? Oh! I can tame that Dungeon Mouse with this!

I twisted and bent my arm and grabbed the Kibi Dango from my pocket. Then, I called out to the Dungeon Mouse that, mere moments ago, I'd been treating like a nuisance: "Hey, Chutaro. Sorry for earlier. Here, I'll give you something good." I tore off a piece of the Kibi Dango in an easy-to-eat size and offered it to the Dungeon Mouse.

The mouse squeaked hesitantly. I had just chased it off with my foot, so it looked wary.

"It's okay. Your big bro isn't scary," I called out to it in a coaxing voice. "Here, it's tasty." *Please don't bother arguing with me about whether a coaxing voice would actually work on a mouse. I'm desperate here, okay?*

The mouse squeaked once again. The Dungeon Mouse drew closer, due more to the allure of the Kibi Dango than my behavior. Its pointed nose turned up, eagerly sniffing it.

"That's right. Take a bite. It's tasty."

The Dungeon Mouse hesitantly squeaked in response before it finally bit into the Kibi Dango. Although it was still wary, it couldn't fight against its appetite.

"Attaboy. There's more where that came from." I watched on as the Dungeon Mouse stuffed its cheeks full of the Kibi Dango, craning my neck to the point that it hurt. Before long its hunger was sated, but the Dungeon Mouse didn't run away. It sat in place and gazed up at me. My taming looked to be a success.

"Okay. From today on, you're not just any ordinary Dungeon Mouse," I told it. "You're my servant, Chutaro. Understand?"

Chutaro gave me an affirmative squeak.

Whoa, it replied. Humans are selfishly fickle, so I started seeing the Dungeon Mouse as cute the moment I could communicate with it, even though I had previously found it abhorrent. I was a nice guy, so I wouldn't force any unreasonable requests on it, like chasing down ogres with me. Just doing something about this rope would be more than enough. "I'm going to give you your first task, Chutaro. Use your teeth to chew through the rope binding my

hands. Can you do that?”

Chutaro gave me a single cry in response and promptly leaped at the rope binding my hands. For a while, I felt some furry thing crawling around my wrists until at last the rope was cut with a snap, and I could taste freedom once more.

“Good job, Chutaro! Here, I’ll give you the rest of the Kibi Dango.” After I generously distributed the Kibi Dango to it, I sat with my legs crossed. I had wasted a lot of time since Chichi had left. Where was she right now? Michelle would be coming back from the dungeon depths today. However, it was still possible to avoid catastrophe so long as they didn’t come in contact with one another.

I took out the Stick Chocolate that increased your magical power by thirty percent and emptied the colorful beads of chocolate into my mouth in one go. I crunched and I munched, my teeth breaking them into pieces before I swallowed. “All right, Clairvoyance preparations complete!” It’d be easy to find where Chichi was if I used my other special skill, Clairvoyance.

I put Chichi in as the keyword and started my search.

My viewpoint immediately moved to Hot Spring Yahagi. *So, she went back there... Wait, this is bad—Michelle’s at the entrance!* Michelle and Chichi were about fifteen meters apart. I had to stop those pictures from getting into Michelle’s hands at all costs.

I whipped out a gold-sparkling monster card that I had carefully stored in my inside pocket. “So, the time for this has come. Monster summon, activate! Come forth, SSSR. Archangel Lunadian!”

Lunadian was among the most high-ranking angels. While its incredible offensive power went without saying, it could also use skills like Teleportation and Glowing Wings of Purification. *If I use this power to fly to Hot Spring Yahagi, I should be able to prevent the worst-case scenario.*

The card glowed with a light so dazzling that I couldn’t open my eyes, and Archangel Lunadian, clothed in sheer silk, appeared before me. But what incredible proportions! As one would expect from an angel, it had an otherworldly beauty... *Whoops, now is not the time to ogle.*

“Lunadian, teleport me to Hot Spring Yahagi!” I commanded.

Lunadian wrapped me up in its two arms and eight wings, and in the blink of an eye, it transported me to Hot Spring Yahagi.

The Archangel’s sudden advent at Hot Spring Yahagi threw the people there into disarray. Michelle, and Chichi right beside her, also stared at it with wonder.

“Yusuke?”

“Get away from her, Michelle!” I cried.

“*You* get away from *that* woman!” she shot back. “Who is that exhibitionist?!”

Uh, it’s an archangel. Can’t you tell? “It’s the Archangel Lunadian that I summoned to teleport me here.”

“I don’t care! Don’t cling to my Yusuke while you’re dressed so scandalously!”

“No, don’t use your offensive magic! Never mind that! You need to get away from that man in the glasses. That’s Chichi!”

“Excuse me?” At the mention of Chichi’s name, Michelle finally returned to her senses.

Chichi clicked her tongue. “Tch. I was so close. Whatever. Michelle, have a look at these!” Chichi began sliding some pictures from inside an envelope. *I’m not gonna let you!*

“Lunadian, steal that envelope from Chichi!”

At my command, Lunadian closed in on her.

“G-Get away from me!!!” Chichi retaliated with her Wind Magic spell, Wind Cutter, but it dispersed before Lunadian’s angelic presence. *That’s an SSSR card for you. It’s crazy strong.*

Lunadian didn’t utter a word. It raised the wings on its right side high into the air. What was it going to do? *Whoa, the wings are overflowing with surges of soft light.*

“Gaaah!!!” Chichi shrieked. *So these are the Glowing Wings of Purification!*

They apparently purged all malicious intent within the hearts of humans. Chichi looked petrified. *Is she okay?* It'd leave a seriously bad aftertaste in my mouth if she died because the shock was too severe. However, Lunadian graced her with a faint smile then addressed her in an inhuman voice.

(Be not afraid. In truth, it seems even thou hast come to know regret.)

"Wh-What are you saying?!" Chichi sputtered, unable to do anything but glare.

(Cease thy false act. If thou hast obtained a love, thou shouldst hold him dear.)

"I don't care about Marco!"

(All is well. Thou canst become more honest with but a small amount of courage. Thou mayest even come to know a happiness heretofore unknown to thee.)

"I... I..." Bathed in the especially dazzling light, Chichi collapsed.

(It is time for my departure.)

Lunadian smiled and disappeared. *Oh yeah, the three-minute activation period has passed.*

Having fainted, Chichi still lay on the ground. I immediately picked up the envelope of Sunprints she'd held. "Michelle, check how Chichi's doing."

"O-Okay." While Michelle headed over to Chichi, I took the opportunity to summon my store and rush inside. Then, standing in front of the kitchen in the back, I glanced through the contents of the envelope.

Yikes. There was some indescribably nasty stuff depicted there. If Michelle saw these, she might even become a demon lord bent on destroying the world.

I immediately turned on the burner and threw the envelope—photos and all—into the fire. "Ashes to ashes, garbage to garbage..." I murmured. *Destruction of evidence complete!*

"What are you doing, Yusuke? I kinda smell something burnt."

"I thought Chichi might still have some tricks up her sleeve, so I took care of that thing she was going to give you." Yep, I wasn't lying. Therefore, it wouldn't

weigh on my conscience. *Excuse complete!*

“Oh, she *was* trying to give me something. I wonder if it was a cursed talisman?”

“Maybe.” In a sense, the effect of those Sunprints would’ve probably been even worse. “How’s Chichi?”

“She’s unconscious,” she replied. “I’ve restrained her, and she’s lying down in the back tatami room.”

I see. Now this series of events can finally come to a close... Well, that’s what I thought, but just then someone violently threw open the door.

“Mister Yahagi, please give Mistress Chichi back.” It was Marco, holding the Legendary Spiked Bat in his hands. He stood at the entrance, staring at Michelle and me with bloodshot eyes. “Mister Yahagi, please release Mistress Chichi.”

“Marco...”

“I’m begging you, please overlook Mistress Chichi’s transgressions. If you don’t, then I... Please. I don’t want to hurt you.”

That’s how much he treasures her, huh?

“No, *you* step back! Lay a hand on Yusuke, and I’ll never forgive you!” Michelle cried, stepping forward in indignation, but I placed a hand on her shoulder to calm her down.

“Wait, Michelle.” Even if Marco had honed his skills, he was still far from being a match for Michelle. Right as I began thinking about how we could somehow talk our way through this, I heard Chichi’s shrill cry ring out from the inner tatami room.

“Don’t lay a hand on Marco!” she shrieked. “That nobody has nothing to do with this! I only used him! He’s a simpleminded idiot! Marco, if you don’t want to be caught, then hurry up and run. There’s no point in staying here!”

Um, is Chichi protecting Marco?!

“Mistress Chichi, I won’t go anywhere. I will definitely set you free!”

“Idiot! You’re nothing but an annoyance! Just leave me be already!” she

shouted at him before she somewhat lowered her voice. “I’ll be killed as an example anyway,” she murmured. “I’ve already accepted it as the consequences of my actions. But, you know, it’s not like you did anything wrong. Your only crime is that you were tricked by the lowest, wickedest woman.”

“Mistress Chichi, you are not a wicked woman!” he insisted. “I was living an empty life with no hope in the future. But after I met you, my everyday life has been so bright. I’m having so much fun and feel so fulfilled and happy that I just don’t know what to do with myself!”

“You foolish thing... Never mind that. Just use that money you saved up to run to another kingdom. Then, you can snag a good country girl and live a happy life. That’s what suits someone boring like you,” she mumbled, sounding a bit tearful at the end.

Michelle was tilting her head as she listened to their conversation. “What’s the meaning of this? Chichi’s serious about Marco?”

“I think she might be,” I said.

“Even so, Chichi would normally choose to save herself. There’s no way she’d let only Marco escape.”

“It may be because she was showered in the Archangel Lunadian’s Glowing Wings of Purification.” No, it was possible that what the angel had done was simply give her a nudge in the right direction before it left.

“Michelle, if you want to kill me, then do so,” Chichi said to us. “You can even hand me over to the king. In exchange, let Marco go.”

“Marco is Yusuke’s friend. I won’t kill him.”

“I see. Then hurry up and hand me over. Well, I’ll just seduce the king and once again take my place as queen. You might cry about it later, you know!!!” Chichi spat, lashing out.

Michelle once again tilted her head. “Hey, the Glowing Wings of Purification is a holy light that expels all wicked intentions, right? And yet, isn’t she saying some pretty terrible things?”

“That’s true... Oh, I got it!”

“What is it?”

“Well, the Archangel Lunadian had to go back in the middle of using that skill. You see, once it’s summoned by the monster card, it can only be active for three minutes.” I’d also had it teleport me, so it had probably gone back before Chichi had been completely purified.

“So, the Chichi now before our eyes is a half-baked good person?”

“Seems like it.” If I once again summoned the Archangel Lunadian, it was likely all of Chichi’s evil intentions could be erased, but I doubted I’d be able to pull an SSSR card again. Also, I wasn’t sure how I’d feel about a completely saintlike Chichi.

Marco took another step forward. The Legendary Spiked Bat fell from his hands with a plunk. “Please, Mister Yahagi. Let Mistress Chichi’s transgressions slide.”

I wanted to be considerate of his feelings. However, it seemed the opportunity had already passed. “I can’t, Marco. Look.”

A troop of soldiers had appeared at the entrance of Hot Spring Yahagi. The king’s beloved female general was walking at the very head of the group. Based on the all-too-perfect timing, it was possible they had been monitoring Chichi as they let her run loose.

“Ngh...!” Marco picked up the Legendary Spiked Bat. *Don’t tell me he’s going to fight that group of soldiers?*

“Don’t do it!”

Michelle moved before I could, grabbing the back of his neck and using some kind of magic. Marco soundlessly crumpled to his knees and collapsed.

“Mistress...Chichi...run...” he mumbled as he lost consciousness. I knelt beside Marco.

“I’ll talk to the king in person,” I gently whispered to him, “and I’ll definitely do something about this one way or another. I won’t let Chichi be killed, so stay quiet for now.”

The soldiers marched into the store and, upon seeing Chichi restrained, nodded their heads in satisfaction.

“Rise, former queen Chichi. You’re under arrest.” The soldiers began leading Chichi away in handcuffs, but she stopped in front of Michelle.

“Michelle...thank you for saving Marco.”

“I didn’t do it for you,” she replied.

“You’re right. Also, I’m sorry.”

“You’re sorry?”

“I’ll apologize for everything up until now. I’ll probably die soon, so...”

Michelle said nothing.

“Yahagi.” Chichi addressed me next.

“What?”

“Take care of Marco,” Chichi said. “I know I’m in no place to make requests, but please have him eat dagashi that’ll cheer him up enough that he won’t try chasing after me.” It sounded like she truly was concerned for Marco.

“Yeah, I understand. Leave Marco to me.”

Chichi boldly raised her head high and looked straight ahead as she was taken away.

In the noisy Hot Spring Yahagi, Michelle and I silently saw Chichi off as she was marched away. Eventually Marco, who’d been unconscious thanks to Michelle’s magic, woke up.

“Ugh... Huh? Mistress Chichi?”

“Chichi was arrested. She’ll likely be taken to the castle,” I said.

“No way...” Marco sat there dumbfounded for about ten seconds before he shot to his feet and snatched a basket from my store. While I watched intently, wondering what he was doing, he began systematically cramming my products into his basket.

“H-Hey now.”

He grabbed things like Ten-Rim Gum, Curry Rice Crackers, Anzu Sticks, Monster Chips, Carol Chocos, and Kielbasas, stuffing them in the basket one after another.

“Calm down, Marco.”

“Mister Yahagi, I’ll buy everything from the Rocket Bomb lottery. Please give me the whole sheet.”

“What are you going to do with that?” I doubted that he was planning to explore the dungeon.

“Just as you did when you rescued Miss Michelle. I’m going to rescue Mistress Chichi with these! If I have the biggest Rocket Bomb—”

“Don’t be reckless,” I warned him.

“But *you* did something reckless for Miss Michelle, didn’t you?!” he cried.

“The circumstances were totally different,” I said. “The former king was there at the time, so I could take him hostage. His guards weren’t organized either. However, the current king isn’t that easy. He’s in total control of his troops. If you just go charging over there, you’ll only be caught.”

“Even so, I can’t just let Mistress Chichi die!” Marco slapped his wallet down on the counter. Three silver coins spilled out from the loosened pouch. “I’m going to take the whole sheet!” Marco snatched the sheet of Rocket Bombs hanging from the wall and bolted for the entrance with it. However, his comrades from Team Harukaze held him back.

“You can’t, Marco! You’re going to be killed too if you go right now!”

“Let me go, Miss Meryl. I have to go!”

“If I say you can’t, then you can’t! Mira, Rigal—stop Marco!”

At their leader’s instructions, Rigal and Mira moved swiftly. The three of them pinned him to the floor.

“Mister Yusuke! The rope! The rope!” Meryl gasped.

“A-All right!” I grabbed the rope that had just been used to tie up Chichi from

the inner tatami room. I felt bad, but it was probably for the best that we tie Marco up until he calmed down.

Quietly huffing and puffing, Marco was squirming like a cat who'd been caught.

"I'm telling you to calm down a little," I said. "I'll appeal to the king to spare her life." Chichi *had* done something horrible to Michelle. Even so, she was still her little sister. Also, thanks to the Archangel Lunadian's Glowing Wings of Purification shining upon her, a seed of goodness had sprouted in her heart. No, even before that, she had apparently been treasuring Marco for a while. If so, then we really did have to save her. She'd stolen her older sister's fiancé, and as the former queen, she'd put a heavy burden on the country's finances, but with her added crime of attempted escape now dooming her to capital punishment, I felt sorry for her.

"Will the king see you?" Michelle asked. Normally, there was no way a mere dagashi-ya could receive an audience with the king.

"I'll ask Baron Ethel," I said. If I went through the baron, whom I was on good terms with, I might be able to manage it somehow.

"But it's the king we're talking about. Will he save Chichi?" Taxes had been slightly raised recently in order to restore the country's finances. Since the people harbored anger that had nowhere to go, there were a decent number who desired the former king and queen's execution. I feared they could be scapegoated as outlets for the general dissatisfaction.

"It's not like we have no chance of success. I have a new limited-time-only product. If I use that, then even if we can't gain an acquittal, we might be able to settle for exile."

Marco's eyes sparkled. "Really, Mister Yahagi? If you can save Mistress Chichi, I'll follow you for the rest of my life!"

"Don't get so worked up." If an investigation proceeded, Marco might get pulled in. Once it became evident that he was an accomplice to jailbreak, he probably wouldn't get off scot-free. Chichi probably wouldn't rat out Marco, but if evidence somehow turned up, I didn't think he'd be able to escape arrest. *We better move soon.*

I decided to check in with Michelle. “We might wind up saving Chichi,” I told her. “Are you okay with that?”

“Oh, I don’t care about her,” she said. “If it weren’t for Chichi, I might not have met you. Also, having Marco remain like this...” Glancing at Marco, all tied up, she let out a small sigh.

“I’ll go to Baron Ethel’s place right now,” I said. “I’ll be back by tonight.”

“I’m going with you,” Michelle declared. “I’ll feel more at ease that way compared to just worrying at home.”

“Got it.” I grabbed the limited-edition item that I kept hidden in the back of my store and headed to Baron Ethel’s residence with Michelle.

We managed to receive an audience with the king that same day thanks to what we arranged with Baron Ethel. That was likely because of the information I had given him about the limited-edition item. The baron’s eyes had flashed with delight, and he’d led us to the royal palace straightaway.

Michelle and I waited in a lavish living room until the king and the baron arrived, side by side. The king was brimming with his usual energy and vitality.

“I kept you waiting, Yahagi,” he said, greeting me. “So, are the effects of that product real?” He probably didn’t want to waste time. He got straight to the point.

“Yes, that’s correct. This is the product.” I placed a small bag on the table.

Product name: Young Donuts (Four pieces)

Description: When you eat one, your physical age will be reversed by five years.

Price: Forty rims (Five bags only)

I stocked many dagashi with surprising effects, but you could say that this one topped the list. *And its price is 40 rims...* Only the cheap price made it a dagashi. *I’ll keep quiet about how much it costs to make it seem more valuable...*

“So if you eat this, it’ll really make you five years younger?” inquired the king, his eyes sparkling.

“Yes, it’s true. Please be careful not to eat too much.” There was a folktale like that, about a greedy old woman who drank too much rejuvenating water and turned into a baby. Nothing good comes from being too greedy. The king and baron paid little mind to my thoughts, though, conferring with each other in hushed voices.

“I’ll eat one of these myself, and if I can use the rest to bait those old geezers in the senate, they should become our yes-men,” murmured the king.

“If we win over the elders, then the Gocaun Region’s budget will be approved,” said the baron. No matter how brilliant the king was, he couldn’t manage the government by himself. He was probably going to use the Young Donuts to win favor with the top aristocrats. Well, I didn’t really care. They could do whatever they wanted.

“No need to stop at the budget approval,” the king added. “Show these to people like the illness-prone Marquis Kepasse, and there’s no doubt they’ll heed our every request.”

“Indeed. With this, reinforcements for the eastern garrison, which has long been a matter of concern, can finally become a reality.”

Ugh... Yeah, I still hate my dagashi being used in politics. The leftover Young Donuts would go to Meryl’s and Mira’s grandparents, I decided. If their grandparents could become healthy, that was enough for me. *All right, I’ll bring things back to Marco and Chichi.*

“Your Majesty,” I said.

“Hmm? Oh, sorry about that.” He’d been completely absorbed in his conversation with Baron Ethel, but he finally turned to face me. “We were still in the middle of talking, right?”

“I will present this to you, Your Majesty. Therefore, in recognition of this deed, could I request that you be tolerant with Marco and Chichi?”

“Hmm,” he hummed. “I don’t mind in regards to Marco, whoever that is, but the former Queen Chichi cannot be pardoned. Now, what to do...” King he

might be, but he probably wanted these Young Donuts so badly that he could taste it. He seemed to be carefully mulling over how we could somehow reach a compromise. A heavy silence fell upon the room as the king stared intensely into the air before he abruptly tapped his fist against his palm. “I’ve got it! Yahagi, become the feudal lord of Luganda.”

What? A feudal lord? Indifferent to my confusion, Baron Ethel also nodded as if the king had come up with an ingenious idea. “Now *there* is an option. It would be the most perfect role for you, Sir Yahagi. It is just right as a reward for presenting these Young Donuts to us.”

“Um, I don’t understand what you’re talking about at all.”

The baron explained it to my confused self. “Recently, a new dungeon was found in the forest of Luganda, a territory of this kingdom. Although it is on a small scale, magic crystals and ingredients can be collected there. His Majesty has decided to develop the area so as to avoid it going to waste.”

“Well...congratulations.”

“As such, as a reward for the Young Donuts you have given us, we will make you its lord.”

That was the part I didn’t understand. If they wanted to reward me, then they could just let Marco and Chichi go, and I’d be happy. “Why me?”

“To tell the truth, Luganda is currently only a clearing in the forest. However, we eventually would like to establish a town there. For that purpose, we have decided to give free plots of land to adventurers who will go exploring in that dungeon.”

In short, by recruiting settlers and obtaining funds from the dungeon, they planned to grow Luganda in size.

“Your dagashi greatly help those adventurers who explore the dungeon, right? Furthermore, the young adventurers adore you. If you take on the role of Luganda’s lord, will there not be many adventurers who follow you?”

“I see. I now understand why I should become the feudal lord. But how does this relate to Marco and Chichi?”

The king answered this time. “I can’t acquit Chichi of her crimes. But how about I exile her to the Lugandan frontier?”

“Oh!” That way, both his people and his vassals would accept it.

“If you’re going to beg me to spare Chichi’s life, we can settle this by exiling her to Luganda. In exchange, you’ll take up a new post as feudal lord, and you’ll strictly monitor her there.”

“I understand what you’re saying, but I can’t be a feudal lord.”

“Don’t worry. I’ll appoint an official to assist you. Once there, you can just run your dagashi-ya like always. That’d be the greatest help in Luganda’s development.”

While I was carefully deliberating what I should do, Michelle leaned in close to me. “Yusuke, I think you should take them up on this.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. I have various reasons, but if you’re going to Luganda, then I’ll go with you.”

“You sure?”

“I’ll go crazy if we have to live apart. We should always be together.”

“I see. If you say so, then...” It seemed this was the only way I could help Marco and Chichi. If that was the case, the idea of leisurely managing my dagashi-ya alongside the rural dungeon’s development wasn’t too bad. Even if I was called a feudal lord, my position would be something more like the mayor of a frontier town.

“I understand. We’ll go to Luganda then.”

And that was how I would end up running my dagashi-ya in Luganda.

After answering another summons to the royal palace, I went straight to the designated materials storehouse, carrying nothing on me. Inside I would apparently find a stockpile of supplies that had to be transported to the new territory I was being sent to. It contained tons of important things for the

people who were going to the Luganda Forest with us, such as food and the bare minimum necessities for living. My first task as a feudal lord would be to deliver these safely.

There were several large storehouses lining both sides of the road, but people were scarce. When I walked toward the twenty-seventh storehouse, the one which had been indicated, I found a middle-aged man waiting for me there.

“Hello,” he greeted me. “Are you Sir Yahagi?”

“That’s right,” I replied. “And who are you?”

“I’m Nakaram, the aide that’s been appointed to you. I look forward to working with you.”

So this was my aide, the assistant official who’d help manage my new territory! That pervert of a king had initially told me he’d prepare a beautiful assistant for me, but I’d immediately rejected his offer. That was, of course, because I feared the power of Michelle’s jealousy. Brilliant the king might have been, but he didn’t understand how scary Michelle was at all. Baron Ethel had scolded him, asking if he wanted the entire Luganda Forest to be burned down, so that idea had been scrapped. Instead, this man in front of me was the one who’d been appointed.

We were talking about Michelle here, so I’d felt even an elf or a young boy with a beautiful face would ignite her jealousy. I’d told the king that the aide had to be a man. I’d added that a plain but reliable man would be even better. *Still, I got a pretty quirky guy here...* I didn’t know about his personality yet, but his appearance alone was kinda crazy. He might’ve been close to two meters tall or so? His entire body was armored with muscle, yet he had a completely forgettable face and his sparse hair had been styled into a comb-over. His square, black-framed glasses and his deep laugh lines further enhanced his nondescript appearance. To put it briefly, he was an old man with a unique body build.

“Um, are you from the military, Mister Nakamura?”

“It’s Nakaram,” he corrected me. “*Civil* Official Nakaram. Despite my appearance, I have not once served in the military. I’m adept at arithmetic and preparing requisition forms. I also dabble a little in cooking...”

“I-I see. Nice to meet you.” I was intimidated since, no matter how you looked at it, he seemed way stronger than my regulars. However, from another perspective, he might actually be dependable. With someone like him to back me up, I felt like I could get by even in a remote region like Luganda. “Now then, can I have a look at the supplies?”

“Right this way. There’s quite a lot, so you will probably find you either need to buy or rent a horse-drawn wagon,” he said, opening the door to the storehouse with a large key. Before my eyes lay a massive quantity of jute bags in a pile.

“Whoa...” I breathed.

“They’re full of wheat,” he told me. “There’s enough to feed one hundred people for a month.” A single person consumed about thirty-five kilograms in one month. There needed to be enough for one hundred people, so that would be 3.5 tons... Seeing it in person, it really was quite a lot. I’d been told that we should carry this for now, and order more every time we ran out. Luganda was still a wooded area, so self-sufficiency wasn’t in the cards anytime soon. For the time being, we would probably need to sell magic crystals and drop-items from the dungeon to procure supplies.

“Carrying all of these will probably be very expensive,” I noted.

“It’ll be about 2,500,000 rims to purchase a wagon with the horse included. The king can provide one, but it’ll likely be difficult to make do with that alone.” Mister Nakaram’s eyebrows knitted together, troubled. That expression of his held just a hint of charm, I thought. Still, it was gonna be 2,500,000 rims per wagon? That was about as much as you’d need to buy a car in Japan. “If we plan to have the immigrating adventurers also carry some goods, I recommend we buy donkeys to transport them,” he continued. “You can buy one donkey for about 800,000 rims.”

“That’s all right. I’ll make multiple trips to bring it myself.”

“*You’re* going to carry it?” His eyebrows once again knitted together. That seemed to be a quirk of his. Rather than explaining, it seemed faster to just show him how I’d carry it all.

“Please come outside. I’ll show you the magic I’ll use to transport these

supplies.”

“Huh...” I led Mister Nakaram outside, his eyebrows still knit up, and moved to a slightly more spacious area.

“Just watch,” I told him before reciting the words “Store, open!” Dagashi-ya Yahagi appeared in response to my spell. What showed up this time was the latest version of my shop, which I could now summon thanks to leveling up.

“Huh?!” Mister Nakaram’s jaw dropped, and he looked up at Dagashi-ya Yahagi in astonishment. A three-story structure made of reinforced concrete had appeared in the storehouse district. The first floor was the store, the second was storage, and the third floor was a living space. It was also made so that you could hang laundry up to dry on the rooftop. I personally preferred the retro, Showa-era vibes of the single-family store, but this version was superior in terms of cramming tons of stuff into it. “I-Is this the feudal lord’s manor?!”

“It’s nothing so grand. This is my dagashi-ya.”

“Come to think of it, the people know you as Sir Snacks.”

That again... Meryl had been the first to call me that. She and Garmr’s group had spread it all over the place, so the name had apparently really gotten around. “I’m a feudal lord of no rank. And of all things to call me, why Sir Snacks?” I said wearily. Mister Nakaram smiled at me for the first time today.

“Now, now. You have such a wonderful power. I’m sure you’ll be given the rank of knight or baronet in the near future.”

“You think?” I wasn’t interested, so it was whatever. “At any rate, I’ll put these things in the store and carry them. You can assume there’ll be very few transportation fees involved. Let’s use the money we’ll save to buy things that’ll be useful to everyone.”

“Absolutely wonderful!” he exclaimed. “I was depressed that I’d been demoted from the capital to the countryside, but it’s an honor to serve someone with such an amazing ability!” His eyes were sparkling, just a little.

The matter of Marco and Chichi, the migration to the frontier—everything

was going well, but a new incident emerged that'd rip me from my cozy sense of security and cast me into the lowest pits of despair. Believe it or not, Michelle found *that* Sunprint.

By some chance, just one of those Sunprints had drifted into the inner tatami room and slipped under the tea table. We hadn't noticed it until now, but Michelle discovered it while she was cleaning. She immediately started an uproar.

"What is this...?" Michelle's voice turned as dark as if it had sunk into the depths of hell.

"Wh-What are you talking about?"

"This photo!" Her entire body trembling, she thrust the photo at me. What was depicted on that small scrap of paper was me with my eyes closed and Chichi with a bold smile. Her upper half was naked, and she was hugging my unconscious form from behind. Her bare shoulders and arms, and her provocative gaze, were frightfully bewitching. The silver lining was that I was wearing clothes in this photo. If I'd been naked while in that position—like I had been in the other photos—Michelle's rampage would've probably been unstoppable. "Yusuke, tell me the truth. What did you do with Chichi?"

First of all, I started by denying it with every fiber of my being. "Nothing! Nothing at all! I swear it!!!"

"Then explain this!"

"I'm telling you, this was Chichi's ruse."

"Ruse?"

I explained what Chichi had been trying to do. Of course, I didn't broach the subject of the photo showing our naked embrace or the unexplainably indecent photo...

"Unforgivable!" she cried. "Exile is letting her off too easy! I'll use Absolute Zero to freeze her for eternity!"

With how infuriated she is, she really might do it... "Hey now, I really do think Chichi's turned a new leaf," I said, trying to calm her down, "so please let this

slide—”

“You’re defending her?!” she shot at me.

“No, I’m not,” I insisted. “I just don’t want you sisters to fight anymore. Besides, you understand, right? You’re the only one for me. I don’t even look at other women. I definitely wouldn’t do anything that’d make you sad!”

“Really?”

“Yeah, I promise. Also, I’m not popular enough for you to worry about anyway.”

“You don’t understand anything about yourself,” she said, shaking her head as if in pain. No, *Michelle* was the one who didn’t understand at all.

“You know... I don’t have a face pretty enough for people to flatter me, and I’m not even close to strong enough for people to admire me. I’m just a guy who constantly loses his nerve in the dungeon.”

She kept shaking her head like she vehemently disagreed with me.

“Also, my girlfriend dumped me right before I came to this new world. To be precise, she cheated on me.”

A glare suddenly flashed within her eyes. “What do you mean by that?”

Crap. Did I accidentally say too much? “Well, you know... It’s what it sounds like. I was so busy at work that I couldn’t see her, so she cheated on me with someone else.”

“Unforgivable!” she cried. “I’ll summon that woman here and have her burned with Inferno for all eternity!”

No, no, no, you really look like you could do it—it’s scary! “Michelle, please don’t say that.”

“Why not?!” she demanded. “I can’t forgive anyone who’d hurt you!”

“It’s all in the past. It doesn’t bother me.”

“No! She needs to pay for what she did!” she insisted.

“Even so, I’m not interested in her one bit anymore. I mean, I have you. I’m so happy right now that I’ve forgotten about the past.”

“Yusuke...” Michelle flew into my embrace. *Yep, it looks like the matter of Chichi’s photos has been resolved.* She clung to me, and I held her close for a while.

“Well?” I asked. “Did you calm down a little?”

“Yeah, a bit...” She didn’t seem to be on the verge of blasting down the dungeon walls with her Maximum Magic anymore. “But there’s something I want you to tell me.”

“What is that?”

“About who you dated in the past.”

“What?”

“I want to know. I mean, I can’t help but be curious.” *Considering her personality, that’s probably true...* “What kind of person was she? Was she pretty? How tall was she? What was her job? How much did you like her?”

“H-Hey, just wait a second.” I guess I *had* to answer her questions now. It looked like it was going to be a long night. “All right, I’ll answer everything, so let’s calm down a little.”

“Okay. Then let’s talk while eating this.” She took one snack off the shelf.

Product name: Happy Shrimp Crackers (Small bag)

Description: If consumed during a conversation, it really makes things interesting. You can’t stop eating, and you won’t want to!

Price: Thirty rims

Uh-oh... Eating these would really liven up a party—not to mention that they were so delicious, you’d wolf down a ton. But they were also a dangerous snack. If you started a heart-to-heart while eating them, you’d be unable to hold back and wind up blurting out something you shouldn’t. *You truly can’t and won’t stop...*

“Here, say ‘aah,’” she said as she fed me the Happy Shrimp Cracker. “All right,

here's one more."

"Hey, hey..."

"Now then, tell me. What was your girlfriend like?"

"I'll talk, but you have to promise me that you won't use your Maximum Magic out of jealousy."

"Yeah. If I get just way too angry, then I'll go to the dungeon depths."

"The dungeon depths?" I asked.

"I'll vent it by fighting Valgaur, so relax."

Valgaur? That was the most powerful Earth Dragon in this dungeon! There was no way I could relax! *Well, since it's Michelle, then maybe she'd be fine...?*

"I'll beat it to a pulp with a triple combo of my Maximum Magic," she told me. I'd never seen that heinous Earth Dragon before, but I felt a little sorry for it.

The Adventurer Meryl's Diary: Entry 9

Something crazy has happened. I'm also so excited, I can't think straight. I think I'll calm down by writing in this diary.

To start with the conclusion, it turned out Marco's girlfriend wasn't Lady Cecelia—she was the former queen, Chichi. Marco is apparently a former servant of Rondas Tower. That was probably where he first caught Chichi's eye. However, as for whether or not Marco was just being used, apparently that wasn't the case. I truly have mixed feelings.

Marco was too agitated, so we had to pin him down by tying him up with some rope. If we hadn't, he might've taken on that troop of soldiers all by himself. I noticed later that I was also scratched up here and there. That meant the usually mild-mannered Marco must have resisted with all his might. If I hadn't used my strength to the max, I don't think we would've been able to hold him back. Marco finally calmed down when Mister Yusuke told him he'd do something about it. Mister Yusuke is normally as carefree as they come, but he's reliable when it comes down to it. I don't know specifically what he's going to do, but no one objected. It seems we rookies really do believe in Mister Yusuke.

Everything went as Mister Yusuke said! Chichi's life was successfully spared, and Marco won't be charged for his crimes either. But why is Mister Yusuke a feudal lord now?! I was so surprised, I started kinda hyperventilating, and I had to down a Mini Mini Cola in one go to calm down.

When I saw Dagashi-ya Yahagi today, this was pasted on the door:

Recruiting pioneers! Would you like to pioneer the Lugandan dungeon together with Dagashi-ya Yahagi?

Yusuke Yahagi has been appointed the new feudal lord of

Luganda. A small dungeon has been discovered there, and we are recruiting comrades who'll develop the land together with us. Fellow pioneers will obtain the following privileges:

- A 1,300-square-meter plot of land, free of charge.
- Tax exemptions for two years.
- A grant for housing construction.
- Food assistance for the time being.
- Provision of some funds for the move.

For further details, please direct inquiries to the shop owner/feudal lord. We look forward to seeing you.

—Yusuke Yahagi

The rookies who read this were making a stir. We also wanted to barge into Mister Yusuke's shop, but it had already become so packed with adventurers who wanted to hear more that we couldn't enter. In the end, he held an informational session at Hot Spring Yahagi.

We took the day off and seriously discussed the matter with everyone. Since Marco had been exiled along with Chichi, he was destined to go to Luganda. Rigal, who respects Mister Yusuke, said he'd also go. Mira was worried about drifting farther away from her hometown, where her parents are. It would take ten days on foot to reach it from Luganda. I was also worried about leaving the capital that I've grown used to living in. However, I did find the idea of having my own plot of land appealing. Even out in the countryside, chances like this don't come by often. I'd hesitate if it was just a regular piece of cleared land, but Mister Yusuke is the feudal lord. I think that no matter what happens, he'll be someone I can depend on.

"I'll go to Luganda," I said, boldly declaring my decision. Mira was also of the

same opinion. I'm glad. It seems all members of Team Harukaze will be migrating. We'll work hard together over there too.

I really, really don't care, but apparently, Garmr and his team also decided to move there. They haven't had much luck as of late, so they're aiming to make a comeback in a new land. Man, we just can't be rid of each other—I guess I'll cooperate with them a little.

Mister Yusuke gave me some leftover snacks called Young Donuts. When I returned to my parents' house to tell them I'd be moving, I gave my grandma two of them just like he told me to.

Her bent back straightened!!! She even became healthy again! She's been prone to illness recently, but she said she felt ten years younger. She felt so much better that she even made me my favorite cherry tarts, which I hadn't had in years.

Her cherry tarts really are the best. I thought I'd never taste them again, so I cried as I ate them.

My family was worried to hear that I'll be moving out to the frontier, but there's no need for concern. Our feudal lord is going to be someone very dependable.

Epilogue

There was a crowd of people waiting in front of the gate, wanting a look at the prisoners who were being escorted to Luganda. Today, the first wave of pioneers would be departing for the Luganda Forest. In addition to myself, the feudal lord, the main members were Michelle, Team Harukaze, Garmr and his team, and the aide, Nakaram. Then, there were the exiled Chichi and Marco, who were being carried in a prison wagon. There was a wooden cage installed atop the horse-drawn wagon, and Chichi and Marco had been thrown inside. They were handcuffed together.

“Shameless!”

“Get out of the capital!”

“You harlot!”

Angry voices were hurled Chichi’s way from the crowd of people vying to catch a glimpse of her. There were even those among them who threw rotten eggs and such, leaving her drenched from head to toe. Around sixty to seventy percent of her evil intentions had been purged thanks to the Archangel Lunadian’s Glowing Wings of Purification, but the truth that she’d wasted the government’s funds couldn’t be erased. She had to just endure this as yet another form of purification. Team Harukaze and I were worried about the pair, but Michelle alone held a different opinion. She let out a sigh for some reason and gazed at them with envy. “I’m jealous...”

“Why?” I asked.

“I mean, they’re alone, just the two of them in the cage, chained to each other. I wish we were handcuffed together too...”

“Hey...”

“Even if all the world is their enemy, the two of them can still hold hands. There’s no greater happiness than that... Don’t you agree?”

I was a little scared of the spellbound Michelle, but I could understand what

she was trying to say. “I understand how you feel, but I prefer something more peaceful. Plain and ordinary is okay with me. I just want to foster a quiet kind of love.”

“Yeah, you’re right. Just like you said, I prefer that too!” She laughed happily. Rigal looked at us with admiration.

“You’re amazing,” he told me. “I think you’re the only one in the whole world who can accept Miss Michelle’s love.” Michelle looked even happier at that.

“You understand well, Rigal. That’s right. Yusuke is all I have. You’re a good, honest boy, so I’ll teach you how to use some intermediate Fire Magic later.” Michelle was way too easy. Also, I didn’t think Rigal had necessarily been complimenting her. He’d merely been astounded. Well, I’d also accepted her superheavyweight love, and I was comfortable with it, so all was well.

In the meantime, the aide, Mister Nakaram, ran over to me. “Sir Yahagi, the preparations for our departure have been completed. Please give us your orders.”

So, the day when we’d set off for the new land had finally arrived. Over a year had passed since I’d come here from the other world, and I’d grown attached to the capital. I’d be lying if I said I didn’t feel sad to part from it, but the people coming with me were a bunch of comrades I got along well with.

“Everyone, it’s time to depart!” I announced. “Leave the snacks throughout the journey to me! I’ll treat you to some stamina-boosting snacks today.”

Product name: Kabayaki-san-suke

Description: Fish paste turned into something kabayaki-like. Its exquisite, crunchy texture is delicious.

Raises stamina upon consumption. You can even endure a sixteen-hour march.

Price: Twenty rims

With the wheels clattering, the wagon began to move. On the seat beside me,

Michelle was pressed right up against me, enjoying our trip together. As for me, I was nervous about my heavy responsibility as a feudal lord, but in the end, my job was still mainly as a dagashi-ya. Until now and henceforth, what I did wouldn't change much.

Now then, Dagashi-ya Yahagi would be having its grand reopening in the Luganda Forest.



END OF VOLUME
BONUS

Dagashi-ya Yahagi



RECOMMENDED
PRODUCTS!



Michelle

We have some new products!



★★★★★

SACCHAN SQUID

★★★★★

Shredded pickled squid. When you put it in your mouth,
you'll wake up no matter how deeply you're asleep.



PRICE:
50
RIMS

Mira

If you have this, then you can wake up even
the sleepyhead Meryl in one try.





CHOCOLATE BAT



A snack featuring a chocolate-coated biscuit shaped like a baseball bat. Restores some HP upon consumption. It features a lottery. If the words "Home run" are written inside the package, you can receive the Legendary Spiked Bat. A seasonal item available from fall to spring.



PRICE:
30
RIMS

Meryl

I'll keep eating these...until I finally
get the Legendary Spiked Bat...



★★★★★

TASTY STICK

★★★★★

A snack food that recovers HP.



Yahagi

This is a staple product of Dagashi-ya Yahagi.
Believe it or not, there are fifty different flavors.
There's a new apple pie flavor that's
only available for this season!

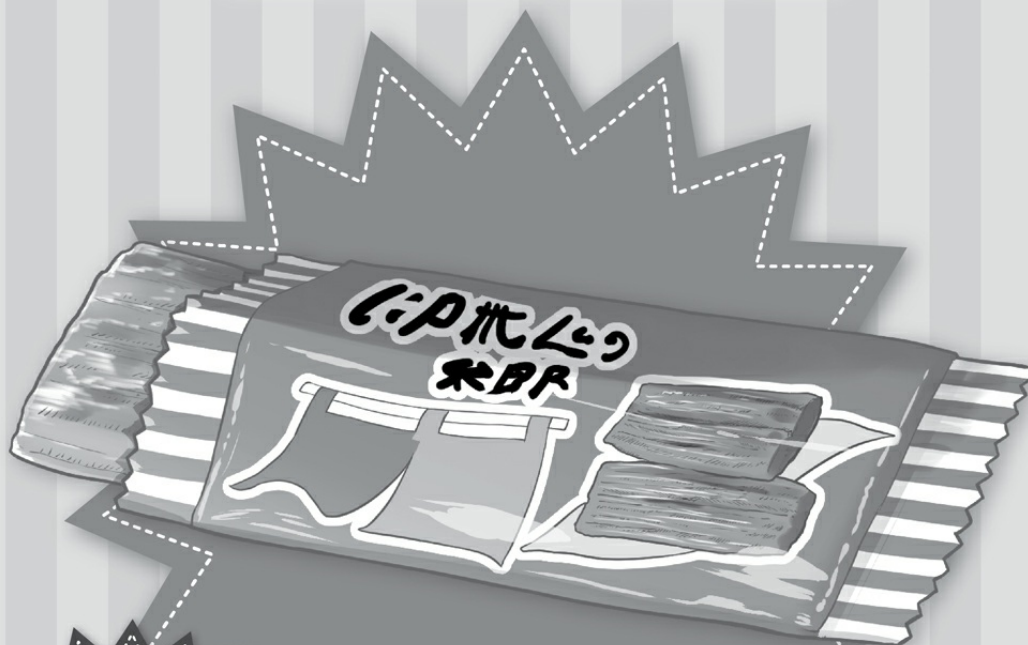




KABAYAKI-SAN-SUKE



Fish paste turned into something kabayaki-like. Its exquisite, crunchy texture is delicious. Raises stamina upon consumption. You can even endure a sixteen-hour march.



PRICE:
20
RIMS

Meryl

With this, you can
keep working for a long time.
Team Harukaze, we're setting off!



★★★★★

NERI NERI MIZUAME

★★★★★

Mizuame in a cup.
Comes in four flavors - strawberry, lemon, apple, and soda.
Your body becomes flexible after consumption.



PRICE:
50
RIMS

Mira

It's so delicious that I eat too much.
I'll get fat if I'm not careful...
but I just can't stop eating it.



★★★★★

EVA (PERFUME GUM)

★★★★★

Has a perfume-like allure. If a couple eats this together, it makes them want to kiss. For those who are not lovers, there's no effect.



Meryl

Do you wanna kiss li'l ol' me? Just kidding!



★★★★★

CHOCODORA

★★★★★

Two bite-size dorayaki with chocolate cream filling. If you share one with another person, you two will become closer. Existing friendships will become even stronger. Don't make them eat too much. Abusing it is prohibited!



PRICE:
30
RIMS

✂ NOT FOR
SALE

Chichi

This cheap snack...isn't half bad...



★★★★★

WIDE SUNGLASSES

★★★★★

A trendy item on the cutting edge of fashion. It enables you to see really well.



PRICE:
300
RIMS

✂ NOT FOR
SALE

Yahagi

This item is bad news.
I need to keep its abilities a secret
from Michelle too.



Afterword

Thank you for purchasing *Dagashi-ya Yahagi: Setting Up a Sweets Shop in Another World* volume two. I express my gratitude to my dear readers, those who made this publication possible, and Neruzo Nemaki-sensei, who once again drew some wonderful illustrations for it. Thank you very much.

I often go location scouting to lay the groundwork to write stories, but the number of classic dagashi-ya has vastly decreased. Going to the actual locations, taking in the scenery, and understanding the atmosphere are important to conceptualizing ideas. However, there are no dagashi-ya left in the area where I live. The dagashi themselves exist on shelves at large stores, but it was hard to get ideas for this novel with those alone. As such, I went all the way to Kawagoe City in Saitama Prefecture! There are several dagashi-ya around Kawagoe's Kashiya Yokocho that still have a classic atmosphere. Just so you know, I didn't go for fun. It was strictly for gathering materials, okay?

Moreover, the variety of dagashi and toys they sold was abundant and made for good reference material. I discovered several dagashi I'd never seen before, which sent my excitement skyrocketing through the roof. It's probably rare for dagashi-ya to have customers that take notes. A woman who appeared to be the shop owner was looking at me like I was a suspicious person. Don't get the wrong idea! I'm just a light novelist! (Yep, definitely a suspicious person.)

At the first classic dagashi-ya I'd visited in years, I joined all the kids and went on a binge-shopping spree, buying up all the dagashi. As a result, it looked like I was just flaunting my adult financial prowess and my selfishness to those kids who'd come to hang out at the dagashi-ya, so I internally apologized. The shame I felt toward those children who were getting by with their small allowances was unbearable.

(Forgive me. This is my job. I'm not buying these just because I like them. These are business expenses. Oh, I'll buy every type of this mizuame. Oh, I gotta buy the whole set of powdered drink mixes. Should I just buy the whole pot of

this snack...?)

The preschoolers were staring up at me in amazement, seeing me throw so many snacks into my basket. And after having a lot of fun—I mean, suffering a lot, I finished writing volume 2. If all my readers have enjoyed this novel even a little, nothing could make me happier.

As of the writing of this afterword, the first day of winter has already passed, according to the calendar. The winter cold feels like it's soaking into my cells, setting my mind and soul at peace. When the time comes, the leaves of plane trees apparently take off into the sky on their own, as if severing their own lives. It's about time I also abandon my attachments.

As a result of my binge shopping, I earned a large number of lottery wins, which I tearfully threw away. I had amassed more than ten lottery wins, like those from candy and gum. Meryl might faint if she saw them. However, even if I'd wanted to exchange them, the dagashi-ya that I'd bought them from were a distant two hundred kilometers away. I couldn't just make my way over there so easily.

I think the presence of dagashi-ya is only meaningful if it's in your neighborhood. The rise in costs and declining birthrate are also probably contributing factors to their scarcity. It will be a sad thing if dagashi-ya like that disappear. If I get enough funds from this light novel, if it happens to sell well, I could open a dagashi-ya while working as a light novelist on the side... That's not a bad idea. These are the kinds of things I, Bunzaburou Nagano, daydream about.

—Bunzaburou Nagano

Afterword

Thank you for volume 2 as well!
Also, congratulations on your manga
adaptation! I'm cheering you on!!!
Thanks for having me!

- Neruzo Nemaki



Bonus Short Story

Inspection: Stick Chocolate

My name is Yusuke Yahagi. I'm a dagashi-ya from Japan who has arrived in another world. In this world of swords and magic, it's my job to sell dagashi to rookie adventurers. Well, I call them dagashi, but these aren't just any ordinary snacks. My store's products are all special items that grant various magical effects upon consumption.

That being said, my dagashi are cheap, so please don't expect any earth-shattering results. Don't go thinking you'll be able to use the Maximum Flame spell after eating one of my Super Hot Muchos or something.

What characterizes my dagashi is that they give a small bit of support to novice adventurers in a tasty and enjoyable way.

As a responsible dagashi-ya, I want to get a good grasp on what my products do. To that end, today I once again put my full focus on inspecting my dagashi with my girlfriend, Michelle.

Product name: Stick Chocolate

Description: A stick with colorful chocolate beads inside.

When used as a magic item, it boosts magical power by thirty percent one time. However, it also increases the amount of mana consumption so caution is required. Disappears after use.

Price: Thirty rims

Stick Chocolate was a popular product at Dagashi-ya Yahagi. Its effects were remarkable, and it definitely came in handy when I used my Clairvoyance to look into the past. This stick increased magical power by thirty percent, so

images heavily approved of it. I'd heard countless reports of things like how using this Stick Chocolate made them able to crush monsters when previously, a single blast of Fire Magic couldn't take care of them. That was why a thought suddenly came to mind.

"Even rookies can take down big monsters with this, right?" I said one day. "Considering how you're already strong, Michelle, what would happen if you used it?"

Michelle pondered this. "Let's see... I hadn't yet hypothesized how this might affect my use of Maximum Magic. Shall we take this opportunity to experiment?"

Wait, wouldn't that be strong enough to blow away the capital...? "Um, I don't intend to bring about a calamity," I said anxiously. "I just kinda voiced my thoughts aloud, that's all..."

"Don't worry, I'll be sure not to hit the capital. Or rather, I'll make sure I don't hit the planet."

"You won't hit the *planet*? What are you planning to do?"

"Do you know what Meteor is?"

"It's that magic spell thing that pulls down a meteor, right?"

"Yeah, it's the most powerful magic spell that I can use. Let's experiment with that!"

Seeing Michelle smile somewhat excitedly, I couldn't feel anything but apprehension.

In order to see the trajectory of the meteor well, we conducted our experiment at night. We were right in the middle of a grassy field on the city's outskirts, waiting for the sun to go down. Once the sun finally sank behind the mountains, Michelle stood up.

"It's about time to start," she said. "I'll get ready, so wait a bit." Michelle rarely recited anything when she used her magic. However, as expected, you apparently had to recite a three-minute-long incantation when it came to major

spells like Meteor. That made sense. You *were* pulling down a meteor.

“Hmm, I wonder what on earth will happen if you use a Stick Chocolate,” I mused.

“It’ll make the meteor I’m dropping bigger, maybe? Or it might make it easier to control. I’d prefer the latter.” Michelle was saying it so nonchalantly, but was this really okay? I’d heard that on Earth, one reason that the dinosaurs had gone extinct was because a meteor collided into the planet. This wouldn’t severely damage the ecosystem or anything, would it? It was kinda too late for second thoughts, but rather than the meteor, I felt like my anxiety was going to crush me first.

“Maybe you shouldn’t go through with it after all.”

“Oh, Yusuke, you’re such a worrywart. I told you that I’d set it on a course where it wouldn’t hit the planet, didn’t I? There’s no way I’d hurt you, right? Now, I’m going to start.” As one would expect from a researcher, Michelle loved experiments and the like. Now that it had come to this, nobody could stop her. Also, to tell the truth, I was curious too.

After one wave of the stick, Michelle started chanting the spell. From her body, her green mana gathered around her as a flickering aura, but it gradually transformed into a white light. It was probably because her mana was amplifying.

Her quiet incantation continued for a while, and a gigantic, seven-layered magic circle emerged from the earth and floated upward, beginning to rotate in midair. Wringing the final spell from her open mouth, she cried, “Meteor!” The massive amount of mana became a whirlpool and was sucked into the night sky. And then...

“It worked. Look, Yusuke.” Beyond where Michelle’s finger pointed, I could see a meteor streaking a trail through the sky like a comet.

“So that’s Meteor...” I murmured, my legs shaking with fear.

“See, it’s taking a course that won’t bring it down here, isn’t it?”

“Seems like it, but...” It looked like its glowing red tail was trailing horizontally,

so it appeared it wasn't heading this way. I let out a sigh of relief.

"Oh?"

"Wh-What's the matter?" Had something unexpected happened?

"There, have a good look. There're two of them."

"Excuse me?" When I strained my eyes, I could also see a blue comet beyond the red one.

"That's from the Stick Chocolate's power," she said. "I thought its effects were weaker than I'd hypothesized, but I'm satisfied if there are two of them. Hee hee, two meteors—they're just like you and me."

Michelle was saying all this in a breezy tone, but those two meteors would probably cause a huge disaster if they fell one after another. Would there be a First Impact, and then a Second Impact lagging behind it?

"Oh my, oh no... What should I do?"

"What's wrong now?!"

"My control... My control over the meteors didn't go so well..."

"What?!"

"Oops, they've rammed into each other."

It seemed the two meteors had collided with each other in space.

"Hey! Do we need to take shelter?" I asked.

"Don't worry about that. They were both pulverized into fragments, so they won't do us any harm. See, look."

Peering up at the sky, I was at a loss for words. The fragments of the comets had become a meteor shower and were raining down upon this world's surface.

"They'll all burn up before they fall here," she told me.

"I-I see..."

"Yes. It's really beautiful. Romantic, isn't it? ≡"

As we gazed up at the shooting stars, Michelle sidled up and leaned against my body. Michelle gazed spellbound at the comets, and as I held her close, I

couldn't hide my stiff smile.



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Dagashi-ya Yahagi: Setting Up a Sweets Shop in Another World: Volume 2

by Bunzaburou Nagano

Translated by Mizuki Sakamoto Edited by Rhys Martinez

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